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SPORTS • OUTDOORS • CLASSIFIEDS

SPORTS PREVIEWS

# FEARLESS

## Grant Union football team ready for tough schedule

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Team chemistry was one of several elements that helped push the Grant Union Prospector football team into the post-season last year.

Head coach Jason Miller and the team hope to make a comeback.

Miller, in his 11th year leading the team, said another factor in last year's success was the players, though young, "all wanted to fight for each other."

"As coaches, we kept it simple and let them get really good at a few things," he said.

Miller said this year's team is also young, but all the boys are back, except two graduating seniors, including quarterback Garrett Lenz.

"Our running game is strong, and our defense is stout," Miller said, adding they have some talented wide receivers as well, some of whom will help out the junior varsity team.

Working on the quarterback position are sophomore Maverick Miller and junior Devon Stokes.

Stokes said, because last year's team was young (the 2017-18 team graduated several seniors), some people didn't believe they would go far.

"I think we have a lot of potential this year," he said, adding their goal is to take it at least one step further this year.

Grant Union finished second in the 2A Special District 6 last season, behind Heppner, making it to the state playoffs, where the Prospectors fell to the Monroe Dragons 49-0 in the first round. Grant Union ended the sea-



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter  
Grant Union sophomore Justin Hodge, center, hangs onto the ball as a defender reaches for it during a practice scrimmage.



Cinch Anderson



Frank Douglass



Mason Gerry



Russell Hodge



Taylor Hunt



Drew Lusco

son with a 5-5 overall record, 3-1 in league.

The Dragons continued to the semifinals, falling to Santiam 44-13, and Kennedy won the championship title over Santiam 31-20.

Miller is assisted by defensive coordinator Andy Lusco and Tucker Wright, who works with linebackers and special teams. Wright was on the 2013-14 Prospector football team, led by Miller, that won the 2A state title.

There are 28 out for the team this season, including six seniors, six juniors, seven sophomores and nine freshmen.

Miller will have a junior varsity team this season after being without one last year, due to lack of numbers. He

said they'll play nine-man football against some of the teams on the JV schedule.

The six seniors are among the returning players, including starter Drew Lusco, who was named an all-state lineman his previous three years on the varsity team. He was recognized for first team all-state offensive line and second team all-state defensive line last year.

Drew Lusco also earned second place at the OSAA wrestling state championships last February in the 285-pound bracket and was the district champion.

"He's a mountain," said coach Miller.

Other returning senior starters are Russell Hodge (tailback), Taylor Hunt (linebacker and fullback) and

Frank Douglass (defensive lineman). Senior Cinch Anderson is a returning offensive lineman, and senior Mason Gerry is back after a stint with the Prospector cross country team last season. He's a 6-foot-4 wide receiver and defensive back.

Also back after starting last season are freshman Justin Hodge (defensive back and slot back), junior Peyton Neault (offensive and defensive line) Quentin Hallgarth (linebacker and tight end) and Jordan Hall (receiver).

Miller said he's excited to have all but one of his returning starters back, and said he's also seen improvements from Maverick Miller, sophomore Tanler Fuller and freshman Eli Wright.

Russell Hodge said his

### GRANT UNION FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

Sept. 6: vs. Knappa at 7 p.m.  
Sept. 13: @ Monroe at 6 p.m.  
Sept. 21: @ Lost River at Summit High School in Bend at 5 p.m.  
Sept. 27: @ Umatilla at 7 p.m.  
Oct. 4: vs. Kennedy at 7 p.m.  
Oct. 11: vs. Stanfield at 7 p.m.  
Oct. 18: @ Riverside at 7 p.m.  
Oct. 25: vs. Heppner at 7 p.m.  
Nov. 1: @ Weston-McEwen at 7 p.m.  
Nov. 9: First round state, TBD  
Nov. 16: Quarterfinal playoffs, TBD  
Nov. 23: Semifinals, TBD  
Nov. 30: Championship, TBD

goals include doing his job right and being a leader for the team.

"I want to bring everybody up and be that person that makes everybody better," he said.

Douglass said he feels the support of the entire team and said his teammates are confident.

"I know it's going to be a good season," he said.

Hunt said he's looking forward to seeing the younger players grow throughout the season and fill their roles.

The seniors have a long history together, playing football with each other since third grade, said Drew Lusco.

He said he's glad there are a few more guys out for football this year.

"It's going to be a young team again," he said. "The freshmen this year are tougher and harder working than they've been in the past."

Lusco said his personal

goal is to make first team all-state for the offensive and defensive line again this year.

"It'll take hard work and preparation," he said.

The Prospectors have a tough schedule ahead.

"We run the 2A gauntlet," Miller said.

In the 2A Special District 6, Grant Union will face the Heppner Mustangs, Riverside Pirates, Stanfield Tigers and Weston-McEwen Tiger-scots in the last four games of the regular season.

"Stanfield and Weston-McEwen are in the running, and Riverside — you never know," Miller said. "Heppner will be our toughest opponent in the league."

Heppner has been led by head coach Greg Grant for more than 20 years.

"They always have good numbers, with 35-40 kids over the years — good athletes, good coaches and good numbers," Miller said.

Besides their league opponents, Grant Union will also face Knappa in the Prospectors' home opener at 7 p.m. Friday, Sept. 6.

Knappa also made it to the first round playoffs at state last year, falling 48-42 to Glide. Heppner fell 34-0 in the first round to Kennedy.

Grant Union will face Monroe on the road Sept. 13 for the Prospectors' second game of the season. Grant Union will host Kennedy on Oct. 4.

"We play five of the top 10 teams in 2A," Miller said.

This includes Knappa, Monroe, Lost River, Heppner and Kennedy.

"It's a tough schedule, but I think we'll hold our own," he said.

## Grant Union volleyball team revamps for season

By Angel Carpenter  
Blue Mountain Eagle

There are nine big shoes to fill on the Grant Union Prospector volleyball team this season.

Although the team graduated all the main starters, a new crop of talent is ready to grow into the roles left behind.

Grant Union brought home a second-place trophy from state competition last season with current head coach Ali Abrego, falling in a tight game to Portland Christian, which won with scores of 28-26, 23-25, 25-11, 24-26 and 15-13. Grant Union won it all the year before, earning the 2A state championship title under head coach Shae Speth.

The Prospectors were champions of the Blue Mountain Conference last year with a 12-0 league record, 28-5 overall.

Of the nine graduating seniors, four received All-State honors, including Hailie Wright, setter, first team; Kaylee Wright, outside hitter, first team; Trinity Hutchinson, middle blocker, second team; and Alcie Moore, setter, honorable mention.

Now, Abrego is revamping the program with 24 girls eager to fill the empty spots of players they've looked up to as leaders.

The team's four seniors are Taylor Allen, Kaytlyn Wells, Baylee Combs and Averie Wenger. Rounding out the roster are four juniors, 10 sophomores and six freshmen.

"It's awesome that we have the numbers this season," Abrego said. "We have a lot of sophomores in this group, which is both a blessing and a curse."

A blessing because the sophomores have a history of playing together and a curse because she'll have to let yet another large group go when they graduate, she said.

"I love big classes, but it will hurt my heart to graduate that many again," Abrego said. She noted that last year's junior varsity team had a "fairly successful season."

Varsity positions are still being filled, including team captains.



The Eagle/Angel Carpenter  
Grant Union Prospector Taylor Moss, right, returns the ball, faced by Grace Taylor at the net.



Taylor Allen



Baylee Combs



Kaytlyn Wells



Averie Wenger



Head coach Ali Abrego

So far, two team captains have been chosen, including Allen, a strong outside hitter who saw a lot of playing time last season, and sophomore Lauryn Pettyjohn, the libero (defensive specialist) for the team.

"Having a senior and sophomore as captains speaks a lot about their ability to lead this group," Abrego said.

She said her main goal is for a "unified group of girls," and she'll be looking to the team leaders to keep the squad cohesive.

"If I'm not teaching them the proper way to lead the team, then I'm not doing my job," she added.

She'll be looking to the captains to "build a positive team culture and positive program," especially with the six incoming freshmen.

Adding to the welcoming atmosphere is new assistant coach Andrea Combs.

"We balance each other out," Abrego said. "I'm very driven to

win. She's very supportive and uplifting and always offering a friendly face and someone to rely on."

Grant Union will face Enterprise, Heppner, Pilot Rock, Stanfield, Union and Weston-McEwen in the 2A-6 Blue Mountain Conference.

Abrego expects Union and Weston-McEwen to be "pretty tough this year."

While the Prospectors have their work cut out for them, they'll be playing to their strengths.

"We're striving to be the heavy hitting team," the coach said. "You have the power, now let's get the footwork — your basics."

Grace Taylor, one of Grant Union's taller players, is a setter.

Abrego said they're "still figuring out the middle and outside situation."

Wells has played in the middle blocker and outside hitter position, and Maddie Spencer also has tournament experience with the varsity

team.

The Prospectors are hosting a tournament at 9 a.m. Saturday, Aug. 31, at the Prairie City School gym, because the Grant Union gym is currently undergoing floor work.

Invited to compete with Grant Union are 1A Prairie City, 1A Dayville/Monument, Weston-McEwen, Heppner and Enterprise.

The four Grant Union seniors, who've been playing the sport together since second grade, are positive about the season's prospects.

"We're a really young team, but we have a lot of potential," Allen said. "We have a good block, and we're determined. I'm looking forward to this last season, because it's going to be a good one."

Wells said she's sad it's the final season of her high school career, but she's feeling positive about the strengths she's seeing in her teammates.

"I feel like we'll have a strong passing line," she said. "We have a lot of strong passers this year. And we're good at blocking, because we're tall and quick."

Wenger, who took a break from volleyball last year, is ready for the season.

"I'm glad to be back playing volleyball," she said. "I think we have really good coaching staff, and we have a lot of drive."

Baylee Combs agreed.

"I'm excited to be a part of such a great program," she said. "I'm excited to see how the younger players step up and fill the spots that (last year's seniors) left open."

Looking ahead, Abrego said she's excited for what the season holds.

"It'll be a learning curve," she said. "I'm eager to see how they come together."

"The last class of seniors left a big mark, and I'm interested to see these girls rise to the occasion," she continued. "We have a lot of talented players and have some untapped talent. When they have that epiphany, that 'aha' moment, it'll all come together."

### GRANT UNION VOLLEYBALL SCHEDULE

Aug. 31: Grant Union Tournament in Prairie City, 9 a.m.  
Sept. 3: vs. La Grande, 4 p.m.  
Sept. 7: @ Heppner Tournament, 9 a.m.  
Sept. 12: vs. Burns, 6:30 p.m.  
Sept. 13: @ East-West Volleyball Classic, Powder Valley High School, TBD  
Sept. 14: @ East-West Volleyball Classic, Powder Valley High School, TBD  
Sept. 17: @ Prairie City, 5:30 p.m.  
Sept. 19: @ Heppner, 5 p.m.  
Sept. 23: vs. Prairie City, 5:30 p.m.  
Sept. 28: @ Stanfield, noon  
Sept. 28: @ Weston-McEwen at Stanfield High School (L), 3 p.m.  
Oct. 1: @ Union, 5 p.m.  
Oct. 5: vs. Enterprise, 2 p.m.  
Oct. 5: vs. Pilot Rock, 5 p.m.  
Oct. 10: vs. Heppner, 5 p.m.  
Oct. 12: vs. Stanfield, noon  
Oct. 12: vs. Weston-McEwen, 3 p.m.  
Oct. 15: vs. Union, 5 p.m.  
Oct. 19: @ Enterprise, noon  
Oct. 19: vs. Pilot Rock at Enterprise High School, 1:30 p.m.  
Oct. 22: @ Burns, 6:30 p.m.  
Oct. 26: Blue Mountain District Tournament at Stanfield, TBD  
Nov. 2: First Round State Playoffs, TBD  
Nov. 8: Quarterfinals, Ridgeview High School in Redmond, TBD  
Nov. 9: Semifinals at Ridgeview, TBD  
Nov. 9: Finals at Ridgeview, TBD  
*Some volleyball times show start time for JV games, followed by varsity.*