Future of 8-man football in question after recent OSAA proposed change

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
The (La Grande) Observer

WILSONVILLE — The future of 8-man football in Oregon is currently up in the air.

The Oregon School Activities Association Football Ad Hoc Committee released its first proposal for the 2022-2026 football time block on Tuesday, Dec. 20, which suggested doing away with 8-man football among 2A and 1A schools. The public meeting on Dec. 20 proposed divisions of 9-man and 6-man leagues, which would alter the landscape of football in Union and Wallowa counties.

"It's a bummer they'd be getting rid of 8-man," Powder Valley head coach Josh Cobb said. "People are really starting to get behind this."

Alex Wittwer/The (La Grande) Observer, File

Casey Vaughan (4) and Kaden Krieger (5) lead the Powder Valley Badgers back onto the field following halftime at Baker High School on Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021. Powder Valley lost to the Adrian Antelopes 46-38 during the final match for the OSAA 1A State Championship in a heartbreaking finale that saw a successful comeback attempt in the fourth quarter by Adrian.

At the meeting, the OSAA Ad Hoc Committee met virtually and conducted a work session to begin the initial stages of reclassification. The committee also took into consideration the Oregon Athletic Coaches Association's small school survey, which took place in the fall and collected trends from the last five years of 11-man, 8-man and 6-man football.

After reviewing the information on hand, the committee came away in support of three divisions between 2A and 1A schools. Based on school enrollment, two potential sections of 9-man and one division of 6-man teams were drafted.

The potential divisions slated Enterprise, Cove, Elgin, Imbler and Union in the 9-man leagues, while Powder Valley, Wallowa and Joseph would play 6-man.

In Baker County, Pine Eagle, Huntington and Burnt River already play 6-man football, and would remain in that classification under the OSAA proposal.

The proposal to do away with 8-man football raised eyebrows among several local coaches, such as Cobb and the 2021 1A state football runners-up Powder Valley Badgers.

"Eight-man just feels right," he said. "I see 6-man as a good thing for schools that truly don't have the student body."

The Badgers would be bumped down to the 6-man league, which Cobb is against, although Powder Valley could potentially request to jump up to the higher division. The Badgers are coming off an 11-2 season of 8-man football. There is no current deadline for teams to opt up or down in divisions, but the deadline will be determined at the next OSAA meeting in January.

"I don't want to play 6-man," Cobb said. "We have 30 kids on the team. There's not a participation issue."

OSAA emphasized in the proposal that participation in football was a key issue. The proposal noted that a transition to 9-man would allow easier scheduling between 9-man and 11-man non-league opponents, while the junior varsity levels could likely avoid cancellations if the roster size is smaller.

"The decreases in average team size over the last 10 years have been significant," the statement read.

The preference of keeping 8-man football was also expressed by Elgin head coach Kirt McClure. The Huskies are slated in the 9-man division, which could be a challenge for an Elgin team that had only 11 players on the roster. Even so, the Huskies went 4-4 in the regular season and earned a spot in the playoffs.

"I'm not really for it. It doesn't make sense to me," McClure said.

McClure expressed a similar sentiment as Cobb in that 8-man football has seen a bump in popularity in recent years. According to Cobb, many of the other 1A coaches he spoke with objected to the proposals. The 1A championship showdown between Powder Valley and Adrian on Nov. 27 drew a packed stadium at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium in Baker.

"Eight-man is growing, especially in our area," McClure said.

The proposals are still in the works but could be a looming issue for local coaches and supporters of 8-man football. The next OSAA Ad Hoc Football Advisory Committee meeting is set for 9 a.m. on Jan. 5 at the Holiday Inn in Wilsonville. The meeting's purpose is to gather public input on the proposed changes to 2A and 1A football.

"High school sports are all about opportunities for young adults. Six-man football takes two to three kids off the field per team — just don't see how that is beneficial," Cobb said. "Creating opportunities for kids to compete, promoting the desire to improve as a team and individually is the concept of high school sports."

Arizona Bowl off, Boise State pulls out with COVID issues

The Associated Press

The Arizona Bowl has been canceled after Boise State pulled out and shut down all team activities due to COVID-19 issues within the program.

The Broncos were scheduled to play Central Michigan at Arizona Stadium on Friday, Dec. 31, but instead joined numerous college basketball programs that have been hit with coronavirus issues coming out of the Christmas break.

"We feel for the young men in our program who were very much looking forward to closing out their season, and for some, their football careers," Boise State athletic director Jeramiah Dickey said Monday, Dec. 27 in a statement. "I would personally like to thank Kym Adair and her team at the Arizona Bowl for putting together a first-class student-athlete and fan experience that we are extremely disappointed to miss."

Barstool Sports, the sponsor of the Arizona Bowl, tweeted that it made the "difficult decision" to cancel the game, which would have been streamed on its platforms. It becomes the fourth bowl canceled this season after the Hawaii, Fenway and Military bowls.

Central Michigan will instead play Washington State in the Sun Bowl in El Paso, Texas, on Friday, replacing Miami in a game that will be broadcast on CBS.

College basketball also will have a notably lighter schedule this week after the pandemic caused numerous games to get canceled or postponed.

The Atlantic Coast Conference and Big East announced Monday they were scrapping three and four games, respectively, scheduled to take place over the next several days.

That included No. 2 Duke's game Wednesday night at Clemson. Other ACC matchups that won't take place as scheduled Wednesday include Florida State at Boston College and Virginia Tech at North Carolina. The Georgia Tech-Syracuse game scheduled for Wednesday was postponed earlier.

UConn's game against No. 23 Xavier scheduled for Tuesday was scrapped because of COVID-19 issues involving the Huskies.

Most major college conferences, including the Big East, Atlantic Coast Conference, Southeastern Conference, Big 12 and Pac-12, have changed their policies recently to say that games that can't be played because of COVID-19 will be rescheduled — and if they can't be rescheduled, they'll be considered a no contest.

Since Dec. 15, more than 120 men's college basketball games and 100 women's games have been canceled or postponed.

The number of people a men's or women's basketball team needs for a game ranges from six scholarship players and a coach in the Big 12 to a minimum of seven in the ACC, Pac-12 and Big East. The SEC requires teams to play if they have seven, while an ACC team can choose not to play even if they have the minimum number of players, though it would be a forfeit.

It wasn't just on the men's side that the Big East had to cancel games. Four women's games were wiped out over the next week as well, with Providence losing its contests at Xavier and Butler. Georgetown lost games against St. John's and Seton Hall.

POWDER VALLEY BOYS, GIRLS BASKETBALL

Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Powder Valley's Kaden Krieger in action Tuesday evening, Dec. 28 against Burns.

Badgers split games at Baker tourney

By DAVIS CARBAUGH
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The Powder Valley girls and boys basketball teams both played a pair of games at the Baker Holiday Tournament this week at BHS.

Both teams finished with 1-1 records.

Boys

In a rematch of the 1A football state championship, Adrian came away with a similar result against Powder Valley — a narrow victory on Monday, Dec. 27.

The Antelopes' 80-75 comeback win dropped top-ranked Powder Valley's record to 8-1.

Powder Valley started off the game strong, but Adrian ultimately pulled away with a big second half for the come-from-behind victory. The Badgers built up a 20-7 lead after the first quarter behind seven points from Kaiden Dalke. The senior from Baker City finished the game with nine points.

The Badgers continued to extend the lead in the second quarter, building up a 41-25 advantage by halftime. Senior Clay Martin hit three three-pointers in the second quarter — he finished with a team-high 19 points.

In the second half, the Antelopes surmounted a comeback that started with a 26-17 advantage in the third quarter. Adrian junior Carter Bayes scored 21 of his game-high 25 points in the second half.

In the fourth quarter, a 29-17 advantage for Adrian ultimately tipped the scales in favor of the Antelopes. Junior Cole Martin added eight of his 10 points in the fourth quarter, but the Badgers ultimately came up short. Adrian senior Gavin Bayes scored nine points in the fourth quarter along with 10 from Carter Bayes to lead the Antelopes to the victory.

The Badgers rebounded on Tuesday night, Dec. 28 to dominate Burns 57-35.

The Badgers got off to a fast start, building up a 20-6 lead by the end of the first quarter. Senior point guard Reece Dixon led the charge early, scoring nine of his team-high 16 points in the first quarter.

Powder Valley kept its foot on the gas in the second quarter and took a 35-16 lead into halftime. Senior forward Kaden Krieger scored eight points in the first half and finished the contest with 15 points.

In the second half Powder Valley was able to contain its sizable lead. The Badgers led 44-26 at the end of the third quarter and held on to win by 22.

In a balanced scoring effort, senior Kaiden Dalke added seven points and both Clay Martin and Case Olson scored seven.

Girls

After a difficult 0-6 start to the season, the Powder Valley girls capped a three-game winning streak by cruising by Adrian 62-30 on Monday, Dec. 27.

Powder Valley jumped out to a commanding early lead, holding a 19-5 advantage after the first quarter. Adrian kept it close in the second quarter as both teams scored 11 points, but the Badgers pulled away handily in the second half.

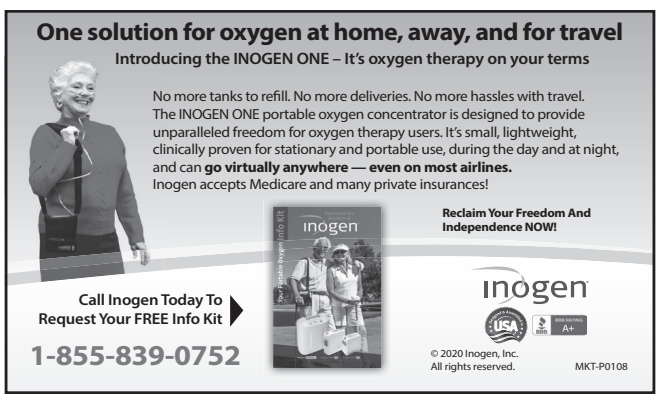
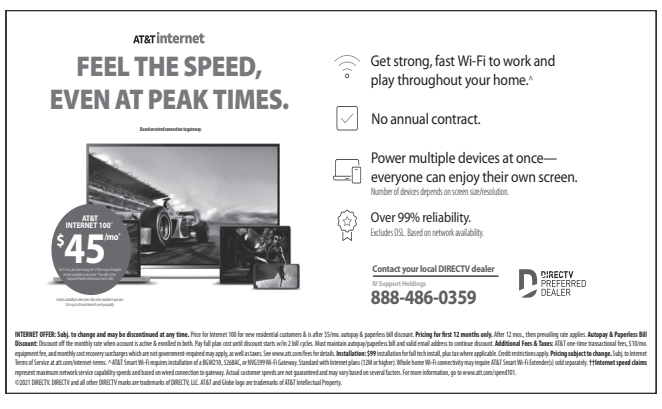
Powder Valley blew out Adrian 23-10 in the third quarter to all but seal the game, while a 19-4 fourth quarter was the icing on the cake for a 62-30 victory.

Junior Dallee Jo Bingham led the Badgers with 16 points, while sophomores Ayla Bingham and Abby Cox both added 11 points. Sophomore Paige Marlia led the team with five rebounds.

"We just knew with our youth that it would take some time," head coach Allen Bingham said. "They're putting some things together, I think we're on an uptick."

Powder's winning streak ended Tuesday night with a 41-31 loss to Burns in the BHS gym.

Pine Eagle scores

The Pine Eagle boys and girls teams also competed in the tournament. The Spartan boys lost 58-41 to Prairie City on Tuesday, to drop to 3-4 on the season. The Pine Eagle girls lost 39-14 to Prairie City on Tuesday, falling to 1-6.

The Spartan girls were slated to play the Baker JV team Wednesday morning, and the Pine Eagle boys played Burns Wednesday afternoon.