

9-man football appears off the table

State committee heeds call from Class 1A schools to keep 8-man team format

BY RONALD BOND AND DAVIS CARBAUGH
EO Media Group

SALEM — Nine-man football appears to be off the table.

The Oregon School Activities Association's Football Ad Hoc Committee dropped support of a considered move that would have drastically altered the 2A and 1A game and divided the schools into a large and small school division of 9-man football.

Instead, 2A schools will continue to play 11-man football, while larger 1A schools will remain at the 8-man level.

Backing 9-man football was shelved after the vast majority of 8-man schools — about 95% — said they favored 8-man over 9, according to an Oregonian report last week.

Powder Valley High School was adamant against the proposed 9-man football, with head coach Josh Cobb speaking out after the initial 9-man proposals on Tuesday, Dec. 20. Superintendent Lance Dixon and Athletic Director Brad Dunten both spoke at the most recent OSAA meeting on Jan. 5, with Dunten presenting a survey he conducted among 1A representatives.

Dunten noted that the majority of the survey took in results from athletic directors and school officials at the 1A



Powder Valley quarterback Reece Dixon breaks loose for a run during the OSAA Class 1A state championship game on Saturday, Nov. 27, 2021, at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium.

level, with a small number of principals and coaches responding. The survey showed that 80 responses from 95 1A schools and one 2A school favored 8-man football over 9-man. Just over 86% of the survey were against the 6-man/9-man/11-man model, while 79.5% voted that 2A through 6A classifications should not have a say on the future of 8-man football.

Dixon noted that the proposed doing away of 8-man football united 1A schools and representatives, which is not always a common trend. He also stated that switching to 9-man football could have a negative impact on schools on the east side of the state, who would be unable to play non-league games against Washington and Idaho schools who play strictly 8-man and 11-man football. Dixon emphasized his concern over impacts on the school's budget if travel

plans are affected by potential new football alignment.

Dixon further noted that getting rid of 8-man football would force schools with limited rosters to have to play down or put unprepared freshman on the field in order to meet the standards of 6-man or 9-man football. He stated that roughly a third of Powder Valley's 90 students are listed on the football team's roster, which would eliminate any need for the school to play 6-man football. The original proposal from Dec. 20 slated the Badgers to be moved down from 8-man to 6-man competition.

"I would hate to think that a school with 90 students in their student body and 25 players on their roster would be forced to play some of these schools that have 25 or 30 kids in the high school and 12 kids on the roster that still want to play 8-man football," Dixon said at the meeting.

Officials from Adrian High School, which beat Powder Valley in the Class 1A state championship game in November, also voiced displeasure over doing away with 8-man football at the meeting.

"Eight-man is the greatest form of football in my opinion, and it is one of the fastest growing forms of football," Adrian head coach Billy Wortman said at the meeting.

According to the update from the OSAA, schools will have an option to play 9-man "when necessary and appropriate."

Six-man football will continue to be offered by the OSAA for smaller 1A schools, and the OSAA is considering sanctioning the sport, meaning schools at that level would have the ability to play for an official state championship. Six-man has been a pilot program the last four years, and the teams had played for a de-facto title. The three smaller high schools in Baker County — Pine Eagle, Huntington and Burnt River — play 6-man football.

The current proposal would align Union County 1A schools in a similar 8-man district to the existing leagues. Powder Valley, Cove, Elgin, Imbler and Union would compete in the 1A Special District 3, alongside Adrian, Crane and Wallowa.

Enterprise, under the current proposal, is currently listed as part of the 2A ranks, and would be one of six teams in Special District 5, alongside Grant Union, Hepner, Irrigon, Stanfield and Weston-McEwen. The Out-

laws had played down to 8-man the previous four years.

The OSAA plans to keep play-down options in place for schools that have struggled at their slotted classifications, but is considering adding criteria that schools that play down would be ineligible for the postseason.

Joseph would remain at the 6-man ranks as part of Special District 1. The rest of the district includes Dayville/Monument, Echo, Huntington, Wheeler County, Pine Eagle, Prairie City/Burnt River, and South Wasco County.

On Dec. 20, the ad hoc committee made a recommendation of a new 2A and 1A hybrid classification, combining Oregon's 2A and 1A schools into three groups: a 9-man football Division 1 classification mostly made of 2A teams, a 9-man football Division 2 classification made of smaller 2A teams and bigger 1A teams, and a 6-man football classification for the smaller 1A programs.

During that meeting, Nestucca head coach Jeff Schiewe said that 2A programs would prefer to play 9-man football over 8-man, which is currently only played at the 1A level. However, during a Jan. 5 meeting of the ad hoc committee, representatives from 1A's Adrian and Powder Valley schools voiced their concerns over a potential change to nine-man football.

The next meeting of the football ad hoc committee will be on Jan. 19.

— Oregonian reporter Nik Streng contributed to this report.

Baker-La Grande hoops games postponed

Baker's girls and boys basketball teams were scheduled to open their Greater Oregon League season on Tuesday, Jan. 11, by playing host to rival La Grande in the Baker gym.

But then COVID-19 intervened.

Quarantines in both the La Grande girls and boys teams prompted the games to be postponed, Baker School District Athletic Director Buell Gonzales Jr. announced late on the morning of Jan. 11, about seven hours before the girls game was slated to tip off at 6 p.m.

The games will be rescheduled for Feb. 8, La Grande Athletic Director Darren Goodman said.

Baker now is set to start its league schedule by traveling to Milton-Freewater on Friday, Jan. 14 to play Mac-Hi. The girls game is set for 6 p.m., and the boys game at 7:30 p.m.

The Baker girls are 9-4 and ranked 9th in the Class 4A standings. Mac-Hi is 6-3. The Pioneers have already started their league schedule, beating Ontario 51-19 on Jan. 8. The teams have one common opponent — Molalla. Baker beat Molalla 50-33 on Dec. 11. Mac-Hi beat Molalla 49-41 on Dec. 22.

The Baker boys are 9-3 and ranked 7th in the state. Mac-Hi is 2-6, and 1-0 in Greater Oregon League play. The Pioneers beat Ontario 48-39 on Jan. 8. The teams don't have a common opponent.

PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS

Simons seizing his opportunity with Lillard out

BY ANNE M. PETERSON
Associated Press

PORTLAND — While Portland guard Damian Lillard remains sidelined with an abdominal injury, Anfernee Simons is seizing the opportunity to show he has the abilities to be an everyday starter in the NBA.

Simons' emergence has given the Trail Blazers a spark in an otherwise bleak season. Just 16-24 and sitting in 10th place in the Western Conference, Portland is missing both Lillard and his backcourt partner CJ McCollum because of injuries.

"That's my main goal really, just to show that I can be that guy," Simons said. "So that's what I'm trying to do."

Simons had 23 points and a career-high 11 assists in Portland's 114-108 victory Monday, Jan. 10, over the talent-laden Brooklyn Nets, who were missing James Harden but played Kyrie Irving for the second time this season.

The win capped a home-stretch during which the Blazers went 3-2. Simons kicked off the homestand with a career-high 43 points in a 136-131 victory over Atlanta on Jan. 3.

Known by his nickname Ant, the 22-year-old Simons has averaged 27.8 points and 7.6 assists over those five games, scoring 20 or more points in four of them.

"I think he's on his way," Portland first-year coach Chauncey Billups said when asked if Simons has proven himself to be an NBA starter. "This stretch here without Dame is going to be big for Ant. I know what I feel about him, but it's not about me, it's about proving himself to everybody else. He's going to have to maintain that consistency."

He started each of those games in the absence of Lillard, who has struggled this season with lower abdominal tendinopathy. Lillard, a six-time All-Star and the Blazers' stalwart leader, has been bothered by the injury since the Tokyo Olympics.

Lillard isn't accompanying the Blazers on their upcoming six-game road trip, which



Trail Blazers guard Anfernee Simons (No. 1) drives around a screen as the Portland Trail Blazers face the Los Angeles Clippers at Moda Center on Friday, Oct. 29, 2021.

starts Thursday night, Jan. 13, in Denver. Instead, he'll be evaluated further — a troubling sign as the Blazers seek their ninth straight playoff berth.

McCollum has missed 15 games after suffering a collapsed lung and is now awaiting the birth of his first child. Portland is also without fellow starters Norman Powell because of COVID-19 protocols and Larry Nance Jr. because of right knee inflammation.

Simons is hardly alone among the league's young players who have been garnering more minutes as coronavirus cases spike.

Miami's Omer Yurtseven, 23, has had double-digit rebounds in his last 11 games and was the first NBA player this season to have four consecutive games with at least 16 rebounds, a streak he'll try to extend Wednesday when the Heat visit Atlanta. He's been getting more playing time while Bam Ade-

bayo and Dewayne Dedmon are both hurt.

"I think everybody's seeing it this year, probably more so than any other year ever in the NBA, is that young guys are getting opportunities and they're taking big-time advantage of it," Sacramento Kings interim coach Alvin Gentry said. "You look at a kid like Simons, who everybody feels like is a good player. As to how good that is? Well, if you play on a team with the two backcourt players (the Blazers) have here, there's just not a whole lot of time for you to play. So now that he's got extended minutes, you can see what he can do."

One of the pitfalls of taking over the starting job, and capably performing in it, is that defenses are now keying in on Simons.

"I'm learning every single game, playing through mistakes, trying to be aggressive

in certain areas. I know a lot of teams are going to start throwing me a lot of attention," Simons said. "Just being prepared for that and know how to counter it. I think I'm handling it pretty well."

Simons is in his fourth season in the league. He was

a first-round draft pick by the Blazers in 2018 out of the IMG Academy in Florida. When he moved into the backup point guard role ahead of last season, Lillard wholeheartedly endorsed him, saying: "I believe in Ant."

"They just want me to play

my game. Everybody's saying shoot the ball, make plays, and everybody's giving me the confidence to do that," Simons said. "So it makes it much easier. I'm not going into the game worrying about the burden that's on my shoulder, or the weight that's on my shoulder."



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