

Johnston hangs up the spikes after 36 years of coaching

By David Sykes

When you sit down and talk to Rick Johnston about baseball, a subject he knows quite a bit about, the conversation always ends up back at the same place. It's all about the kids. And Johnston has coached quite a few over his 36-year career. Make no mistake, Johnston loves to win, and has a long record of post-season play while coaching the Mustang baseball team, but what he remembers and relishes the most is meeting and working with the kids, parents and other coaches.

Johnston became the head coach in 1993. He took two years off in 1997 and 1998 before returning to the baseball program as the JV coach in 1999. In 2000 he once again took on the role of head coach.

the Mustangs in 1993, he had only one losing season, Rick Paullus, have given him over the years.

and his team played for the state championship in 2004.

But once again when Johnston talks about his accomplishments he doesn't dwell on wins and losses, but about the kids.

His first year as head coach of the Mustangs, his team lost the first six games.

"The kids were feeling pretty down, but I wouldn't let them quit," he recalls. The team went on to play in the state semi-finals that year. "I watched kids get confidence in themselves,



Coach Rick Johnston stepped down as Mustang head coach. -Contributed Photo

In addition to baseball Johnston also coached Colt Basketball for 12 years, ran the hoop shoot at the St. Patrick's celebration for several years, helped with construction of the George Waterlund by installing the cyclone fence, helped with building the

high school baseball field and has worked on the "chain gang" at Mustang football games for over 20 years.

Johnston, who is employed by the Port of



Coach Johnston (middle) with the team that upset Regis in the 2002 playoffs. -Contributed Photo

"When you have the opportunity to work with a kid and make a difference in his life, that's what it's all about," Johnston says, who this year is stepping down from the head coaching job for the Heppner Mustangs. "Don't get me wrong, I have had some rough spots, but overall it has been a great experience for me," he says.

Johnston, who grew up in Heppner, has always had a love of baseball and recalls how when he was 11 years old he and his buddy Roger Leonnig would eat baloney sandwiches together for lunch, and then head to the ball field several hours before Little League practice to get in some early pitching and hitting. Heppner had three teams then, the Giants, Braves and Dodgers. Ione's team was the Indians. Johnston was a Giant. Later in High School, at the urging of Ted Toll, he started his career coaching the Giants. He coached little league for 11 years.

Over the years he has also coached jr. high, jr. varsity, and Babe Ruth baseball. He made the play-off almost every year. Since he became head coach of

and that was a great feeling to see that and know I had something to do with bringing that out," he says.

Johnston started coaching Babe Ruth baseball in 1987 and has enjoyed the family aspect of the games. "We would base our family vacations around the games and we had a lot of fun, meeting other parents, coaches and players," he says. He encourages parents to stay interested in the game with their children and recalls how his own father went to only one of his baseball games when he was playing. "That meant so much to me to see him there," he said.

He credits baseball and his coach with keeping him in line when he was young. "Rex English took an interest in me and kept me on the straight and narrow," Johnston says. "He helped me out."

Some of the other people who helped and encouraged him in his coaching and playing career were: Riley Munkers, Leon Ball, Bert Corbin, Erin Snow, Kenny Sawyer, Ted Toll, Bob Byrd and Don Cole. He also appreciates the work his assistant coaches, John McCabe, Troy Morgan and

Morrow, is retiring from coaching to spend more time taking care of his wife Susan, who has Multiple Sclerosis. "My wife has learned to love baseball but it is time for me to take care of her. It's time for me to take care of my own," Johnston says.

"This is the best place to raise kids, Johnston says about Heppner. "I have had some run-ins with parents over the years, but this is the best place to live and coach. For the most part it has been a great experience," Johnston says. He says the town has a winning attitude that starts during football season and carries on through the whole year. "We have always done it (put together winning teams) with local kids," Johnston said. "They have been local grown not transplanted like some schools. And the Ione kids (Ione does not have a baseball team but plays with Heppner) have been great. We couldn't have done it without them," he says.

"I have always tried to set an example in my personal life for the kids," Johnston. "I wanted them to look up to me. I wanted to set a good example."

Kindle, Coe named as new baseball coaches



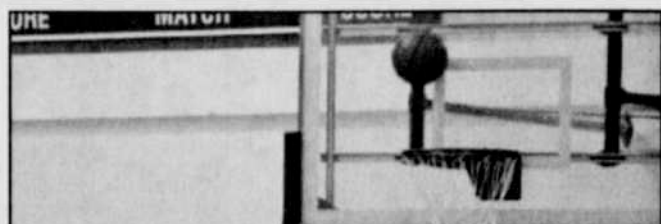
Jim Kindle (left) was recently named the new varsity baseball coach and Scott Coe (right) was named the new JV baseball coach for Heppner.

Lady Cards defeat Echo and Condon/Wheeler

The Ione Lady Cardinals tallied two "must wins" last weekend, defeating Echo at home on Friday night and pulling out a close one against Condon/Wheeler in Fossil on Saturday. The wins secured a spot in the district tournament for the Lady Cards with two tough games remaining in the regular season. They will host red-hot Helix on Friday night and travel to Dufur next Saturday.

The Ione girls were intense when they took the floor against Echo on Friday, February 5, most likely remembering a humiliating loss at the hands of the Cougars a couple weeks back in Echo. With seven minutes gone in the first quarter, Ione had established a 14-2 lead. Echo got a couple of scores at the tail end of the quarter to make the score 14-7 after one. The Lady Cards built their lead to 13 points in the second quarter before Echo responded to pull within eight at the half 23-15. The third quarter was a dandy for Ione as six players put points on the board and they outscored the opponent 17-8 to lead 40-23 entering the final quarter of play. Echo was able to close the gap slightly in the waning moments of the game but it was not nearly enough as the Lady Cards took the 46-35 win.

Shadow Kendrick led the team in scoring with 14 points. Beth Morter added nine and Tyree Svetich had eight.



Brianna Peterson puts one up against Echo on Friday, February 5. -Photo by Theresa Crawford



Brianna Peterson puts one up against Echo on Friday, February 5. -Photo by Theresa Crawford

Playing in Fossil on Saturday, February 6, neither the Knights nor the Cardinals got much going in the first quarter. It took almost five minutes of play before anyone got a point on the board and when Beth Morter hit a three with 24 seconds left in the quarter, the Cards led 7-2. The Knights got right back in the game though, tying the score at 14 with 1:45 to go in the half. Shadow Kendrick had seven points in the second quarter, including the last three to put the Lady Cards up 17-14. Condon/Wheeler ran off

the first six points of the third quarter to go up 20-17 and they outscored the Cardinals 8-4 in the quarter. But in the fourth, the Ione ladies shifted gears and put up 18 points to nine for the opponent. Beth Morter had eight points in the quarter and Tyree Svetich and Brianna Peterson hit critical buckets for the team as they went from one point up to the final winning margin of 39-31.

Beth Morter and Shadow Kendrick shared scoring honors for the game with 14 points each.

Heppner to hold 28th annual St. Patrick's Celebration

Heppner's Wee Bit O' Ireland St. Patrick's Celebration is just around the corner and it's time to get out the green and wear it proudly. The 28th annual Wee Bit O' Ireland Celebration will be held March 11-14.

There are many activities planned for this year's event including: the variety program "Ireland in Story, Song and Laughter", written by Father Condon, with music by Joe Lindsay; Heppner Chamber's/ UROCK 3rd annual Irish Boxing Smoker at Heppner High School; the Cruz In" and "Great Green Parade"; the 5K Run/Walk in memory of Donna Schonbachler to benefit Willow Creek Terrace; the Iron Man Bike Ride; the Leprechaun Run;

KUMA Coffee Hour; Ceili; shopping at the Vendor's Square; the arts and crafts display at Les Schwab organized by Morrow County Creative Arts & Crafts; the "Wee Bit O' Western Fine Art Photography" by Denise Smith and Celia Moyer at City Park; the Alumni Softball Game; the dedication of "Turner Day Park" at the view point at Willow Creek Reservoir by the Willow Creek Park District; the Friends of the Library book sale; Stuart Dick's book signing and presentation on Morrow County and Mattieson School House; Morrow County Heritage and Agricultural Museums; the "St. Patrick's O'Flock & Fiber Show" to be held at the Morrow County Fair-

grounds; "Ewe-Do-Bingo"; "O'Ducky Race"; "O' Kiddie Tricycle Races"; "Kiss Heppner's Blarney Stone"; "Throw the Welly"; the live mannequin show by the HHS Drama Club; the Children's Carnival coordinated by The Stable of Youth; food vendors; Sheep Dog Trials on Saturday and Sunday; and Road Bowling on Sunday.

Entertainment on Saturday evening will include Tiller's Folly", the "Old Time Fiddlers" and "Brenda Sue" s. The entertainment is free to all and is sponsored by the Morrow County Unified Recreation District.

For more information call the chamber office at 541-676-5536.

Drama Club planning community trip to Disneyland

Heppner Drama Club is currently planning a group trip, open to all community members, to Disneyland August 11-18.

The trip would include a six-day Park Hopper Ticket for Disneyland and California Adventure, seven-night stay at Anaheim Hotel, all meals, ground transportation, dinner theatre performance in Los Angeles, and roundtrip airfare. The cost of the trip is \$1,150 per person. Other options are six nights for \$1,065 and five nights for \$975.

The group maximum is 60 travelers. Anyone planning to sign up is asked to respond by March 1. For more information or to sign up call 541-676-8022 (day) or 541-676-8161 (night).

Windows 7 open houses to be held

Pat Struthers will give presentations on Windows 7 on Thursday, February 25, during the chamber lunch meeting and again at 7 p.m. at Heppner City Hall for the public.

There will be drawings for free prizes during these open houses.

Morrow County Public Works

You are all aware of the new law Effective January 1, 2010 computers, monitors and TVs CANNOT be disposed of in the garbage or at disposal sites such as landfills, transfer stations and incinerators. Anyone who knowingly disposes of these items can be fined.

Morrow County Public Works is pleased to announce that prior to the ban the transfer stations had been implementing this procedure. Residence are allowed to dump **FREE** of charge televisions, computers and monitors. Containers for E Waste are located at the North 69900 Frontage Ln. Boardman and the South 57185 Hwy 74, Lexington Transfer Stations. Hours of operation 9:00 - 3:00 Saturday and Sundays.

Questions and concerns may be addressed by calling 541-989-9500.

BOMBING RANGE ROAD TEMPORARY CLOSURE

Morrow County Public Works Department would like to announce Due to reconstruction on the south end of the Bombing Range / Hwy 207 Intersection project. It is necessary to close the South end section of Bombing Range road for a period beginning on **January 4, 2010** and continuing through **February 28, 2010** weather permitting. The primary north detour route will be Grieb Ln. The South detour route will be Juniper Canyon to Baseline Rd. All traffic of any kind with the exception of those local residents will be restricted and the closure will be strictly enforced during this period. Local residents will be allowed access subject to following traffic control measures necessary at the time.

This project is a Statewide Transportation Improvement Program (STIP)