

Mustangs beat Knights 44-6 in first BMC game of the year

The Heppner Mustang football team won their first Blue Mountain Conference (BMC) game of the season by defeating the Irrigon Knights by the score of 44-6. The Mustangs are 4-0 on the season and now 1-0 in BMC play. They are currently the 3rd ranked team in the OSAA 2A State Football Rankings.

Heppner kicked off to start the game and the Mustang defense stopped Irrigon at the 42-yard line. On the very first play for the Heppner offense, quarterback Mason Orem handed the ball off to Hayden McMahon who raced through the Irrigon defense 62 yards for a touchdown to make the score 6-0.

On the next Irrigon drive they drove deep into Heppner territory and looked as if they may score. That was until Keaton Coiner stepped in front of a pass and intercepted it to give the Mustangs the ball back at their own 4-yard line. Heppner then went on a long drive of 15 plays until Irrigon intercepted an Orem pass and ran it in for a score. That made it 6-6 as the first quarter ended.

After the Irrigon kickoff, the Mustang offensive line dominated the line of scrimmage as the Mustangs went on a seven-play drive of 60 yards all on runs for another score. Hayden McMahon took a handoff from Orem and scampered 13 yards for the touchdown. Orem then passed the ball to Keaton Coiner for the 2-pt. conversion to make the score 14-6.

The teams traded possessions until Joseph Albitre intercepted an Irrigon pass to give the Mustangs good field position at the Irrigon 28-yard line. On the very next



Mustang QB Mason Orem throws a pass under pressure in Heppner's win against Irrigon Friday night. - Photo by Tara Eakin Proudfoot

play Orem threw a strike to Caleb George for a touchdown. Nick Wenberg ran the ball in for the 2-pt. conversion to now make it 22-6. On the next Irrigon possession, Nick Wenberg intercepted a pass to end the first half with the Mustangs ahead 22-6.

Heppner kicked off to start the second half and Irrigon punted the ball away on their possession. The Heppner offense took over and it only took the Mustangs two plays and less than a minute to score again. After a 26-yard pass completion from Orem to George, Heppner scored when Zach Brown ran the ball in from 32 yards out. George ran for the 2-pt. conversion to increase the Mustang lead to 30-6.

The teams traded possessions several more times in the game until George intercepted the Knights quarterback early in the fourth quarter. On a

5-play drive that was highlighted by a 28-yard run by Brown, the Mustangs scored again when Alakae Rodriguez had a 3-yard touchdown run. The score now was 36-6 with seven minutes left in the game.

On the first Knight play of their drive, George intercepted another Irrigon pass at mid field and returned it 11 yards to give the Mustangs the ball at the 39-yard line. Brown ran for 10 yards and a pass completion of 26 yards from Orem to Jackson Coiner gave the Mustangs first and goal from the 3-yard line. Rodriguez then took the handoff and blasted through the line for a 3-yard touchdown. Brown ran the ball in for the 2-pt. conversion to make the final score of the game 44-6.

The Mustangs not only dominated the score board, they dominated the statistics too. Heppner ran the ball for 310 yards and

passed for 105 for a total of 415 yards in the game. Irrigon rushed for 72 yards, passed for 64 for a total of 136 yards in the game.

Mason Orem was 5-12 passing the ball for 79 yards and a touchdown. Caylan Proudfoot was 1-1 for 26 yards. George had 2 receptions in the game for 54 yards and a touchdown. Jackson Coiner had a catch for 26 yards, Keaton Coiner had a reception for 14 and Rodriguez caught 2 passes for 11.

Brown led the team in rushing with 115 yards on 8 carries and he scored a touchdown. Hayden McMahon was next with 102 yards on 6 carries and 2 scores. Rodriguez ran for 44 yards and 2 touchdowns while Wenberg finished with 43 rushing yards. George ran the ball for 6 yards in the game.

The Heppner defense was led by three players with 6 tackles each. They were Keaton Coiner, George and Rodriguez. With 5 tackles each were Brown and Landon McMahon. Recording 4 tackles each in the game were Jaime Cavan, Kaden King and Albitre. With 3 tackles each for the Mustangs were Wenberg, Hayden McMahon and Lane Critchlow. Proudfoot was next with 2 and with 1 tackle each in the game were Ryan Haugen, Owen Guerra, Darby Spivey and Jace Wilson.

The Mustang football team has a bye this week and will not play. Their next game is set for Friday, October 4th at Stanfield against the Tigers.

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Circuit court location continued

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ter area would like circuit court in Milton Freewater? No, they all have to go to Pendleton to have court."

Kuhn expressed worries about the economic feasibility impacting court locations, saying, "The Circuit Court does not want to hold court in Milton-Freewater, even though the statute says they can. It is expensive, and time-consuming for court personnel." He also mentioned the modern challenges with technology and increased court personnel as influencing factors, expressing concerns over the future of the court in Heppner and hinting that it could be treated as a lesser 'satellite' location, in favor of Boardman gaining prominence.

Jensen tried to interject regarding Judge Hill providing statistics, but Kuhn remained apprehensive about their authenticity and usefulness. Sykes, defending Jensen, said that Jensen didn't make this decision, so he doesn't need to defend any stance.

Reflecting on how the project was initially introduced, Sykes shared his disappointment over its evolution, "When this project was first introduced, I told Interim City Manager at the time Tom Wolf that this needs to stay 'corralled' in Heppner, and he said it's not a Heppner decision it's a County decision. It didn't go down the way I thought it would, but I wanted the deal done before anyone messed with it, and it didn't happen."

Kuhn expressed his dissatisfaction with Judge Hill's remarks, emphasizing the potential economic implications for the county. "I would hope that they didn't put too much weight on Judge Hill's statement here because it's a lot of

inaccuracies. Not only from a Judicial administration perspective, but he certainly did not consider the economic cost of the county or the economic cost to this community. So, to me, this just came down to a political decision. And I'm hoping the two commissioners aren't hiding behind Judge Hill's statement," Kuhn stated.

Commissioner Sykes redirected attendees to resources where they could review the decision-making process for themselves. "The story in the Heppner Gazette, it was a long one, and it was accurate. Also, that meeting is online, the video. So, if any of you wanna see and hear how it went down, that decision is there. How people arrived at their decision, I can only tell you how I arrived at my decision," Sykes responded.

Adding to his critique of Judge Hill, Kuhn conveyed a concern that Judge Hill may have a pessimistic view regarding employment opportunities at the courthouse in Heppner. Kuhn indicated his belief that Judge Hill feels there will never be courthouse jobs in the community.

City Manager John Doherty voiced concerns that had been previously raised by Judge Hill regarding the current courthouse constraints. He referred to Judge Hill's 2023 study which underscored numerous deficiencies such as inadequate ADA access, limited courtroom size, and insufficient attorney-client rooms. Doherty highlighted the ambiguity surrounding the role of a proposed supplementary building, posing the question about its implications if it appears to exceed the significance of the primary courthouse.

"As Bill said Judge Hill referred to this as a satellite, it's also been referred to as an annex," Doherty stated, "My understanding of an annex is it's either an extra or subordinate part, in this case a supplementary building but it seems in this case that the annex becomes the primary...So my questions regardless of that location is; how are Judge Hills deficiencies from his 2023 study addressed?"

In response, Commissioner Sykes opted not to address the concerns directly but handed over to County Admin Matt Jensen, indicating that Jensen's intricate knowledge of the courthouse details would better serve the conversation. Sykes emphasized that Jensen's role in the discussion was not to defend the commissioners' decisions but to shed light on the structural and planning specifics of the courthouse.

Jensen highlighted the challenges with the current courthouse setup, particularly in its capacity to host jury trials. He explained, "So with the study of course it has deficiencies mainly listed for the full time circuit court, for the jury trials and such it is extremely deficient, the juror room is extremely small, originally it was the judge's chambers and so it's big enough to be a smaller office- they've resorted into taking over the conference room where the BOC hold their meetings here in Heppner in the bart building."

One of the main issues he pinpointed was the problem with soundproofing which affects the privacy and integrity of the jury trials. "We couldn't put a jury in there and have it soundproof from the rest of it" Jensen discussed potential adaptations to the

courthouse, which involve shifting from jury trials to judge trials only. This change would minimize the space and soundproofing requirements currently proving problematic. "That's something that if you don't have jury trials then you don't have that issue," he pointed out.

Talking about the future strategies, Jensen mentioned ongoing dialogues and site studies aimed at reducing the demand on the courthouse while maintaining its historic significance and utility. "We've already talked about what do we need to do with courthouse, there's already been plans, we're looking at our capital improvement plan about what we need to do to continue to have that historic building represent the county and be the site for the justice and the circuit courts," he elaborated.

The proposed transition outlined by Jensen also includes delegating different service requirements to the annex, which caters to the circuit court's needs not typically covered in a county seat. "That wont be coming up in this legislative session," Jensen added, indicating that financial aspects and precise planning would be reviewed in legislative sessions scheduled for years 2025 or 2026 coinciding with the completion of the new circuit court building.

Local resident, Patty (last name inaudible) was the first to speak from the public, she raised a question about the inclusion of Boardman in the council's plans. When Council member Doherty confirmed that it was not included, Patty wittily remarked, "wouldn't you have to start there?"

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