



# MASTERS OF THE MAT



Contributed Photo

Grant Union's Justin Hodge's hand is raised in victory at the OSAA 2A/1A wrestling state championships in Culver on Saturday, Feb. 26, 2022.

## Two Grant Union grapplers take first in state

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Two Grant Union grapplers brought home titles from the state wrestling tournament in Culver last week.

On Thursday, Feb. 24, freshman Mallory Lusco, at the Oregon School Activities Association Girls State Championships, took first in her 235 weight bracket, pinning all of her opponents.

Senior Justin Hodge, wrestling in his 152 weight bracket, beat Lakeview's Wyatt Patzke in a close 16-13 decision to take the top spot in his division on Saturday, Feb. 26. Meanwhile, Grant Union grappler Rylan Cox, a junior wrestling in the 285 weight class, brought home a second-place medal.

Out of 30 schools, Grant Union finished 10th overall, scoring 43 team points.

Prospector wrestling coach Andy Lusco said he thought all of Grant Union's grapplers put in the effort to reach the state tournament.



Contributed photo

On Thursday, Feb. 24, freshman Mallory Lusco, at the Oregon School Activities Association Girls State Championships took first in her 235 weight bracket, pinning all of her opponents.

"Our kids worked very hard to get to state," Lusco said. "On the girls side it was a learning experience in regards to being at a big tournament with a lot at stake."

Nonetheless, Lusco added that the girls looked they belonged on the big stage.

Next year, Lusco said, he hopes the team continues to qualify lots of girls and gets a few more wins. Lusco noted that the boys wrestle in an incredibly tough dis-

trict. That said, Lusco added that Cox and Hodge represented Grant Union well with a top 10 finish.

"Justin capped off an amazing career with his second championship," Lusco wrote in a Monday email. "He was a third-place finisher in the COVID year. I'm incredibly proud of him as a wrestler, but even more so as a person. He has made our team better for his whole career."

Cox, Lusco added, had "the

best tournament of his life" at state.

"Although he lost his finals match," Lusco said, "I believe he will come back stronger next season and have a legitimate shot at a championship of his own."

Lusco said his daughter Mallory's state title was "quite a surprise."

"As a freshman, we weren't entirely sure how she stacked up against the statewide competition," Lusco said. "She pinned all four of her opponents. We are excited about her future."

Mallory Lusco concurred with her coach.

In a Friday phone interview, Mallory said it took a moment to catch up with the reality of winning the title.

"It just felt like a regular match," she said. "But when my teammates were all there, congratulating me, that's kind of when it hit me."

Mallory was adamant about clarifying that it was not her efforts alone that got her to the state tourney.

"I'm here because of my team and the people who pushed me in practice," Mallory said.

Hodge concurred with Mallory on that point, which, he said, was why he and Cox made sure their teammates who did not make the state tournament were awarded tickets to attend the competition Saturday.

"You practice with them all year, and they want to see you be successful," Hodge said, "and you want them to be successful."

It is important to remember that champions are the "product of their partners," Lusco said.

"Every wrestler on this team is connected to the state champions by being a partner or a partner of a partner who makes everyone better," he said. "We all rise together."

Lusco pointed out that the team's assistant coaches and families were a tremendous support system all season long.

"I need to thank our coaches and their families," Lusco said. "It is a long and challenging season, and I'm grateful for their sacrifice."



Steven Mitchell/Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Grant Union's Riley Robertson (32), a senior, positions herself for a rebound during a game last month. Robertson was named to the Blue Mountain Conference's All League second team last week.

## Grant Union players earn All League spots

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The Oregon School Activities Association named two Grant Union basketball players to the Blue Mountain Conference's All League Team, while two others earned an honorable mention.

On the girls side, senior Riley Robertson was named to the second team, while Parker Neault, a senior, got the second team nod for the boys.

Senior Paige Gerry was an honorable mention for the girls, while sophomore Sheldon Lenz received honorable mention for the boys.

Coach RC Huerta's boys team finished the season 4-18 overall and 3-9 in the Blue Mountain Conference.

The Lady Prospectors went 8-14 overall and 5-7 in league play under coach Jason Miller.



Steven Mitchell

Blue Mountain Eagle, File

Grant Union's Parker Neault (5), a senior, shoots from downtown during the Prospectors' game against Stanfield last month. Neault was named to the Blue Mountain Conference's All League second team last week.

## Playoffs cap Prairie City hoops season

By STEVEN MITCHELL  
Blue Mountain Eagle

The Prairie City boys and girls basketball teams ended their state playoff runs last week.

Both squads qualified for postseason play by finishing third in the season-ending IA-8 High Desert League tournament held at Grant Union High School.

After downing Rogue Valley Adventist Academy 31-24 Wednesday, Feb. 23, in their first playoff game, the girls fell to Damascus Christian 37-46 Saturday, Feb. 26.

The Lady Panthers held their own against Damascus, the only team in the state to beat the top-ranked Crane Mustangs all season.

In the third quarter, Damascus outscored the Lady Panthers 13-1; up until then, Prairie City head coach Bo Workman said, the girls squad was in the game. At the close of the first half, the score was knotted up at 23 apiece.

"We played really well," Workman said. "We're one of the top 10 teams in the state. But things just did not go our way."

Workman added that in the fourth quarter, his squad outscored Damascus 13-10. He said the ball just did not fall for the Lady Panthers in the third.

Team captain Betty Ann Wilson, who led the team's offense with 20 points on five three-pointers, one two-point field goal and three free throws, said the squad was really feeling the ups and downs of winning the first-round game and then losing the second-round match.



Eric Watkins/Elite Oregon Girls

Prairie City's Betty Ann Wilson (20) drives toward the basket during the Lady Panthers' game against Damascus Christian on Saturday, Feb. 26, 2022.



Eric Watkins/Elite Oregon Girls

Kaitlynn Ashley, a Prairie City junior, pulls up to make a shot Saturday, Feb. 26, 2022, against Damascus Christian.

"We all felt the emotions, but to make it that far was just ... we were just proud of ourselves for that," Wilson said. "We know that we will be back in (the playoffs) next year."

Kaitlynn Ashley, a junior who scored 11 points on four two-point goals and three free throws, agreed with Wilson's

sentiment.

"It was a tough game," Ashley said. "We fought until the end."

Wilson pointed out that the Lady Panthers play in one of the toughest leagues in the state.

The girls squad finished the season 14-11 overall and went 7-5 in league play.

### Prairie City boys

After the boys team bested Jordan Valley 67-51 in the High Desert League tourney, the Panthers were beaten by Trinity Lutheran 63-55 on Tuesday, Feb. 22, in the first round of the playoffs.

Eli Wright, who scored 19 points on nine two-point field goals and a free throw, said the team did many good things in the game but ultimately turned the ball over too many times.

One of the team's two seniors, Marcus Judd, who

scored 10 points on five two-point field goals, concurred with Wright that it was not their best game.

Judd added that it was hard playing the final basketball game of his high school career.

"I didn't want it to be over," Judd said. "I love to play basketball. I always have."

For his part, senior John Titus, who had five points in the contest on a two-point field goal and a three-pointer, said he was excited to get in and play the final basketball game of his career.

"I wanted to go in there and do well," Titus said. "I feel like for it being the last game, it was a decent game, and we had a good season, so I'm good with it."

Overall, the Panthers finished the season with a 16-10 record and were 8-6 in league play.