

Pendleton to join Baker in GOL

By ANNIE FOWLER
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — Pendleton Athletic Director Mike Somnis knew about six weeks ago the Bucks were destined to drop from 5A to 4A and join the Greater Oregon League.

The executive board of the Oregon School Activities Association made that final Monday, Dec. 13, when it approved the last recommendation of the Classification and Redistricting Committee. The decision will bring changes to several leagues throughout the state starting with the 2022 fall season.

"I think everyone is excited and ready to make the move," Somnis said. "We have been very competitive at the 5A level. The reality of it is, with Hermiston going to the WIAA, and Hood River going to 5A and to the Northwest Oregon Conference, if we stayed, we would be in the Bend league. It will be a seamless fit."

Pendleton will join GOL teams La Grande, Baker City

and Ontario. McLoughlin is moving down to the 3A Eastern Oregon League.

La Grande and Baker are ecstatic that Pendleton is joining their league.

"We are very pleased to have Pendleton in our league," La Grande AD Darren Goodman said. "It will help strengthen our league. Everyone will have to raise their game, for sure."

"The GOL will definitely be more competitive now," Baker AD Buell Gonzales added. "The issue with the scheduling is still there with just four teams. Losing Mac-Hi and gaining Pendleton, our league is more competitive and balanced. We didn't want to lose La Grande. This worked out the best for everyone involved."

Pendleton is one of a handful of local teams the redistricting affects.

In addition to Mac-Hi moving to 3A, Irrigon will drop down to the 2A Blue Mountain Conference, and Pilot

Rock will drop to the 1A Old Oregon League with Griswold and Nixyaawii.

The Mac-Hi, Irrigon and Pilot Rock moves benefit the schools, which have recently seen enrollment drop.

Schools at the 3A level will have an enrollment of 146 to 310 in grades 9-11, while 2A is 75 to 145, and 1A is under 74 students.

At the 4A level, enrollment is 311 to 607. Pendleton will be one of the largest schools in the division with 588 — larger than any school in the Greater Oregon League by more than 100 students. Only St. Helens and Crook County are larger.

While travel will be reduced for Pendleton, the hunt for nonleague games begins now.

The GOL athletic directors will meet in Baker City on Thursday, Dec. 16, to discuss standard operating procedures, schedules and the like. "We are hitting the ground running," Somnis said. "For us, it has been a long, long time

since we have been connected to these schools. In 5A and 6A we have scheduling meetings. It's a collaborative effort. I'm not sure how it is in 4A. Being at a small school before, it was a free-for-all. In the past, we haven't played 3A schools. It's a different world we are stepping into."

Goodman and Gonzales know the challenges of scheduling nonleague games, which can be upward of 14 games or more for basketball, volleyball, soccer, baseball and softball.

"We have to work hard for those games," Goodman said. "If you have teams that are good, it's easier to get those games. Sometimes people don't want to travel that far. Some are good about hosting a game and coming here the next time. It can be challenging."

Gonzales said Pendleton could help open up avenues for new nonleague opponents.

"If they can open us up to some new travel destinations, that would be great," he said.



Kathy Aney/East Oregonian, April 2021

Baker's Gabe Gambleton, left, tries to elude Pendleton's Zaanan Bane on April 2, 2021, at Pendleton. The two teams will become league opponents starting in the fall of 2022.

Adding Pendleton to the GOL has benefits, according to Goodman.

"You want your teams to be prepared to go into the playoffs," Goodman said. "You want to challenge them so they will be ready. We have always had a little rivalry with Pendleton. Instead of friendly rivalries, now they mean something."

Gonzales said he likes that Pendleton can offer junior

varsity and freshman teams to play, and they have swimming, which adds another team to their league.

"On the competitive level, we match up well," he said. "It will be good for the region. They were very competitive in baseball and softball, and they are a good 5A football team. I think they will continue to dominate at that. Baker is going to have to step up their game."

Work session set on proposed 'constitutional county' resolution

By SAMANTHA O'CONNOR
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Baker County Commissioners have scheduled a work session for Jan. 12 to continue a discussion about a proposed "constitutional county" resolution that local residents submitted to commissioners and are urging them to approve.

The work session will be at 1 p.m. at the Courthouse, 1995 Third St.

On Wednesday, Dec. 15, commissioners heard from proponents of the resolution, which states, among other things, that "all actions by the federal government and its agents will conform strictly and implicitly with the principles expressed within the United States Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights."

The group promoting the resolution is Baker County United.

Jake Brown of Halfway spoke first to commissioners, saying he once attended a town hall meeting with U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz who told the audience that if they wanted to champion the causes that really meant something to them, they needed to stop complaining to him about it.

"He basically said that we should pull an effort together; that we

should get people behind, and that we should come out to Salem and lobby it," Brown said.

He said the proposed resolution is Baker County United's effort at the county level to do that same thing.

"We are merely asking you commissioners to double down on the liberty that we already are afforded in the Constitution and Bill of Rights," Brown said.

Brown addressed a flier that Baker County United distributed in October, urging county residents to oppose Gov. Kate Brown's COVID-19 vaccine mandate for health care workers by refusing to pay their property taxes and instead setting the money aside.

"This was done in support of those emergency services, not against them," Brown said.

He said he has collected \$2,500 from supporters to ensure that adopting the resolution wouldn't cost the county any money.

Commissioner Bruce Nichols said the county respects the rights to individual freedoms. He noted that the county was actually violating the governor's executive order requiring people to wear masks in public indoor spaces, as commissioners weren't wearing masks during the

meeting. Of the 30 or so people in the audience, only a couple of those were wearing a mask.

One of those is Gary Dielman of Baker City.

He was escorted from the room by Sheriff Travis Ash after repeatedly asking Commission Chairman Bill Harvey about the lack of compliance with the mask mandate.

Dielman described the meeting as a "super spreader event."

Carrie Matthews of Baker City, talking about the proposed constitutional county resolution, said it is time to take a stand.

"There is an emergency legislative session now that is trying to change history forever, telling us what to wear, what to inject into our bodies, who we can or cannot assemble with, and blatantly violate our lives, liberties, and happiness," Matthews said, describing the situation as "slavery and involuntary servitude. We cannot stand one more day, one more minute, or one more second of this tyranny."

She encouraged people to write letters, email, or testify in opposition to the OHA proposed rules before Jan. 24.

"If we become a constitutional county now and pass further resolu-

tions, we will be proactive instead of reactive by telling them not in our county, not on our watch, or you will see the inside of the sheriff's jail. Plain and simple," Matthews said.

Bert Ramos, manager for Lander County, Nevada, which has passed a similar resolution, also addressed Baker County commissioners Wednesday.

Ramos said that by supporting the Constitution, law enforcement, emergency medical services and other local agencies is how "we keep our communities great."

Art Clark, who is a commissioner from Lander County, said he does not understand why anyone would be opposed to "ending all this treason."

Nichols said he is a student of the Constitution, is married to a teacher, has a son who is a principal, and is a veteran who strongly supports the Second Amendment, which is cited in the proposed resolution.

"I am not opposed to the course or the causes that you guys are pointing out," Nichols said.

Nichols said he appreciates the comments from the public, but that commissioners need to spend more time studying, and discussing, the proposal.

"Unfortunately, that's painful

but that's the way our government works," Nichols said.

The proposed resolution states that "the Baker County Commissioners proudly join the Constitutional Sheriffs and Police Officers Association and that the undersigned commissioners do hereby denounce any acts or agencies that promote the aforementioned practices. All actions by the federal government and its agents will conform strictly and implicitly with the principles expressed within the United States Constitution, Declaration of Independence, and the Bill of Rights."

"If we become a constitutional county now and pass further resolutions, we will be proactive instead of reactive by telling them not in our county, not on our watch, or you will see the inside of the sheriff's jail. Plain and simple," Matthews said.

"Commissioner Mark Bennett said a lot of county residents are still worried about the pandemic. "I had one lady that just literally called and talked to me for over half an hour," Bennett said. "She was bawling and she was accusing me of killing her. And my heart went out to her. My heart went out that anyone would be that scared, just flat out scared."

DOSES

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At the drive-thru clinic

On Monday morning, Dec. 13, Becky and Bruce Litke were among those who took advantage of the opportunity for inoculation from the comfort of their car.

The couple both got their booster dose of the Moderna vaccine.

"We're elderly, we just want to stay healthy and we've been around a lot of people we knew who became sick that didn't get their shots, and died," Becky Litke said. "Several people. And so, we're just not ready to die yet. We would have gotten our booster earlier, but we didn't get our last shot until the end of March and then we got our flu shot last

month, so we waited 30 days until after we got our flu shot to get this one. We're good."

Macy Eisland, who was with two friends who declined to comment, said they each had a booster shot.

"We're from Portland and our friend has property out in Sumpter and so we were just in town," Eisland said. "We were like, it was going to take at least three hours and two weeks waiting time in Portland to get it so we were like, we'll just drive through here. Very painless."

COVID-19 case trends

For the first 14 days of December, Baker County reported 49 cases, an average of 3.5 cases per day.

That would be the lowest monthly rate since July, when the daily average was 2.9.

36th death reported in county

The OHA reported on Wednesday, Dec. 15 that a 71-year-old man from Baker County who tested positive for COVID-19 on Nov. 13 died Dec. 10 at Saint Alphonsus Medical Center in Nampa, Idaho.

The presence of underlying conditions had not been confirmed.

It was the county's third COVID-19-related death during December.

Vaccination percentages

Baker County continues to have the fifth-lowest vaccination rate among Oregon's 36 counties, with 54.7% of residents 18 and older having had at least one dose.

Baker County's breakdown by age group:

- 65 and older: 65.4%

have had two doses, and 37% have had a booster dose.

The comparable percentages statewide are 82.5% and 49.8% (booster).

- 50 to 64: 49.5% have had two doses, and 18.2% have had a booster dose.

The comparable percentages statewide are 79.1% and 27.9% (booster).

- 20 to 49: 39.4% have had two doses, and 8.2% have had a booster dose.

The comparable percentages statewide are 76.9% and 16.8% (booster).

- 18 to 19: 44.9% have had two doses, and 4.8% have had a booster dose.

The comparable percentages statewide are 65.6% and 5.1% (booster).

- 12 to 17: 25.8% have had two doses, and 0.7%

have had a booster dose.

The comparable percentages statewide are 65.3% and 1.1% (booster).

- 5 to 11: 8.4% (not eligible for boosters).

The comparable percentage statewide is 26.3%.

Vaccination rate by ZIP code

The Sumpter area has the highest vaccination rate in Baker County at 60.6% of residents 18 and older — 171 of 282 — having had at least one dose, according to OHA.

The area with the lowest vaccination rate is Oxbow, at the far eastern edge of the county, where 33 of 216 residents 18 and older have had at least one dose, a rate of 15.3%.

A majority of the county's

residents live in the 97814 ZIP code, which includes Baker City, parts of Baker Valley and the Keating and Medical Springs areas.

The vaccination rate is 49.3% — 6,089 of 12,348 residents 18 and older having had at least one dose.

Other areas:

- 97834, Halfway/Pine Valley: 461 of 904, 51%
- 97907, Huntington: 220 of 501, 43.9%
- 97833, Haines: 405 of 740, 54.7%
- 97870, Richland/Eagle Valley: 271 of 798, 34%
- 97905, Durkee: 45 of 85, 52.9%
- 97819 and 97837, Bridgeport/Hereford: 24 of 77, 31.2%
- 97884, Unity: 59 of 129, 45.7%

CRASH

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Fortunately, the railroad was contacted and the train, which was moving slowly, was able to stop with plenty of distance to spare but not before

causing some concern.

"It was a little nerve wracking for a while," Retherford said.

The cause of the accident remains under investigation. According to Aydelotte, Oregon requires a local medical examiner to investigate the

cause and manner of death when the death is unattended.

The accident blocked both active rail lines until approximately 8:45 a.m., when one of the lines was cleared. The crash did not close I-84 and no other vehicles were involved.

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