

## SPORTS

THE BULLETIN • SATURDAY, MAY 29, 2021

bendbulletin.com/sports

## NWSL

## Thorns unable to claim teenager

The Portland Thorns on Monday filed a discovery claim on 15-year-old player Olivia Moultrie with the National Women's Soccer League, hours after a federal judge ordered the league to temporarily lift its age rule that requires players be at least 18 years old.

Yet by Friday, the league rejected the claim, saying it was working on drafting new discovery rules for young players, Moultrie's lawyer confirmed.

"The family and the lawyers are disappointed in the league's decision and think it is inconsistent with the letter or the spirit of the court's ruling," attorney Leonard Simon said.

Both sides are expected to be back before U.S. District Judge Karin J. Immergut in early June for a hearing on Moultrie's motion for a preliminary injunction challenging the league's age rule.

On Monday, Immergut granted Moultrie a temporary restraining order, directing the league to lift its age rule and allow Moultrie the opportunity to compete for a position on a professional team. The judge found the age restriction violated federal antitrust law and would cause irreparable harm to Moultrie, who practices and scrimmages with the Thorns. Immergut also ruled that lifting the age rule will promote gender equity in athletics.

Moultrie testified in court last week, saying she was asking only for a chance to play soccer in the United States professionally, like girls her age who can play abroad or American boys now do in the United States.

—The Oregonian

## SOCCER

## Why Nike ended deal with Neymar

Nike has confirmed it ended its sponsorship agreement with Neymar after he refused to collaborate in an investigation into an accusation that he sexually assaulted a female employee from the company years ago.

The soccer superstar has denied the accusation and criticized the company on Instagram while training with Brazil outside Rio de Janeiro.

Neymar called Nike's claims "an absurd lie."

Nike didn't give a reason last August when it parted ways with the Paris Saint-Germain forward. But the company said in a statement on Thursday that it terminated the contract because Neymar refused to participate "in a good faith investigation of credible allegations of wrongdoing by an employee."

Nike said it was "deeply disturbed by sexual assault allegations" and confirmed the alleged incident took place in 2016. Nike said it received an official notice of the incident two years later.

The company said it respected the employee's initial desire to avoid an investigation and to keep the matter private.

"In 2019, when the employee later expressed interest in pursuing the matter, we acted immediately," it said. "Nike commissioned an independent investigation and retained separate independent legal counsel for the employee, of her choosing and at the company's expense."

—Associated Press

## PREP GIRLS BASKETBALL

## Recalibrating after COVID

A teamwide exposure has the Bend Lava Bears off to a late start in an already shortened season

BY BRIAN RATHBONE • The Bulletin

Her final high school basketball season has not gone as Ava Dennis envisioned when she was in the gym after school getting shots up as a freshman.

The only senior on the Lava Bears' roster could not predict how different the world would be in her final weeks of high school than when she first set foot on the Bend High campus.

"When I was a freshman I looked forward to my senior year," Dennis said. "You think about your senior year and how you want it to play out."

She had no idea about the realities of playing high school basketball in 2021, which include starting the season less than a week before Memorial Day and having the regular season trimmed to eight games due to a teamwide exposure to COVID-19.

"It was tough. It was really disap-

pointing because you don't know you have it until you have symptoms," Dennis said. "Then, everyone has it."

What was the light at the end of the COVID-19 pandemic tunnel for most Oregon high school basketball teams turned out to be a train barreling down the tracks for the Lava Bear girls. A week before the season was set to start, nearly the entire Bend High girls program had to go into quarantine.

See *Basketball* / B2

Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Bend's Ava Dennis (11) dribbles down court during the first quarter against Summit at Bend High on Thursday night.

## NBA PLAYOFFS | PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS

## Bench production wanes in 2 playoff losses

BY AARON FENTRESS  
The Oregonian

How much do the Portland Trail Blazers miss Zach Collins right about now?

The Blazers have a depth issue. Although coach Terry Stotts and Damian Lillard downplayed the bench's lack of production in Games 2 and 3 of their first-round playoff series against Denver, the stats don't lie.

The Blazers lost 120-115 on Thursday night to fall behind 2-1, with their bench of Carmelo Anthony, Anfernee Simons and Enes Kanter producing six points on 2 of 8 shooting in 32 combined minutes through three quarters. Denver's bench to that point had 20 points.

Anthony found his shot in the fourth quarter and helped

fuel a comeback by scoring 13 points on 4 of 6 shooting. So, the final bench scoring totals favored Denver by just 24-19. That's far better than in Game 2 on Monday, when Denver won 128-109 and outscored the Blazers' bench 38-21. Seven of those 21 Portland points came from non-rotation players late in the fourth quarter after Stotts had waved the white flag.

Still, Stotts downplayed the bench's lack of production in the past two games, saying that he doesn't much care where the points come from, as long as they come.

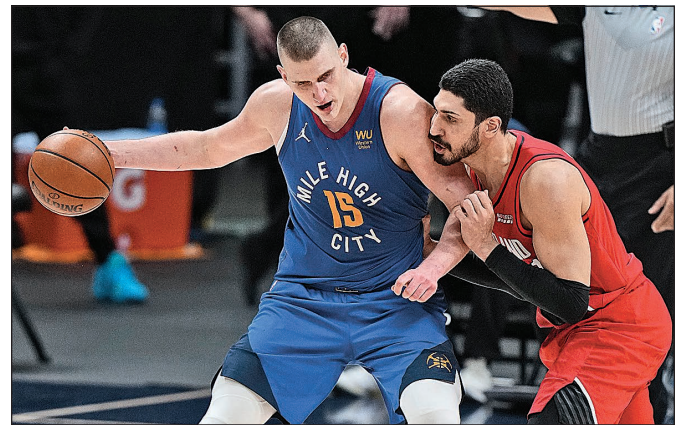
"It's good when we get scoring off the bench," he said. "But my concern is how we score as a team and how that comes about."

In Game 1, which the Blazers won 123-109, a large chunk

of points came from the bench. The Blazers saw Anthony, Kanter and Simons combine for 34 points on 12 of 20 shooting. Simons and Anthony combined to make 8 of 13 3s.

Compounding the overall issue in the losses is that Kanter is the only big man in the rotation off the bench, and he appears to be in over his head against Denver's Nikola Jokic or any other player the Nuggets toss in at center when he is out of the game.

Kanter, in three games, has scored six points with 10 rebounds in 39 minutes while backing up Jusuf Nurkic, who has fouled out of the last two games. But Kanter's biggest problems have come on defense. Kanter played 18 minutes in Game 2 and came away with a plus/minus of minus-14.



Jack Dempsey/AP

Portland Trail Blazers' Enes Kanter (11) defends Denver Nuggets' Nikola Jokic (15) in Game 1 of a first-round playoff series on May 22 in Denver.

Thursday night, he accumulated a minus-15 in just five minutes of action in the first half and played only one minute in the second half. During that short stint, he was called for a flagrant 1 foul.

Kanter's poor play led Stotts to insert Rondae Hollis-Jefferson for five minutes in a move mainly designed to just get Kanter off the floor.

"I thought you could feel his presence out there," Stotts said of Hollis-Jefferson. "We were able to switch when he was in there with (Robert Covington) and Melo. So, I thought he was effective in the minutes that he had."

Stotts said he wasn't sure what the rotation would be moving forward.

See *Blazers* / B2

## TOKYO GAMES

## Olympics looking more and more like fan-free event

BY STEPHEN WADE  
Associated Press

TOKYO — The president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee hinted Friday that even local fans may be barred from venues when the games open in just under two months.

Fans from abroad were ruled out months ago as being too risky during a pandemic.

The prospect of empty venues at the postponed Olympics became more likely when the Japanese government decided Friday to extend a state of emergency until June 20 as COVID-19 cases continue to put the medical system under strain.

The state of emergency was to have been lifted on Monday. The extension in Tokyo, Osaka and other prefectures raises even more questions if the Olympics can be held at all.

Organizers and the IOC are insistent they will go ahead de-

spite polls in Japan showing 60-80% want them called off.

"We would like to make a decision as soon as possible (on fans), but after the state of emergency is lifted we will assess," organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto said at her weekly briefing.

Hashimoto promised to decide on local fans by April, then put it off until early June. Now the deadline is within a month of the July 23 opening date.

"There are many people who are saying that for the Olympic Games we have to run without spectators, although other sports are accepting spectators," Hashimoto said. "So we need to keep that in mind. We need to avoid that the local medical services are affected. We need to take those things into consideration before agreeing on the spectator count."

Cancellation pressure grows daily on Tokyo and the IOC as

more questions arise about the risks of bringing 15,000 Olympic and Paralympic athletes from more than 200 countries and territories into Japan, a country that has been largely closed off during the pandemic.

The IOC says more than 80% of athletes and staff staying in the Olympic Village on Tokyo Bay will be vaccinated. They are expected to remain largely in a bubble at the village and at venues.

In addition to athletes, tens of thousands of judges, officials, VIPs, media and broadcasters will also have to enter Japan.

Earlier this week, the New England Journal of Medicine said in a commentary: "We believe the IOC's determination to proceed with the Olympic Games is not informed by the best scientific evidence."

It questioned the IOC's so-called Playbooks, which spell out rules at the games for ath-

letes, staff, media and others. The final edition will be published next month. Also this week, the Asahi Shimbun — the country's second-largest newspaper — said the Olympics should be canceled.

The British Medical Journal last month in an editorial also asked organizers to "reconsider" holding the Olympics in the middle of a pandemic.

On Thursday, the head of a small doctors' union in Japan warned that holding the Olympics could lead to the spread of variants of the coronavirus. He mentioned strains in India, Britain, South Africa and Brazil.

Japan has attributed about 12,500 deaths to COVID-19, a relatively small number that has gone up steadily in the last few months. The vaccination rollout began slowly in Japan, but has moved more quickly in the last few days. Vaccinated people are estimated at about

5% of the population.

The IOC, which often cites the World Health Organization as the source of much of its coronavirus information, has been steadfast in saying the games will happen. It receives about 75% of its income from selling broadcast rights, which is estimated to be \$2 billion-\$3 billion from Tokyo. That cash-flow has been slowed by the postponement.

Japan itself has officially spent \$15.4 billion to organize the Olympics, and government audits suggest the figure is even higher.

Senior IOC member Richard Pound told a British newspaper this week that "barring Armageddon" the games will take place. Last week, IOC vice president John Coates was asked if the Olympics would open, even if there were a state of emergency.

"Absolutely, yes," he replied.