

Mustangs crowned district champs

Lady Stangs also finish fourth in Pendleton



ZaBrena Masterson shoots over Tiger defender. —Photo by Susan Hisler

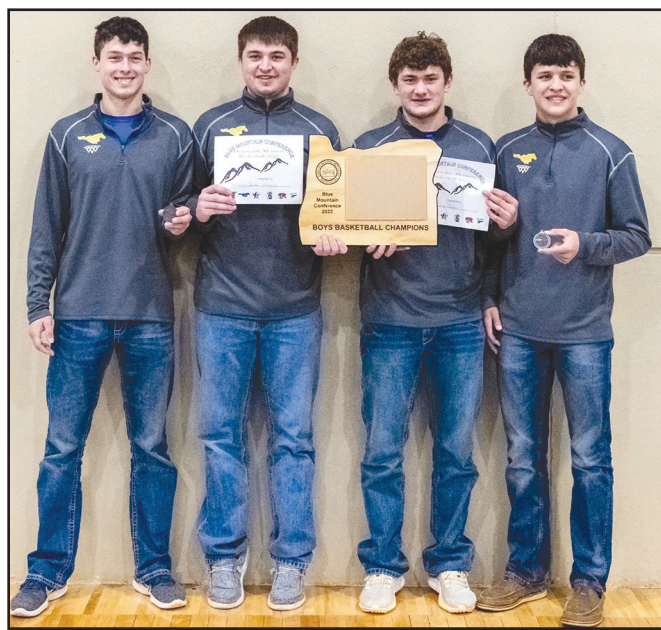
By Blake Carter

The Mustang boys were a bit of an unknown heading into the season. Last season Heppner finished second in league after a condensed COVID basketball season last year. Heppner also departed four seniors, which included two starters, and were a first round exit in the state tournament last season. Out of the gates, Heppner looked strong, a strong infusion of senior leadership with raw young talent created a perfect recipe for the team. The state began to pay close attention to these Mustangs after defeating two solid teams from the east side of the state at the 2A preview, and from that point on the Mustangs rolled. Heppner lost three games in the year, one league contest, and two games to 3A schools. An 11-1 league record solidified Heppner a spot in the 2A state play in games. However, this team was still hungry, Saturday marked a

chance to bring the district title back to Heppner for the first time since the 2018-19 season. The current seniors were just freshmen on that team and hadn't truly tasted that victory since.

Saturday, Heppner took the court with the whole state paying close attention to the outcome. Heppner was focused on themselves though and knew the other team very well. Stanfield remained one of just three teams to defeat the Mustangs, and the only 2A team to do so. In an incredibly passionate and fast paced game, the Mustangs routed the Tigers 72-37 to reclaim the Blue Mountain Conference title for the first time since 2019.

The contest started off neck and neck, as a last second bucket from the Tigers in the first quarter tied the ballgame at 12. The second quarter wasn't so close, the lead quickly grew to 15 as the Mustangs grabbed control of the game



Kason Cimmiyotti, Tucker Ashbeck, Brock Hisler and Joe Sherman with their all-league honors. —Photo by Tylynn Cimmiyotti



Joe Sherman pushes the ball down the floor. —Photo by Susan Hisler



Back row: David Cribbs, Landon Mitchell, Brock Hisler, Derrick Smith, Tucker Ashbeck, Kason Cimmiyotti, Blake Carter, Trevor Nichols, Caden George and Coach Jeremy Rosenbalm. Front row: Coach Adam Doherty, Cameron Proudfoot, Brian Lindsay, Joe Sherman and Cody Fletcher. —Photo by Tylynn Cimmiyotti

at 30-15. Heppner took a 16 point lead into halftime as they led 34-18. Stanfield didn't let the lead grow in the third quarter, the Tigers only cut the lead by two points, but looked to carry momentum into the fourth quarter. Stanfield continued to hang around until about six minutes remaining in the contest. At this point, the Mustangs held a 43-33 lead, Heppner then put Stanfield into the ground as they ran the Tigers right out of the gym. A 29-4 run closed out the game, and helped the Mustangs claim the district title. Heppner scored 31 points in the fourth quarter alone as they completed the 72-37 beat down of the Tigers.

The Mustangs landed four players on all conference teams. Brock Hisler and Tucker Ashbeck earned honorable mentions as Kason Cimmiyotti and Joe Sherman earned first team all-conference.

2021-22 was a big question mark for the Lady Mustangs. Heppner departed six seniors last year, and only a couple of players had experience on a varsity

team. However, this young team wouldn't be fazed by the lack of experience and went toe to toe with many of the teams this year. Heppner went 3-3 in the final six games to grab a final league spot and wanted to grab third place in the league before they sent their two seniors off.

Heppner was able to buy themselves another game after grabbing a 12 point win over the Grant Union Prospectors, 46-34. The contest remained close for the first two quarters of play, as Heppner only took a small lead into the half. The Mustangs broke the game open in the third quarter as they used a hot start and maintained the lead until the end of the game.

After Enterprise upset Stanfield the previous night, Heppner was tasked with a tough third place game. Unfortunately, the Mustangs saw their season end in defeat as the Tigers took them down 53-33. Heppner kept the game close for the first quarter, until Stanfield went on a little run to extend the lead out to 18-9. Stanfield would extend the lead in the



Zandra Masterson, ZaBrena Masterson and Hallee Hisler with their all-league honors. —Photo by Tylynn Cimmiyotti

second quarter. In the third quarter Stanfield grew the lead to 20, this lead stuck for the rest of the half and ended the Mustangs season. The girls landed three players on all league teams, freshman Hallee Hisler and sophomore Zandra Masterson earned honorable mentions. Senior ZaBrena Masterson earned a first team all-league honor as well.

The Mustang boys' varsity team earned themselves a home playoff game with their district championship win. Heppner will face a familiar foe in the first

round, the second place finisher out of the 2A-4 Sunset Conference, Bandon Tigers will travel to eastern Oregon once again. Early in the season Heppner and Bandon faced off at the 2A preview in Pendleton. In a closely contested game, Heppner pulled out the 46-41 victory. However, it's playoff time and everything is thrown out the window. The two teams will battle on Friday, February 25 at 6 p.m. at Heppner High School. The winner will advance to the state tournament in Pendleton next weekend.

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