

Not just an instructor

Sitting at the Eastern Oregon Family Taekwondo center, watching owner and founder Ernest Watson teach a group of children how to punch, block and kick Wednesday, I couldn't help but get the urge to jump up there and try it myself. It seemed so simple.

I know it's not. As someone who played sports, I know that everything always looks easy until you try it. Take baseball, for example. Slow-motion replays have killed baseball because everyone watches those and says to themselves, "Well, that's not that hard. Why didn't he field that grounder?" Well, it's because it is hard, and if everyone could do it, everyone would.

I know taekwondo

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is hard, also, because Watson said so. He's a black belt, and that takes years and years of training and work and discipline. His wife, Lorry, is a red belt, which is darn close to a black belt. They've worked hard to build the skills to earn those belt levels, and I respect that more than even I think I know.

But what most got me is how Watson interacts



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

with his students. He's not hard on the kids. When they do something wrong, or maybe not wrong, just not quite right, he's patient and calmly tells them what to do. On Thursday, he was working with one-two punch combinations and would lightly take a swing with his pads to simulate a hook so the students can practice punching and ducking, ducking and punching.

He was having so much fun with the children, who ranged in age from 5 to 13. They all loved the duck part and laughed when they caught a light swat to the head. Watson laughed, too. Parents laughed. I got a couple chuckles out of it. He wasn't simply teaching his students taekwondo. He was playing with them. He was one of them.

To me, that's the best quality of Watson's business. He can relate to the young students who come in. He can take a very difficult, very demanding activity — martial arts — and make it approachable and reasonably easy to grasp.

The dojo hasn't always been mega-successful, either.

From time to time, the Watsons have had to dip into their own pockets to pay the rent for the space on Coe Avenue in Stanfield. During the summer, enrollment drops, and it becomes difficult to keep the business running. But they persevere because they love it.

"You have to love it," Lorry Watson said.

It's clear that the Watsons have endeared themselves to the students and their parents. Watson is very supportive of his students both inside and outside the dojo, and that is truly commendable.

He's not a teacher. He's not an instructor. He's part of their family. And that is why people keep coming back.

—Sam Barbee is the sports reporter for the *Hermiston Herald* and can be reached at (541) 564-4542 or sbarbee@hermistonherald.com

Cougars drop Badgers

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Friday night in Echo was throwback night, and the Cougar girls wore old-school uniforms from the 1980s.

The school had been selling retro jerseys all week in preparation for the game, and the girls wore buns in their hair from that era. Rock-and-roll from the '80s blared during stoppages, and the crowd was louder than usual.

The electric atmosphere of the retro jersey-wearing crowd gave the Cougars more than enough energy, as they flew past the Powder Valley Badgers, 54-40.

"I think we definitely showed up to play tonight, both teams did," Echo senior Bailey Strofe said. "It was an excellent performance. Both teams executed. I think we really stepped up, and I think we did a really good job."

Elizabeth McCarty put up 19 points and eight rebounds to pace the Cougars, but she was the only double-figure scorer for the Cougars. Samantha Kearns scored 15 for the Badgers, most coming in the second half.

"For the second time this year, everyone with a jersey scored," Echo head coach JD Brazil said after the game. "That says something there."

The win puts the Cougars (13-2, 5-0) at least a game up on Nixyaawii and two games up on the Badgers (7-7, 3-2) in the Old Oregon League, but Echo still has road games against Joseph, Helix and Powder Valley on the schedule.

Brazil said he was happy to get out of the gym Friday with a 14-point win over Powder Valley but doesn't expect the rest of the matchups with the Badgers to be



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Echo's Hannah McCarty (14) dumps a pass into the post as Powder Valley's Hallie Feik (24) closely defends during the second half of Echo's 54-40 win over the Badgers Friday night in Echo.

that lopsided.

"If you'd have told me last night we were gonna get 'em by 14 at home and be as dominant as we were, I'd have taken it because that's a damn good team," Brazil said.

Echo dominated for most of the game before the Badgers rallied in the third quarter. Up 44-15, Powder Valley scored six of the final eight points on the quarter to build some momentum going into the last frame, where it continued its late-game comeback.

Echo turned over the ball in its first three fourth-quar-

ter possessions, and Powder Valley slowly cut down the lead from 25 points at the start of the period all the way down to 14 by the final buzzer.

Echo committed 11 turnovers, all in the fourth, which was the Cougars only weak spot all night.

"The only thing I'm not happy about is the amount of turnovers in the last three, four minutes of the game, the lack of discipline that we showed there," Brazil said. "That's one of those things — you put your bench in there to finish the game, you've got the game in the

bag — it's hard to do. It's hard to go in there, especially when our game is up tempo, up tempo, up tempo."

Powder Valley was without one of its top scorers, senior guard Sallie Mary Blair, who was out with a bum knee, and that left one go-to option for the Badgers in Amanda Feik at the post, who was whistled for four fouls in the first half.

Feik went to the bench 17 seconds into the second quarter, and Echo quickly built up its lead from 12 to 27. The score wasn't always that lopsided, however.

It took a minute and a half for the first basket of the game to be scored, and the Badgers held a 6-5 lead two minutes later. Powder Valley successfully broke the Cougars' press and, according to Brazil, almost forced Echo out of it. Echo responded, however, with a 9-0 run to take a 14-6 lead and never looked back.

Powder Valley outscored Echo 19-8 in the final period, but it was too little too late.

Echo travels to Wallowa for its sixth league game of the season at 4 p.m. today. It's the first time that Echo will meet the Cougars as a league foe, and Echo isn't taking the game for granted.

"It's gonna be a long trip," Strofe said. "We're gonna have to show up and play tomorrow night just like we did tonight. Nothing's going to be given to us, but we absolutely need to work as hard as we did tonight. Nothing's given."

In other action, the Echo boys defeated Powder Valley 82-52.

At La Salle Prep, the Falcons split with the Hermiston boys and girls teams. The La Salle girls (12-1) lost to the Bulldogs 61-57, and the La Salle Prep boys topped Hermiston 63-40.

Watson teaches taekwondo, life lessons at Stanfield dojo



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Erwin Watson, founder and owner of Eastern Oregon Family Taekwondo, works with young orange belts on punch combinations Thursday in Stanfield.

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

As taekwondo instructor Erwin Watson taught his students at his dojo in Stanfield Wednesday, the frustration on Brandi Pollick's face mounted.

Pollick, a white belt, just started learning the martial art, and she was struggling to remember the new steps being taught.

She was learning a series of steps, punches and blocks, called kata, and was disappointed with herself when she wasn't right in the first try.

Watson remained patient, smiled and laughed to ease

Pollick's frustration, walked her through the steps again and then congratulated and praised her when she got them right.

In 2009, Watson never thought he'd be doing taekwondo again after getting burned out from spending his entire adult life around martial arts. While he has a black belt, the highest-ranked color a person can receive, earning the belt took his enjoyment from the sport, he said.

"It's really easy (to get burned out)," he said from his dojo. "There's a certain level of belt ranking that you get to, where you do get burnt out. Like everything else, you just don't want to

do it."

Six years later, after Pollick performed the steps correctly to pass her advancement test, Watson rewarded her with another stripe on her white belt, a blue one, the fifth she's earned. When Watson gave her the stripe, he added a caveat: Pollick must continue to practice until she gets the moves down pat.

Six years ago, Watson never envisioned he would be back on the dojo, handing out belts and guiding students through forms. Seeing the accomplishment and confidence on his students' faces, however, keep him going and hold off any more burn out, he said.

"I want them feeling when they leave that they have the attitude, the positive attitude and confidence that I try to build in them," Watson said. "If you give them a small amount of confidence, that goes a long ways."

Hermiston residents Candy Zimmerly, 36, and her daughter Cora McCann, 12, go to the dojo because of Watson's style. The sessions offer them more than exercise, though.

Zimmerly said taekwondo is a nice bonding activity for her and her daughter, but it is also "a way of life."

"Taekwondo is a life sport.

SEE WATSON/A10

GO SEE IT

Saturday, January 17

Wrestling
Hermiston @ Oregon Wrestling Classic, Redmond, 8 a.m.

Echo/Stanfield @ Bonanza Tournament, 9 a.m.

Swimming
Hermiston @ La Grande, 12 p.m.

Girls Basketball
Umatilla vs. Vale, 4 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Heppner, 4 p.m.

Boys Basketball
Echo @ Wallowa, 4 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Vale, 5:30 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Heppner, 5:30 p.m.
Echo @ Wallowa, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, January 18

No events scheduled

Monday, January 19

No events scheduled

Tuesday, January 20

Girls Basketball
Umatilla vs. Stanfield, 6 p.m.
Boys Basketball
Umatilla vs. Stanfield, 7:30 p.m.

Wednesday, January 21

No events scheduled