

Special kind of athlete

One of the things I was most excited about this season was watching Sam Colbray wrestle this week.



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

waited for something to happen. When Colbray would shoot for Linebarger's legs, you could feel the tension grow in the Dawghouse, and when Linebarger gave a good sprawl, it eased slightly. I couldn't tell if it was anticipation or anxiety. It was a bit strange.

I don't know if I've ever seen someone so confident about what they're doing. Colbray knows he's going to win. He just does. There's no intimidation, no anxiety, no worry, no doubt, no negative thoughts at all. He knows exactly what he's doing, and he knows exactly what he wants to do. His maturity on the mat is truly spectacular. He doesn't panic, doesn't overthink thing. He just wrestles.

I look at that with a special perspective because I did all those things. I panicked. I worried. I doubted. I wrung my hands with anxiety. When I was a quarterback, I was a panicker, and it affected the accuracy of my passes and soundness of my decision-making. When I played basketball, I'd panic and throw something up. In baseball, I'd walk a guy and start overthinking my mechanics and walk another guy, then another guy, then I'm done.

So to watch a guy that is comfortable in his own skin, to know he's put in the work and trusts himself — that's special. What he's done on the mat is special, too. And he's a big, strong guy who's quick and fast and has good technique and all that. But that won't stay with him. What will stay with him, though, is his ability to prepare and his ability to trust that preparation in key moments.

That's what will take him far.

— Sam Barbee is the sports reporter for the *Hermiston Herald*. He can be reached at sbarbee@hermistonherald.com

Hermiston girls survive The Dalles

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

After three quarters of basketball against The Dalles in the Dawghouse on Friday night, the Hermiston girls basketball team was shying away from the target on its back as the No. 1 team in the state.

In the fourth quarter, though, the first-ranked Bulldogs shook it off and took a five-point lead after three quarters and turned it into a 51-16 win over The Dalles.

Head coach Steve Hoffert gives his players a quote at the beginning of every week to describe the situation his team is in. This week's was: "Success leads to complacency, and complacency leads to failure."

"We knew that if we got complacent with the way we were playing, we were gonna fail," senior Abi Drotzmann said after the game. "We expected that, and so we tried to work hard tonight so that wouldn't happen."

Drotzmann and Tav-in Headings each had 10 points for the Bulldogs, and Katie Conklin had 11 points for the Riverhawks.

"It's a win," Hoffert said. "The Dalles is always a solid program. I didn't think we came out and played like we should've played being the No. 1 team in the state."

Ironically, Hermiston did come out like the top-ranked team in the state opening the game when Sara Ramirez hit a 3, and Abby Drotzmann got 3 on a layup and a free throw.

Hermiston (13-3, 1-0) led 6-0 at that point, and led 12-2 with two minutes left in the first and even-



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

The Dalles' Lori Cimmiyotti (14) drives baseline and passes as Hermiston's Jansen Edmiston, right, tries to block and teammate Abi Drotzmann helps during the second half of Hermiston's 51-36 win over the Riverhawks Friday night in Hermiston.

tually took a 16-5 lead heading into the second quarter.

This was when The Dalles (8-7, 0-1) started to chip away. At one point, though, Hermiston led 21-6, but Lori Cimmiyotti got a layup, Conklin hit a pair of free throws and Brooke McCall got a layup to cut the deficit to 21-12 with about four minutes left.

Hermiston scored the next five, on a jumper by Kynzee Padilla and another 3 by Ramirez, but The Dalles would score the next four on baskets by Cimmiyotti and Conklin to go into the locker room down 26-16 but with momentum.

The Dalles continued to chip away, cutting the deficit to four on a Kailin Hoylman 3 with 3:27 on the clock that forced Hof-

fert to call a timeout.

"We knew we weren't going to lose," Drotzmann said. "We knew we weren't going to play like this."

Right out of the timeout, Edmiston got an open look and drained it, giving Hermiston a six-point lead, and Headings hit a 3 after a Conklin basket to put Hermiston up five. Ramirez got a layup to go through a Conklin foul but couldn't hit the free throw, and McCall hit a 3 with 10 seconds left to cut the deficit to five at 36-31. At that point, The Dalles outscored Hermiston 25-5 since it was down 21-6 with 6:12 on the clock in the second quarter.

Hoffert said he wasn't concerned with the small margin, and he had confidence his team would



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Jansen Edmiston (20) drives around The Dalles' Kailin Hoylman during the first half of Hermiston's 51-36 win over the Riverhawks Friday night in Hermiston.

"stop doing things they weren't supposed to," but he was hoping they would figure out The Dalles' dribble-drive offense and collapsing man defense.

"They're smart enough to figure that out," he said. "Sometimes it just takes a couple knockout attempts to wake us up."

Hermiston have a few knockout attempts of their own in the fourth, and most of them landed.

Right out of the gate in the fourth, Edmiston hit a 3 to put the Bulldogs up 39-31, and they wouldn't look back. Headings followed that up with a layup off one of 15 Riverhawk turnovers, and the Bulldogs outscored The Dalles 15-5 in the final period.

The last time Hermiston lost in the Columbia River Conference was in 2012-13 when The Dalles pulled it off. Drotzmann doesn't plan on reliving that.

"We don't plan on losing CRC this year," she said. "We know that everyone's gonna come at us because we're No. 1 in the state, and everyone's gonna play a good game against us. We can't just expect easy games. It'll be a good challenge."

Stanfield boys facing off against Irrigon in mid-season showdown

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

From the outside, the Stanfield boys basketball team's matchup today against Irrigon is a whale.

The game, which begins at 5:30 p.m. today, pits the top-ranked, one-loss and defending state champion Irrigon Knights against the second-ranked, two-loss, defending-second runner-up Stanfield Tigers. Irrigon's lone loss this season came to undefeated 3A Dayton in a 69-67 thriller, and Stanfield's two losses came to Washington small-school power Tri-Cities Prep and 1A powerhouse Horizon Christian out of Hood River. Stanfield (12-2, 3-0), though, hasn't lost

in a month and Irrigon (14-1, 3-0) hasn't lost in three weeks and is coming off a buzzer-beater win over Pendleton.

"It's a good game to have during the season so you can prepare yourself for postseason," senior guard Hunter Braithwaite said this weeks.

The first of the teams' two league matchups will be in Stanfield, giving the Tigers an opportunity to hold the top spot in the Columbia Basin Conference until potentially the final league game of the year on Feb. 14, when the Tigers head to Irrigon.

"When they're at home, they're a completely different animal," head coach Daniel Sharp said of Ir-

rigon. "Pendleton got it (Tuesday). When you can take advantage of your home court, that's a huge advantage. I don't know how to say it ... playing at home, that's your opportunity to take care of it because, there, it's just a nightmare."

From the outside, the story lines abound, and they are everything from a possible state title preview to the first leg of the CBC championship series.

For Stanfield, though, all that is simply noise.

"It won't make or break our season," Braithwaite said of today's game. "It's just another game."

The Tigers are hoping for different results from last year, however, when

Stanfield couldn't keep the Knights from expanding their six-point fourth-quarter lead to a commanding 63-51 win. Both teams were undefeated before that tilt. Irrigon went on and beat Stanfield 81-47 in Irrigon later that season and topped the Tigers 52-37 in the first round of the Blue Mountain Conference playoffs.

Added to that already inherent motivation is a small history lesson.

In the 2009-10 season, current Hermiston coach Jake McElligott's first year at the helm in Irrigon, the Knights went 2-21 and 0-14 in then-Blue Mountain Conference play. The next year they won five games.

SEE SHOWDOWN/A10

GO SEE IT

Saturday, January 24

Wrestling
Hermiston @ Reser's Tournament of Champions @ Liberty, 9 a.m.

Swimming
Hermiston @ Hood River, 11 a.m.

Girls Basketball
Umatilla vs. Nyssa, 4 p.m.
Echo @ Helix, 4 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Irrigon, 4 p.m.

Boys Basketball
Umatilla vs Nyssa, 5 p.m.
Echo @ Helix, 5:30 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Irrigon, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, January 25

No events scheduled

Monday, January 26

No events scheduled

Tuesday, January 27

Girls Basketball
Stanfield vs. Ione, 5:30 p.m.
Boys Basketball
Stanfield vs. Ione, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, January 28

Wrestling
Hermiston @ Hood River, 6 p.m.

Best of the West tournament begins today

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Today, thousands of people will descend on Hermiston for the 12th annual Best of the West AAU basketball tournament at Hermiston schools.

The two-day tournament features 93 teams of third- through eighth-grade boys and girls from throughout the region.

"It gives us an opportunity to show off how good of a community Hermiston is," Mike Kay, Hermiston School District director of operations and longtime Best of the West volunteer, said.

The games are spread out around local schools, with the championship games taking place at Hermiston High School. Per tradition, the gym lights at Hermiston High are turned off for player introductions, like the school does for its varsity games.

Kay says it's an experience the players remember for a long time.

"It's pretty cool for the kids," he

said.

The tournament grew from a small gathering of local AAU teams so they wouldn't have to go to the Tri-Cities or La Grande or even Pendleton to have to play every game. Those travel costs add up over time for parents.

Kay said the tournament also gives Hermiston a chance to display the modern facilities it boasts at its schools. For Hermiston Youth Basketball President Brian Moss, that is key.

"We have the facilities to do it, and the school district's nice enough to do it so we can accommodate so many teams without a hitch," he said. "A lot of communities don't have the amount of gyms Hermiston does. We're able to provide facilities to everyone. That's probably the biggest thing."

"People are impressed when they come to Hermiston and see the facilities we have," Moss added. "Plus, Hermiston is a nice place to come and visit. So that also lures teams in."

As well, Hermiston businesses benefit from the large tournament, as people patronize hotels, gas stations and restaurants.

Kay and Moss said the community also embraces these events and works hard to make others' experiences in Hermiston memorable for good reasons.

"The entire tourney is run by volunteers and our youth basketball programs," Kay said. "It's been a great thing to participate in and watch grow over the years. I've been actively involved for nine years, and it's been a lot of work to make it a great event for everyone."

"It's good for business," Moss added. "It raises money for programs. High school boys and girls make significant money. Those are the biggest benefits I see as far as doing these tournaments. It's just a win-win for everybody."

A full schedule for the Best of the West can be found at HermistonBasketballClub.com.