



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

Members of the Prairie City track team take the blocks during practice on March 14, 2020.

Bigger and better

Larger turnout, new season bring optimism to Prairie City track

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

Following a COVID-restricted 2021 season that saw just six athletes turn out and a single state meet berth, Prairie City head coach Kiele Williams is optimistic the 2022 season will be a better one for the Panther track team.

The reason for that optimism is an increase in athletes — up to 16 now — and a more complete team than the program has had in years past.

“We have a great group of kids, and I’m optimistic. We have a lot of different skills this year instead of having just jumpers or throwers or runners. This group has more of a diverse skillset,” Williams said.

Along with a more complete team, the squad is also larger. Williams attributes the team adding new athletes to the recruiting efforts of assistant coach Jason Murray.

“He deserves all the credit. He has been a huge advocate and was just telling kids to come out and try it.”

Williams also believes that the ending of many COVID restrictions pertaining to sports helped bring more kids out this year.

The more diverse skillsets and larger numbers make being more competitive in some events and fielding relay teams a possibility this season, something that wasn’t always possible in years past.

“I have a lot of kids that want to do it all. We’ve got more pole vaulters than we ever have this year and some really good high jumpers and a handful of hurdlers,” Williams said.

For the first time in a few

seasons, Williams hopes both the boys and girls will field complete 4x100 relay teams.

“We’re hoping for a good 4x100 this year for both the boys and girls teams. We’ve been so small that we haven’t been able to fill a relay team in years. We haven’t had a 4x100 or any relay in at least the past three years,” she said.

Williams has a pair of seniors and three returnees on this year’s squad and is counting on them to push the younger athletes.

“I’m looking to both my veterans and seniors for leadership. We have two seniors in their first year, and I don’t want to do anything to take away from the fact that they’re seniors, but I’ll also be looking to the athletes that have been here for years to provide leadership as well,” said Williams.

Williams hopes to see her team come together and root for one another during meets and just simply compete.

“We just want them to have fun and do the best that they can. That is all you can hope for. You can push them as hard as you want, but they have to have the desire to do it.”

Now in her second season as head coach, Williams aims to properly prepare her kids to compete.

“As a coach, I just hope to give them all the building blocks. I want them to have fun and be competitive. It’s just a great group of kids, and that is all you can ask for,” said Williams.

When asked if there was anything she wanted people to know about her team, Williams again pointed to the growth of the track team and increased number of participants.

“I’m excited that we have so many kids coming out; even if this isn’t their sport, they are coming out and getting the experience,” she said.

“It’s just great to see the improvement of the track team because we haven’t had these types of numbers in years.”

Pros start season 1-2

By JUSTIN DAVIS
Blue Mountain Eagle

JOHN DAY — The Grant Union baseball team tallied a 1-2 record during the first half of their six-game homestand to open the season.

The Prospectors won convincingly in their first contest and fell just short in their last two outings.

The first game of the 2022 took season took place on Thursday, March 17, and saw the Pros flex their muscles as they defeated the Umatilla Vikings 15-1 in five innings.

Parker Neault pitched all five innings, recording 12 strikeouts while only surrendering two hits. Neault was also efficient at the plate, going 3-4 with a whopping five RBIs.

Riddick Hutchinson went 2-3 with four RBIs while Mason Morris finished 2-3 with an RBI and three runs scored.

“It was nice to start the season off with a win,” head coach RC Huerta said. “It kind of gave us some good mojo headed into the next couple games, I think.”

Huerta also highlighted his team’s ability to have a short memory and move on to the next play and communicate with one another. “Those are some of the positive things I saw.”

The Prospectors came up just short in their second game on Friday, March 18, falling to the 5A Crook County Cowboys 4-3.

Mason Morris threw 6 1/3 innings and Kobe Fell pitched 1/3 of an inning in relief. Fell was 1-3 at the plate with an RBI. Neault finished the game 1-4 with two RBIs, and Mason Morris finished 1-4 with a run scored.

Huerta praised his team’s grit and fight going up against a much larger school.

“Facing a 5A school, we’re a little smaller than them, so for us to come out and compete was a really positive sign to me. They didn’t give up — they have a lot of fight,” Huerta said.

“We were in that game. We had a tough call that could’ve gone either way. We had a runner on second and we had a hard-hit ball that just couldn’t find a hole. If it would’ve gotten through, maybe we score



Justin Davis/Blue Mountain Eagle

Prospector second baseman Luke Blood fields the ball during Grant Union’s game against South Umpqua on Saturday, March 19. The Pros fell to the Lancers 6-3.

there. We’ve got a resilient team,” Huerta said.

The third game of the six-game homestand took place on Saturday, March 19, against the South Umpqua Lancers and resulted in a 6-3 final in favor of the Lancers. The result was not without controversy, however, as the contest was called due to inclement weather following a three-run fifth inning by the Prospectors.

The Lancers built a 6-0 lead headed into the bottom of the fifth behind a great outing by their starting pitcher.

“Their starting pitcher was quality,” Huerta said. “He’s probably going to be one of the best pitchers we face all season.”

Huerta mentioned a couple of plays early in the first inning that set the tone early in the game: “There were a couple of big outs in the first inning. There were some potentially deep shots that were just missed, so our guys knew we were right there.”

In the bottom of the fifth inning, that changed. A switch on the mound by South Umpqua led to the Prospectors loading the bases and slowly cutting into the lead the Lancers had built over the last 4 1/2 innings.

The Prospectors would cut that six-run lead in half before the game was called due to weather. The game ending prematurely had the Prospectors thinking things could’ve gone differently had they finished the contest.

“That three-run fifth was a huge momentum swing, for sure. We just kind

of started rolling there,” Huerta said. “No disrespect to South Umpqua, but I think we would’ve had an excellent chance to win this game had we been allowed to see this through until the end.”

Kobe Fell pitched the entire game for the Prospectors. Parker Neault had another strong showing at the plate, finishing 2-3 with an RBI. Fell also had a good outing at bat, finishing 1-3 with an RBI.

When asked what his takeaways from the first three games were, Huerta mentioned a need to fix defensive lapses. “We just need to clean things up defensively. We’ve had a few more errors than we would like, and I feel like we’re better than that,” he said.

“You can live with two or three errors in a baseball game. After that, you have young men who are pitching their butts off and getting you fly balls and ground balls,” Huerta said. “We have to make those plays.”

Huerta also took time to thank everyone in the community who came out to support his team and get the field ready for each of the games.

“We had a heck of a turnout. The support the community gives to these sports programs is tremendous. So I want to say thank you to everybody that came out or helped with the games. I’m really excited about this year, and go Pros!”

The Prospectors will be in action again on Wednesday, March 23, at home against the Nyssa Bulldogs.

SPORTS SCHEDULE

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 23
1 p.m.: Grant Union softball vs. Scio
Noon: Grant Union baseball vs. Valley Catholic

FRIDAY, MARCH 25
Noon: Grant Union baseball vs. Nyssa

SATURDAY, MARCH 26
Noon: Grant Union baseball vs. Ontario
Home games in bold

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