

‘Reaching for the sky’

Bend High Unified basketball team wins state title, aims for nationals

By **BRYCE DOLE**
The Bulletin

BEND — When Jack Bailey stepped onto the court for the Unified sports state basketball title game at Oregon State University’s Gill Coliseum in Corvallis last month, the moment felt larger than life.

“It felt like game seven of the NBA finals,” he said.

But Bailey, a forward on the Bend High School team that combines students with and without intellectual disabilities, wasn’t nervous.

“I thought to myself: What would Rocky Balboa do?” said the 20-year-old Bailey, who has an intellectual disability. “He wouldn’t give up. I didn’t give up and I did my best.”

The title game March 12 came at the pinnacle of the team’s three-month season, but there was more than a championship at stake, more than a chance to represent Oregon at the 2022 Special Olympics USA Games at Disney World. Players on Unified teams need these games to develop social skills. Sports can sweep away misconceptions and promote understanding. For nearly two years, though, the pandemic put much of that on hold.

The Corvallis game was the first time the team had been back at the state tournament since winning the title in 2019.

The team was poised to defend its title in March 2020, but the coronavirus pandemic locked down the world on the Friday before the tournament weekend. The team remained separated throughout the pandemic lockdown, a period that “felt like 20 years,” Bailey said.

And the time away from the team placed a strain on athletes and their families.

“It was extremely difficult,” Coach Robert Tadjiki, who has helped the program grow exponentially over the years, said of the pandemic’s impact on his athletes. “Students with disabilities need to be engaging with other people and connecting with other people ... The fact that we can finally be together is just wonderful.”

Tadjiki knew his team was ready to take its second state title since it started about 14 years ago. The energy in the Corvallis locker room was electric. His 40-person team was tight-knit and supportive of one another.

They bonded over long practices, drills, three-legged and wheelbarrow races, and other “goofy” competitions, including who could tie their shoes the fastest and run across the gym. One competition involved athletes tossing their shoes from balconies, aiming for mid-court, with the closest to a target winning a Dutch Bros gift card, Tadjiki said.

In Corvallis, from her seat around midcourt, Kerri Jackson cheered on her 19-year-old son Keifer, a forward on the team who is on the autism spectrum.



Ryan Brennecke/The Bulletin

Jack Bailey works on his shooting while practicing with fellow Unified basketball team members at Bend High School.

Keifer joined the team roughly three years ago, and Jackson immediately noticed her son’s confidence growing.

Then the pandemic arrived. With another son on the Unified team at Mountain View High School, Jackson knew Keifer wasn’t the only one to struggle at home.

“It was really hard on them,” she said. The announcer gave the title game a big time feel, calling out athletes as they scored, dragging out their names. Jackson felt proud of her son, watching him come into his own during the game.

“It was amazing watching him go from timid to being more confident with people cheering him on,” she said.

Cameron Walker, an 18-year-old on the team, bobbed and weaved, draining shots that made him feel like his basketball idol: Michael Jordan, from the Chicago Bulls. Walker said being on the team “helps grow my spirits, reaching for the sky.” Like Jack Bailey and Keifer Jackson, Walker said he considers Tadjiki to be a mentor.

“He’s nice, he’s gentle, his favorite cake is chocolate,” Walker said. “I love him.”

The scoreboard clock hit zero, showing a 40-20 win for the Bend Lava Bears over Forest Grove. The team rushed the court, jumped up and down, cheered. Walker turned to Tadjiki and asked, “Did we win?” Tadjiki laughed.

“It was just raw and real,” Tadjiki said of the victory, adding: “Everybody’s looking for some kind of purpose in life, and this was a big one for me, that I get to enjoy these moments.”

The team’s trophy sits in a case in a Bend High hallway. But there’s been little down time for the Lava Bears as they prepare for the national competition coming up in Orlando.

They’re practicing twice a week for about an hour-and-a-half at a time for something just as meaningful as an NBA final.



INSP/Submitted Photo

Buck Faust, 25, of Prineville, is one of 14 competitors on the reality TV series ‘Ultimate Cowboy Showdown.’

Prineville cowboy in TV competition

By **JOE SIESS**
The Bulletin

PRINEVILLE — A Prineville cowboy will put his skills to the test before a national audience, competing with other cowboys and cowgirls from around the country on a cable television series set to debut a new season next month.

Buck Faust, 25, was originally from Waco, Texas, but moved to Central Oregon with his wife in 2020. The couple got married last May and plans to raise a family in the area.

Faust is a competitor in the “Ultimate Cowboy Showdown,” a television show produced by General Entertainment network INSP. The show, hosted by country music icon Trace Adkins, is in its third season, which will start April 21.

Faust approached the show with 100% of his authentic self, he said.

“Pretty much anybody who knows me, knows that me going on that show was a good thing for me. But it is dang

sure going to be entertaining for the general public,” Faust said. “Because I don’t know if I maybe stayed in the hills too long, but I have a pretty big personality. I like to be very personable. I like to laugh, joke around, have a lot of fun.”

Faust, along with 13 other contestants from around the country, gathered at Powderhorn Ranch in the rugged hills of Wyoming to compete in a number of cowboy related challenges to test their skills. The winner, chosen by judges, will be awarded a herd of cattle worth \$50,000 and a chance to start a ranch, along with a belt buckle and bragging rights.

Faust has worked with horses and cattle all of his life. After graduating high school, he decided to travel the country as a cowboy. He spent time in Montana, Idaho, California, Nebraska and Oklahoma before meeting his wife, moving to Central Oregon, and planting his roots.

SHOOTING THE BREEZE

If it’s spring, it must be time for turkey hunting

Looks like spring has finally made an appearance. That means turkey season is right around the corner.

I remember being a college student when we had the first turkey season around here. I didn’t know squat about hunting them, but gave it a try. I snuck up on a squeaky old pine tree, but never laid eyes on a turkey.

Things have really changed. The turkey population has exploded in our neck of the woods, and the tag sales show it. You can only buy one tag at a time, but you can buy up to three tags throughout the spring season. That can mean

a lot of hunting time.

If you buy individual tags they cost \$26.50 each, \$10.50 for youth. A turkey tag is included in the sports pack.

Around here the season starts April 15. Youth get to go out April 9-10 to get a head start.

If you have never given turkey hunting a try, don’t think it is going to be a cakewalk just because you see them all over the place. It’s harder than it looks. First of all, only shotguns or archery equipment may be used to hunt turkeys, so you have to get close.

Turkeys have great eyesight. I have been busted



Contributed Photo

Max and Tuck double down on turkeys.

many, many times trying to sneak up on them. Also, there are usually quite a few together, so there are just that many more eyes. You can only shoot males (toms), who

like to hide behind the ladies (hens).

The best way I have found to be successful is to do a little scouting to find where they roost at night. Toms will

“shock” gobble to a crow or gobbler call. I guess it’s just a reflex. Anyway, in the evening travel likely areas and call, listening for a response. Then sneak in under darkness the next morning and set up close by in the brush. A decoy isn’t required, but can up your chances of success.

If that doesn’t work, travel likely areas early in the morning, occasionally gobbling to locate birds. Hen calls work best to bring them in. Calling isn’t that hard to pick up, and there are hundreds of different kinds to try from. Watch a couple of how-to videos and you will get the hang of it.

Turkeys are surprisingly hard to kill. A body shot with a shotgun probably won’t do

the trick. The feathers are very effective at blocking the pellets. I like to aim for where the neck joins the head with 3 inch No. 4s.

There are specific turkey chokes for shotguns to help tighten the pattern for a longer reach, but shots much past 30 yards are pushing it for most setups. I have never tried turkeys with stick and string, so you archers will have to talk to somebody else.

Getting beat by a stupid bird can be demoralizing, but when it all comes together, it is a real kick in the pants.

How do you like to hunt turkeys? Let us know at shootingthebreezemb@gmail.com.

Rod Carpenter is a husband, father and huntin’ fool.

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