

WOMEN'S COLLEGE HOOPS

Beavs set to face Cougs on Sunday

The subject came up last week about Oregon State and its path to the NCAA women's basketball tournament, a place the Beavers have ended their season six of the past seven years.

It's an uphill climb for OSU this season, and some of it is out of the Beavers' control because of COVID-19. When Oregon State plays Washington State at 1 p.m. Sunday in Corvallis, it will be just the Beavers' second game in 35 days.

Oregon State (3-4, 1-3 Pac-12) has played only seven games this season. As a comparison, by Jan. 23 of last season, the Beavers had played 18 games.

Of teams from Power 5 conferences that are still playing, only Virginia has played fewer games than OSU. Every Pac-12 team except for Washington and OSU have played at least 11 games through Friday.

OSU has had seven conference games postponed, with only one game (Washington, on Tuesday) rescheduled to date.

"We're getting a game per month right now, from July until now. I think that's what it's averaged out," Oregon State coach Scott Rueck said.

Odds are Oregon State will begin playing games on a regular schedule. Beginning Sunday, the Beavers have 11 regular season games remaining and the Pac-12 tournament.

In addition, the Pac-12 is making plans to allow for makeup games the week after the conference tournament.

If COVID-19 cooperates, Oregon State should easily reach 13 games. Surpassing 20 is even possible.

When it comes to qualifying for the NCAA tournament, it's probably not a lack of games that will hamstring Oregon State.

"We need to win games first, to be considered for such a thing, and so we need to play better when we get the opportunity," Rueck said.

Help could be on the way. This week, Oregon State added Talia von Oelhoffen, a five-star guard from Pasco, Wash., who signed in November.

Due to the uncertainty of high school basketball this year, von Oelhoffen graduated early and was able to enroll for winter classes at Oregon State. She began practicing this week after clearing all of OSU's medical protocols.

When von Oelhoffen can contribute is yet to be determined. She's currently limited in practice. Von Oelhoffen is not only a high school senior in age, she's entering the roster midway through the season at a time when most of the players are acclimated to the program. Rueck says von Oelhoffen is a quick learner, and has a point guard's mind.

As for getting into a game, von Oelhoffen has to get in condition and gain the necessary intensity to play at the Pac-12 level. And, of course, fit in at the defensive end.

"Playing time decisions for a coach actually aren't as hard as people think they are," Rueck said. "If a person earns it, if they're the best one, they get the minutes if she's a player in our program."

—The Oregonian

LOCAL SPORTS | NORDIC SKIING

Race returns to Meissner



Courtesy Steve Roti

Cross-country skiers compete in the Tour of Meissner 30-kilometer classic ski race last January at Virginia Meissner Sno-park west of Bend.

BY MARK MORICAL

The Bulletin

David Smullin was determined to not let the COVID-19 pandemic derail the Tour of Meissner nordic ski race this winter.

The race was an annual tradition for many years in Central Oregon, but it disappeared from the calendar for several winters until last season, when David Smullin brought it back to Virginia Meissner Sno-park west of Bend.

"I figured we could have something with an individual start and meet all the requirements. Everybody is required to wear a mask until the start, and then put them on after they cross the finish line. That's what we've been doing in the high school races. It's pretty obvious that people want to do it. It's just a good opportunity to get out and do something like that."

—David Smullin, a nordic skier from Bend who coaches Redmond-area high school skiers

Smullin, an avid nordic skier from Bend who coaches Redmond-area high school skiers, staged the race with more than 100 skiers last January. This winter, the Tour of Meissner is scheduled for Saturday, Jan. 30, but is limited to 50 skiers with the start and finish at Swampy Lakes Sno-park.

"I'm giving out bibs the Friday before the race in my garage," Smullin said. "We're limited to 50 people because that's the guidelines for right now. I have a wait list. It will be an individual start race, not a mass start. I figured we could have something with an individual start and meet all the requirements. Everybody is required to wear a mask until the start, and then put them on after they

cross the finish line. That's what we've been doing in the high school races.

"It's pretty obvious that people want to do it. It's just a good opportunity to get out and do something like that."

But for those skiers who are not one of the 50 who have a spot in the 30-kilometer classic race, Smullin is inviting them to come ski the course after 9 a.m. on Saturday and time themselves.

They can email Smullin their time (dhsnullin@gmail.com) and he will add it to the results.

He is encouraging those skiers to make a donation to the nonprofit Meissner Nordic, which pays to groom the trails.

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NFL PLAYOFFS | NFC CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

All eyes on QBs as Packers host Bucs

BY STEVE MEGARREE

Associated Press

For as much as Tom Brady and Aaron Rodgers have accomplished in their Hall of Fame-caliber careers, they've rarely faced off on the field.

Never have they met with so much at stake.

When Rodgers' Green Bay Packers (14-3) host Brady's Tampa Bay Buccaneers (13-5) in the NFC championship game Sunday, it will be just the fourth time they've squared off as starting quarterbacks, and first in the playoffs.

"I remember when I heard the news about him coming to the NFC, I thought this was a real possibility," Rodgers said. "I'm excited about the opportunity to play against him one more time."

The Bucs trounced the Packers 38-10 in Tampa on Oct. 18. They met two other times during Brady's tenure in New England, with the Packers winning 26-21 at Green Bay in 2014 and the Patriots winning 31-17 in Foxborough four years later.

Both understand all eyes will be on them Sunday. Kurt Warner, the Hall of Fame quarterback and NFL Network analyst, said that's just human nature.

"When I played, I always knew who was on the other



Jason Behnken/AP file

Green Bay Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers (12) gets sacked by Tampa Bay Buccaneers linebacker Lavonte David (54) on Oct. 18 in Tampa, Florida.

sideline," Warner said. "I always said when I went into these matchups, at the end of the day, I know if we're going to win this game, I've got to outperform that guy. I've got to be better than the quarterback on the other side."

Brady, 43, has helped the Bucs earn a franchise-record seven straight road wins. A win at Lambeau Field clinches their first Super Bowl berth since their 2002 championship season.

"This is one of the coolest stadiums in the league to play in," Brady said. "I know they're excited, we'll be excited, and it will make for a great football game."

Brady is trying to join Warner, Peyton Manning and Craig Morton as the only quarterbacks to lead two separate franchises to a Super Bowl. He already won six Super Bowls and played in nine total with the Patriots.

Green Bay is making its fourth NFC championship

game appearance in the past seven seasons, but Rodgers hasn't reached a Super Bowl since leading the Packers to a title in the 2010 season. Warner said the postseason weighs heavily on where players stack up in history.

"That's why Tom is the GOAT (greatest of all time)," Warner said. "It's why Joe Montana is up there and guys who've been there numerous times — the John Elways — and everyone else kind of gets knocked down a notch. Even though they've been great in the regular season, there's a combination of the two that I think weighs heavily."

Simply put, Rodgers needs this victory more than Brady.

"He plays in one Super Bowl, I think there will be something about that that just doesn't sit right with anybody," Warner said. "It doesn't sit right with any of us who love this game and know how great he's been. It just doesn't seem to fit."

This may be the best remaining chance for the 37-year-old Rodgers at that elusive second Super Bowl berth.

"It's been a while since he was last a world champion," CBS Sports analyst and 2002 NFL MVP Rich Gannon said.

See NFL / B3

COLLEGE BASKETBALL

Oregon's lower-division teams still not playing due to pandemic

BY JOE FREEMAN

The Oregonian

The last time the Bushnell University women's basketball players gathered for a game, it was March 12, and they were in Sioux City, Iowa.

The Beacons had just wrapped up a morning shootaround in preparation for the most anticipated matchup of a special season — an evening date with the University of Antelope Valley in the first round of the NAIA Division II Women's Basketball National Championship tournament — when devastating news arrived.

The game was off. The tournament was canceled. The coronavirus pandemic, in the early stages of its first surge through the United States, was about to change life forever.

"It's not the way you want to end a season," said Chad Meadors, coach of Bushnell, a Eugene school formerly called Northwest Christian. "In the back of our minds, we still can't help but think about what could have been."

Ten months later, Bushnell, along with every other lower-division college basketball program in Oregon, is still waiting to play.

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TRACK AND FIELD

Competing, not cash, lures stars to meet

BY PAT GRAHAM

Associated Press

The prospect of winning prize money isn't what brings high jumper Vashti Cunningham, sprinter Andre De Grasse and other top names in track to an indoor meet in Arkansas this weekend.

Because there is none.

Instead, the athletes are going for something that feels every bit as valuable these days, and could even lead to an Olympic gold medal. It's actual competition — much in demand with the coronavirus pandemic shutting down large swaths of their sport, and with the Tokyo Games rapidly approaching in July.

The American Track League begins a four-week indoor series Sunday at the University of Arkansas. It's a chance for athletes to see how they stack up in a time when COVID-19 has made training sometimes difficult and traveling overseas for meets almost unthinkable.

The league — founded in 2013 to provide a condensed, fast-paced meet format — doesn't have a major sponsor at the moment and will operate on a shoestring budget, meaning no prize money for the winners as of now.

And still, there's a waiting list to enter.

"Everyone is so hungry to compete," meet organizer/agent Paul Doyle said by phone.

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Inside

Mahomes, Chiefs host Allen, Bills in AFC championship game, B3