



Wildfire softball girls win District 3 tourney

9-11 and 18U girls busy competing

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Grant County Wildfire 9-10-11 girls softball team dominated the Hermiston Bulldogs at the District 3 Little League Tournament, which was a best of three series between the two teams.

The tournament in Pilot Rock was rained out on June 18. Then the Wildfire powered forward, winning game one, 12-1, on Tuesday and game two, 8-3, on Wednesday.

Head coach Zach Williams said his team performed well, despite the hot weather.

"The girls played solid defense," he said. "They had to be really patient at the plate, which we struggled with. Everybody on the team contributed."

Pitcher Drewsey Williams was in the circle for all 10 innings of the tournament.

In game one, she threw four innings, striking out five and giving up no hits.

Offensively, the team was walked 13 times, and Halle Parsons, Jaydika Anderson and Bailey McCracken each had one hit.

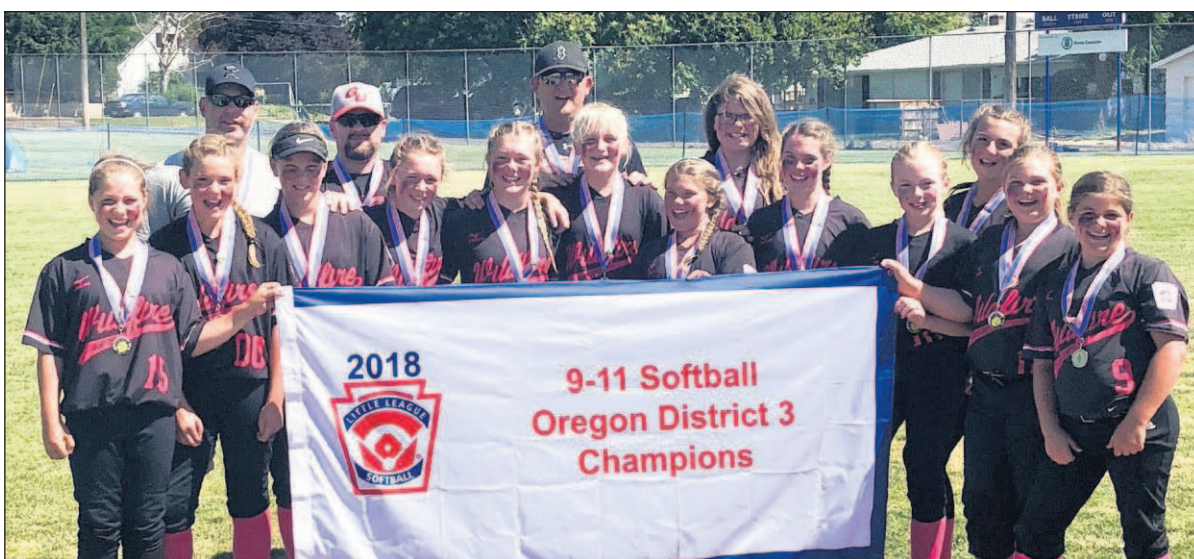
The team won in four innings, due to the mercy rule.

Drewsey Williams pitched a full six innings in game two, striking out eight batters and giving up two walks.

Parsons went 2 for 3, and Lauren Wenger tripled in the second inning. Addy Northway and Savannah Watterson each had one hit.

The Wildfire and 18U Lady Pros team competed at the June 22-24 Amateur Softball Association Boise Blast Summer Shootout in Idaho, eight games against teams from throughout the northwest.

Coach Williams said the ASA games are more competitive, and



The Grant County Wildfire 9-10-11 team gathers after winning the Oregon District 3 Championships on June 20. The team beat Hermiston 12-1 and 8-3 in Pilot Rock. Front row, from left: Bailey McCracken, Preslee Lenz, Savannah Watterson, Addy Northway, Jaydika Anderson, Drewsey Williams, Sivanna Hedge, Lauren Wenger, Halle Parsons, Ava Gerry, Lexi McKrola, Lilly Rockhill and Reece Jacobs; back row, assistant coaches Ray Wenger and Levi Watterson and head coach Zach Williams.



Grant County Wildfire third baseman Lauren Wenger competes in the District 3 Championships in Pilot Rock.

they are up against opponents with girls who try out for their teams.

The Lady Pros won the silver bracket at the June 15-16 Magic Valley Madness Tournament in Twin Falls, Idaho.

After competing in Boise, both Grant County teams will play at another ASA tournament in Medford.

The Wildfire will compete at the 9-10-11 Little League Softball State Tournament, which starts July 18 in Medford. Last year, the Wildfire girls had a third-place finish.

"We're looking forward to going back to the state tournament," Williams said.

By the time the Wildfire and Lady Pros reach the end of the season, each team will have played 45 games.

Williams is manager for the Lady Pros team with assistant coaches Mike Strong, Lance Zweygardt, Amy Hittle and Brandon Culley.

Assistant coaches for the Wildfire team are Levi Watterson, Marissa Williams and Ray Wenger.



Grant County Wildfire's Halle Parsons looks for the pitch in the game against Hermiston.



Grant County Wildfire catcher Addy Northway competes in the District 3 Championships against Hermiston in Pilot Rock.

Prospector softball legacy began with simple question

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

Many hands have made the Grant Union Prospector softball program what it is today.

It all started in 2002 when an inquisitive father, new to the area at that time, asked a sixth-grade teacher about softball for his girls.

Now retired, DeAnna Nash was a teacher with Grant School District 3 when, on that first day of school, Mark Croghan asked if there was a softball program.

Mark's daughters had played Little League softball in Idaho, and they hoped to keep playing.

"I remember meeting them," Nash said. "That was one of the first questions Mark had for me."

A chat with the Little League baseball board of directors, including Lucie Imoos and John Stearns, got the ball rolling, and by spring 2003 a Little League softball program formed.

Croghan's daughter Taylor and Nash's daughter Megan were on that first team of 11- and 12-year-olds.

Nash said there were four town teams when Little League softball started, and later an additional three teams with older girls.

"All of the sudden every little girl in town wanted to play softball," she said. "Parents were almost as excited as the kids to get girls involved in the softball program."

Mark said, the first year the girls played, they went to a district tournament and won some games.

"(They) did well for some girls who'd never competed before," Mark said. "From there, those girls progressed on up to high school, and there was a big enough group that they wanted to continue."

Mark and his wife, Lorie, both coached their three daughters through Little League, who all went on to play for the high school team.

Nash also coached her four daughters in Little League for several years.

Lorie recalled several par-



Girls on the first Grant Union softball team pose in their dugout in 2006. Back row, left to right: Megan Nash, Sidney Swaggert, Jonna Porter, Kelsi Livran, Amanda Buckhaults; middle row, Mikayla Alley, Hilary Ashmead, Taylor Croghan, La'Shawnda Gill, Kristina Hansen; front: Sharon Houpt.



Grant Union Prospector Reagan Shelley gets the signal from then-head coach DeAnna Nash to take it on home from third in a 2017 league playoff against Burns in Vale.

ents stepped up to help coach Little League, including Les DeHaven and Jeff Meyerholz.

When the girls on the first Little League softball team reached their freshman year, a high school softball club started that spring in 2006.

Nash was head coach and Lorie, who was and still is a teacher with Grant School District 3, was assistant coach.

"Initially the program

wasn't funded — we had to prove ourselves," Nash said. "We went to state the second year and fourth year of the program."

Most of the girls on the first team were freshmen, about 14 of them, with a couple upperclassmen that first year.

Mark, who continued to coach Little League until 2014, said the high school team performed well and people were

"pretty surprised because they were so young."

Little League volunteers built the softball dugouts, and Tony Gardner donated the first two batting cages.

DeHaven was another assistant coach over the years, and Nash's husband, Monty, was also a volunteer assistant.

DeAnna Nash credits those first six dedicated freshmen, who played all four years, with developing the program.

"If the Croghans had never come to John Day, we probably wouldn't have softball in high school — 100 percent, I believe that," she said.

By the fourth year of the high school program, there were 27 players on the team.

They won the district tournament and went to state a second time. Then the school began paying the coaches. The excitement was contagious.

Younger girls who saw the success of the older girls became interested, and team members encouraged others to join.

"It's definitely fun to see the girls have an opportunity to compete in softball," Mark said. "It's a lot funner to watch to see the interest develop with people coming up."

He said he helped Little League players and some varsity players learn pitching techniques.

"The parents and the kids took that on themselves, and I think a lot of them went to pitching camps," he said.

Nash said during her last year of coaching the Prospectors, in 2017, there were four or five players who hadn't been in the program long or who had never played.

"They all wanted to be a part of that high school program, and I think that's a benefit," she said.

"It was fun for those girls who had a lot of skills to remember that they were at that point once upon a time," she added. "It helped them remember the fundamentals." She said it was a great expe-

rience to see the newer players progress through the season.

Lorie was assistant coach through 2010 and also assisted in 2014. When she wasn't coaching, she kept records for Nash.

Taylor Croghan said she's glad her dad helped start Little League softball.

"It was pretty cool that I could be on the first softball team here and know that my family was part of that and all my friends," she said, adding she was also pleased to see the playing field even out with the ratio between boys and girls high school sports.

"And now the softball team is doing well and competed really well at state," she said. "I've talked with some of those players, and (they) had looked up to the previous players that had been on the team — those who've had an influence on the younger girls is nice."

She said she was happy with her team and how they all got along.

"It's fun to see how far our community has come, to start out at such a young age and play at the skill level that they do now in high school," she said.

Zach Williams started coaching the Prospector softball team this season, leading the team to the OSAA State Championship quarterfinals.

This summer, he is also coaching the ASA 18U Lady Pros team, and the 12U Grant County Wildfire Little League softball team. Both teams are frequently on the road for games.

Mark Croghan credits Williams for helping the girls gain softball experience as they move up through the ranks.

Williams said there is "a lot of hard work by a lot of volunteers" in Little League.

Last year, he managed the 16U ASA team, which ended in the top half at the ASA State Championship Tournament in Medford. He also led the 8-10 team to third place at the 2017 Oregon State Little League Tournament, also played in Medford.

"I'm sure they'll continue to do well," Mark said.