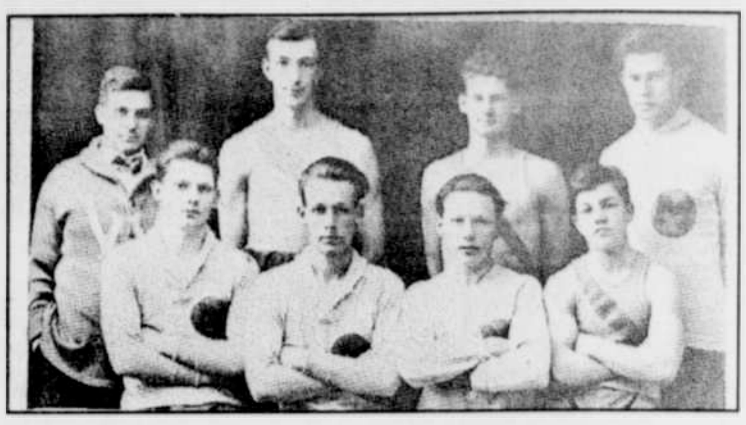
Heppner overcomes tragedy

By Mark Deuel

Editor's Note: The Heppner Gazette-Times received this article in an email from the author, Mark Deuel. Deuel came across information about the 1921 Heppner High School basketball team while doing research on small school basketball. This story and other information can be viewed on his website at http://oregonhoopshistory.blogspot.com/2009/01/heppner-overcomes-tragedy.html.



Sports are often used as a diversion. Something else to think about for a few hours until reality hits again. It can be therapeutic. It can be healing.

For towns bound together by tragedy, the gymnasium on Friday night is a chance to get together with an extended family that extends from Main Street to the fields and farms outside of town.

For Heppner, Oregon, no doubt the healing process from a devastating June day in 1903 was helped along by the sports teams of the Heppner High School.

At the turn of the century, Heppner, Oregon was a booming shipping center, with a "spider web of roads" leading in and out of the city for goods coming inland from the Columbia River. Formed at the confluence of three creeks, the land in and around Heppner was perfect grazing land. By 1900, the town had over 1,000 citizens, two banks, nine saloons and two major hotels.

The growing city became the victim of one of the worst natural disasters in Oregon state history when a devastating "wall of water" shattered the city and the way of life. On June 14, 1903 after an afternoon of rain and storms, an enormous and deadly flood punched the town and in an instant knocked it to its knees.

The flood passed in two hours but left behind a trail of destruction. Nearly two-thirds of the homes were gone, the business district was wrecked. Main Street was littered with trash and homes that had floated from their lots and came to rest. Telegraph and telephone lines were decimated and the railroad line from Lexington to Heppner was destroyed. The only way in or out was badly damaged and nearly un-navigable wagon roads.

Help from other communities was quick to arrive but Heppner lost many residents who moved soon after the flood. The 1910 census counted 880 people, a substantial drop from the 1900 census counting nearly 1,400. By 1990, the town was back to its pre-flood count of 1,412.

The healing must have been slow. Recovering possessions and in the worst case, dead family members is an unthinkable and tragic task.

The children and babies, who survived that horrible event, became key figures on a basketball team that helped their parents recover from that day.

Heppner High School, with a student population of 87 students, had a few years of success before reaching the state tournament in 1921. The team returned five lettermen, including center Jared Aiken, who was on the championship team of 1918-19. [Author's Note: No information was given on this championship won by Heppner. Often, papers would declare their town the champions even though no formal league or championship tournament was created. Heppner probably won the majority of its games that year and probably beat a mix of neighboring towns that had teams, club teams and alumni teams.]

Heppner opened the season with 24-16 win at home over Lexington on January 15. They followed the opener with a close win at home over Pilot Rock 17-15. After the game, the girls of Heppner "entertained at the school house in honor of the visiting team."

I found many stories like this, where after the game, both teams would gather at the school and have parties and gatherings and rehash the game over punch, pie and cookies. It's an incredible show of sportsmanship and pride. I

HEPPNER BALL TEAM MADE GOOD SHOWING AT SALEM

Heppner's basket ball team returned from Salem Sunday evening, where they represented this section of eastern Oregon at the state contest on last Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

While the boys failed to bring home the state championship, they gave a good account of themselves at the big meet and their captain, Jared Aiken, brought home the highest individual tally scored in the state.

The boys are all well pleased with their trip and with the treatment they received at Salem.

The greatest handicap they went up against was in the size of the floor on which they played. Accustomed, as they were, to their own small floor where they were able to play in close formation, they felt rather lost on the big floor at Salem and failed in their best work on that account.

"If we could only have that Marshfield bunch on our own floor, for a game, we'd show 'em," is the way the boys figure it out.

have not experienced this in my many years of sport, as a player or as a coach. I think we would do well to get back to this but I fear that we are moving in the opposite direction instead.

Heppner won their third straight game to open the season over "the crack basketball team from Wheeler County High School at Fossil."

On Friday, February 4, Heppner met Lexington for the second time that season. Lexington took the game 20-12 and it showed that the "Lexington boys have been doing some practicing and that our boys need a little more."

The article appeared on page 8 of the Herald, and was untitled. Clearly, Heppner's press was not fully into Heppner's chances just yet.

Next came a road trip to Condon on February 10 and Fossil on February 12. Condon's slick floor could not deter Heppner, who bolted to a 17-2 halftime lead. Condon couldn't make up much ground in the second half, outscoring Heppner 15-11 for a final scored of 28-17.

Fossil gave Heppner all it could handle two nights later. The Fossilites jumped to a 10-6 halftime lead. The second half proved to be a nip-and-tuck affair, as Heppner battled back to even the score at 19 with under a minute to play. Heppner scored a field goal and a free throw to win the game 22-19.

On February 18,

HEPPNER HI LEADS IN BASKET BALL, DEBATING

[illegible]

BASKET BALL TEAM GOES TO SALEM TOMORROW

LOCAL QUINTET SCORES FOR STATE TOURNAMENT

Heppner Students Will Have Chance To Win the State Trophy

Again the brawn and brain of Heppner Hi has scored.

Not content with winning a place in the state debating contest at Eugene, the members of the high school basket ball team have made a place for themselves in the state athletic tournament to be held at Salem.

[illegible]

Condon visited Heppner for their return game. Condon led early 6-5, making good use of the foul line. Condon hit four foul shots and a field goal for the slim lead. Halftime woke Heppner up, as "Chidsey and Ferguson guarded the Condon boys so effectively that they could not score a field basket." The offense was powered by center Aiken, Elmer Patterson and Paul McDuffee who ran Heppner's second half score up to 29. The 24- 2 second half explosion more than cemented Heppner's status as an elite team in the league.

Heppner continued their strong play a few days later with a dominating performance in Hermiston. Not many details were available on the game other than the fact that Hermiston were good sports in the 34-12 loss and they said that "Heppner was the cleanest team that they had played this year." Nevertheless, the clean playing Heppner team was a team to be reckoned with in the district.

The win over Hermiston was Heppner's seventh victory of the season and puts "them in line for the state tournament at Salem."

Hermiston returned to Heppner for the second meeting of the two schools on March 5 and again Heppner won, this time 24-10 to run their record to 8-1 on the season.

Once again, a district without a tournament had some conflict over who would be their representative at the state tournament. Just like Rainier the year before, there was debate over who would represent the district that consisted of teams from Hood River to Pendleton according to the Herald. Interestingly to me, no mention of Hood River or Pendleton was mentioned as opponents of Heppner during this season.

No matter, Heppner was in line for the trip to Salem. Not knowing if Pendleton and Hood River High Schools were actually in the district, I believe that the debate might have been over Heppner and Lexington since the two schools split the two games during the season.

The team waited several days for word from the committee in Salem and on March 8 they finally got the notice that they were selected to attend the 1921 state tournament. For Heppner, it was a big honor.

"All honor to Heppner Hi!" proclaimed the Heppner Herald. The paper credited the team with putting the town on the map and specifically mentioned the work of Professor John Heard, who coached the team to an incredible season.

The decision had been made and Heppner had been declared the districts' entrant to Salem. But one problem remained: finances. According to the Heppner yearbook, "our school finances were rather low and it looked as though the team would not get to go, but the business men of Heppner offered to finance the trip and the boys were able to go after all."

Plans were quickly made and the Heppner team left for Salem on Wednesday March 9. Once in Salem, the teams drew lots to decide their opponents in the tournament. When Coach Heard's turn came, he drew Southern Oregon's Marshfield, champions of Coos County for the third straight year and winners of eight games in a row.

Right away, a familiar problem greeted the small school teams. Accustomed to playing on their smaller floors, the spacious floor at the Salem Armory was foreign to the boys from Heppner. Ultimately, even if Heppner had hosted Marshfield on their own floor, it would have been a tough game to win. Led by second team all-state guard Thomas McGinnis, Marshfield handled Heppner easily 44-19.

The Heppner Herald claimed "if we could only have that Marshfield bunch on our own floor for a game, we'd show 'em."

While they didn't capture the championship, Heppner made a decent showing at Salem and more importantly, had a great time in doing it. According to the paper, center Jared Aiken "brought home the highest individual tally scored in the state."

Interestingly enough for Heppner High School, the basketball team wasn't the only team to have great success in 1921. Indeed, the debate team was also a noteworthy group and as debating was a significant activity in those days, the town was equally as proud of their debaters as they were the hoopsters.

1921 was a banner year for Heppner activities. The basketball team gave the town a thrilling ride during the basketball season undoubtedly helping to heal wounds left open by that horrendous day in 1903 when the town was nearly washed away.

Child Care Resource and Referral announces upcoming classes

Child Care Resource and Referral will be holding the following classes:

-Family Child Care Overview on February 2 from 6-9 p.m. in Pendleton and March 2 from 6-9 p.m. in Hermiston. This free class is required by the Child Care Division for anyone wishing to become a Registered Family Child Care Provider, and for individuals that want to learn more about Oregon's laws governing child care.

-DHS Family, Friends and Neighbors Orientation will be held on February 5 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Hermiston and March 5 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Pendleton. This is a free class.

-Recognizing and Reporting Child Abuse and Neglect will be held on February 12 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Hermiston. The cost of this class is $5 and will be taught in Spanish. This class is required by the Child Care Division for anyone wishing to become a Registered Family Child Care Provider and for DHS listed Providers who want to qualify for the enhanced rates. It will cover Oregon's mandatory laws and how to recognize child abuse and neglect.

-Children with Disabilities will be held February 19 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Pendleton. The cost for this class is $5. This training will focus on young children with disabilities. The trainer will be Niki Brown from the ESD.

-Building Blocks for Social Emotional Development 4 Week Series will be held February 25, March 4, 11, and 18 in Hermiston. There is a $5 fee for this class.

-ECO Healthy, ECO Friendy will be held March 9 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Pendleton. The fee for this class is $5.

-Learning Through Observation will be held March 23 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Hermiston. The fee for this class is $5.

-Foster Resiliency in Children will be held March 31 from 6:30-8:30 p.m. in Hermiston. The fee for this class is $5. This session will focus on ways child care provider and parents can support resiliency in children.

For more information or to pre-register for classes, call Child Care Resource & Referral at 1-800-559-5878 or 541-564-6878.

It's St. Patrick planning time again

The first St. Patrick's Planning Committee Meeting will be held on Tuesday, February 3, at 6 p.m. at City Hall. Pizza and beverages will be provided.

This meeting will be held to get started on the planning and be brought up to date and plugged in on the 2009 Wee Bit O' Ireland event on March 13-15. The events and projects that have been planned so far will be discussed.

Call the Heppner Chamber at 676-5536 to RSVP or send an email to heppnerchamber@centurytel.net.

DA's Report

Morrow County District Attorney Elizabeth Ballard has released the following report:

-Christopher Alan Snipes, 31, was convicted of attempt to commit a class B felony (robbery-2), and was sentenced to three years probation, 180 sanction units with 90 jail units, complete 80 hours of community service, and other numerous conditions. He was also convicted of theft in the second degree, a class A misdemeanor, and was sentenced to the custody of the local supervised authority for one year. Total fines, fees, and assessments were $1,893.

-Samuel Amador Hernandez, 43, was convicted of manufacturing/delivery of a controlled substance in schedule II, a class B felony, and was sentenced to the custody of the Oregon Department of Corrections for six months, two years post-prison supervision, other numerous conditions, and pay $598 in fines, fees and assessments.

IHS sophomores to hold lasagna feed

The Ione High School sophomores will sponsor a lasagna feed on Saturday, January 31, at the Ione High School cafeteria. The feed coincides with a day of basketball against opponent, Condon/Wheeler.

Dinner will be served starting at 3 p.m. and will last as long as supplies last. Dinner includes homemade lasagna, tossed green salad, garlic bread and punch. The price of the dinner is $6 per person. A child's portion is available for $4.

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