



# The Year in Sports



Blue Mountain Eagle, File  
**Prairie City's football team honored the flag ahead of its homecoming game on Friday, Oct. 8, 2021. The flag ceremony became a tradition after the Panthers walked out with the stars and stripes to honor men and women in the military who were killed in Afghanistan in late August, and later expanded it to commemorate law enforcement and first responders.**

## A look back at some sports highlights of 2021

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
 Blue Mountain Eagle

Unprecedented, unpredictable and unforgettable do not even begin to describe Grant County's high school sports scene in 2021.

With the pandemic shutting down spring sports in 2020, many questions remained unanswered about high school sports by the time 2021 rolled around.

As pandemic restrictions eased across the state, Grant County's student-athletes faced countless challenges, from strict health and safety protocols to an ultimately delayed, altered and significantly shortened schedule, with no shortage of starts, stops and pauses and little time to prepare for competition.

Nonetheless, the high school teams eventually returned to action and did not disappoint.

There were plenty of triumphs for Grant County's high school athletes through it all. From a flurry of state titles in track, softball and volleyball to a young football team putting up its first winning season in years, high school sports gave a pandemic-fatigued community something to rally around, and the Eagle was there to cover it.

1. After the pandemic halted their 2020 season, Grant Union's track and field team came back to earn two state titles to finish second overall at the 2A State Track Championship in Union in late May. Senior Jordan Hall placed first in the 110 hurdles, while Justin Hodge, Quaid Brandon, CJ Glimpse and Luke Jackson took the top spot in the 4x100 relay. Additionally, Hodge took third in shotput while Hall was named athlete of the meet and took third in the triple jump, fourth in the long jump, and fifth in the javelin.

2. That same weekend, the Grant Union/Prairie City softball team made history when it took second place in the state tournament, the best finish ever for the program. In a fraught season of closures, cancellations and interruptions due to COVID-19 lockdowns, the Lady Pros — with a young roster — dominated their league with a 14-2 record. The state tourney saw senior Jordyn Young and freshman Drewsey Williams hit grand slams, while Paige Gerry hit a home run. The squad's success in 2021 was significant, given that pitching ace Halle Parsons and Williams were freshmen.

3. In May, Grant Union's golf team beat out a handful of other teams at its annual invitational at the John Day Golf Course. With a



Blue Mountain Eagle, File  
**Prairie City's football team gathers around second-year head coach Nick Thompson during a practice in mid-October 2021. Thompson, named the High Desert League's Coach of the Year, led the team to its first winning season in nearly a decade.**

team score of 384, the Pros bested Echo, Wallowa and Heppner under Grant Union's longtime golf coach, Ron Lundbom. Prospector senior Devon Stokes shot an 88 and was the tournament's top medalist. Enterprise's Jacob Amaro was not far behind with an 89, while Grant Union's Maverick Miller, a senior, finished out the competition with an overall score of 94.

4. In July, two siblings from Grant Union High School competed at the National High School Finals Rodeo in Lincoln, Nebraska. Bailey McCracken, then a sophomore, finished in the top third overall in barrel racing, an event where a horse and rider attempt to run a pattern around barrels in the fastest time. Bailey, who was named "Oregon's Rookie of the Year" by the state's high school rodeo association earlier in the year, finished in the top 51 out of 187 racers in the aggregate. Meanwhile, Sam McCracken, a junior at the time, placed 72nd in boys cutting, an equestrian competition where a horse and rider demonstrate their ability to handle cattle before a panel of judges. Sam made his best run ever at the competition and was poised to place 37th overall, but, in the third round, a wrong turn on his horse cost him a mandatory 40-point deduction, which put him too far behind to catch up. Nevertheless, Sam came back to score 181 points to finish strong. It was far from his first rodeo. Sam has taken the top spot in the state in boys cutting the last two years and second place in 2019.

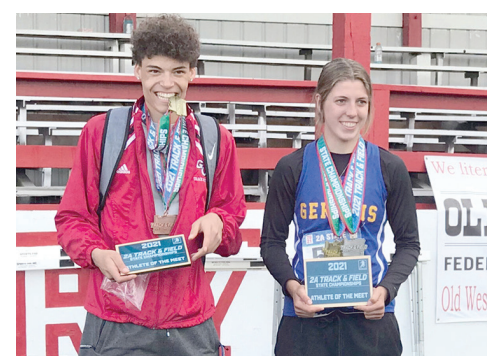
5. In July, Grant Union's grapplers brought

some hardware back to the county when the squad sent two wrestlers to Sweet Home to compete at the state tourney. Justin Hodge, fresh off a state track win in relays and a first-place finish at the state wrestling tournament in 2020, took third overall in his weight division, while teammate Rylan Cox placed fourth. Tye Parsons, longtime assistant wrestling coach at the high school and coach of the county's youth wrestling program, told the Eagle in May that they had a great season given the small window the Prospectors had to prepare. "Wrestling is a sport that you spend months getting in shape for," Parsons said. "So, to try to get in shape in two weeks and expect great things is not probable." Hodge concurred on the short time to practice and wrestle during the summer instead of winter. "It was hot," he said. "Everything was just off." Through it all, eight Prospector grapplers from the team placed within the top 10 at the district tourney in Culver ahead of the state tournament. "They stepped up in a season that is usually a winter sport and saw some success," Parsons said.

6. In August, after taking second overall at the Drive, Chip & Putt competition at the Eagle Crest Resort in Redmond, Sawyer Quinton, then 13, of Canyon City moved on to the sub-regional round of the competition in Hillsboro.

While Quinton took fifth in the state and a third-place medal in chipping, just the top two advanced to the regional qualifying event in Pebble Beach.

The event, sponsored by the Professional



Contributed photo  
**Grant Union senior Jordan Hall, left, poses with the trophy he received after being named male athlete of the meet at the 2A track championships in May 2021. Katie Hanson of Gervais was named the female athlete of the meet.**

Golfers Association, the United States Golfers Association, and the Masters Tournament, moves on to the national finals at the Augusta National Golf Club ahead of the 2022 Masters Tournament.

7. With a significantly smaller roster than most of their opponents in their league, Grant Union's football team made the postseason after going 3-3 in 2A Special District 5. The Prospectors bowed out in the first round, falling on the road against Lakeview. One of the Pros' season highlights was scoring a pair of touchdowns against a powerful Heppner squad that hadn't given up a single point in any of their previous league matchups.

8. The Prairie City football team just missed the playoffs this year after losing a 51-48 slugfest to Alesia. The brutal end to a strong season saw the Panthers go 6-1 in the High Desert League. The team also racked up the league's Coach of the Year honors for Nick Thompson and Offensive Player of the Year for standout running back Cole Teel.

9. The Grant Union volleyball team capped a strong 2021 campaign by bringing home some hardware. After finishing the regular season with a 19-10 overall record, the Lady Prospectors went 2-0 in the Blue Mountain Conference Tournament to move on to the state playoffs, where they collected a trophy for finishing fourth statewide in Division 2A.

10. Prairie City's volleyball team finished strong, going 2-1 in the High Desert League's tournament to qualify for postseason play. In their first-round matchup, the Panthers faced Central Christian of the Mountain Valley League on the road, falling 3-1.



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**From left, Grant Union sophomore Halle Parsons, sophomore Brilynn Combs, head coach Shanna Northway, senior Grace Taylor, senior Paige Gerry, sophomore Drewsey Williams, senior Carson Weaver, sophomore Jaydika Anderson, senior Lauryn Pettyjohn and freshman Addy Northway celebrate after their first-place finish at the Grant Union Invitational Tournament in August. The Lady Pros placed fourth in state to cap off the 2021 season.**



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**Justin Hodge, second from right, accepts his third-place medal at the state wrestling tournament in late June 2021.**