

Bonds that last

I used to hate my hometown. I really did.

I thought it was boring. I thought it was lame. I thought it was crime-riddled and ugly. I thought it smelled. I thought it was a terrible place to raise a family.

I thought all of those things because the size of my world hadn't been challenged yet. True, I had been other places in the region and the country, but I still hated my hometown. I never wanted to go back when we went on a trip somewhere. I was arrogant, but mostly I was naive.

It took until college when I was away from Longview for an extended period of time to fall in love with my hometown. For the first time.

Suddenly, I wasn't thinking about the things I didn't like. I was thinking about things I missed. I missed the familiarity. I missed the smell of the three paper mills and their by-products. I missed the people. I missed my family. I missed the kinda-ugly, kinda-picturesque man-made lake in the center of town.

My world had finally grown. I had finally seen daily life outside of Longview, and I had a realization that you only have one hometown. You only have one place you identify with at a core level. As Dorothy said, "There's no place like home."

Now, when I look back on my 18 and some-odd years in Longview, I think about the lessons I learned there. The people I met, the successes and failures I had. I think about Longview daily. Not in a longing, depressed way, but in a comparative mindset. I compare the weather, the drivers, the buildings, the topography, even the roads. Longview is my baseline, and everything springs from there. I love that little place. It made me who I am.

This sense of where I came from isn't unusual. It's a sentiment shared by people across the country and world. In my mind, it's a necessary sentiment to effectively know where one fits into the world in which one lives.

So when I go to any high school basketball games, I see people



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

who share my fervor for their hometown. People pack these gyms — big and small — to watch the school they graduated from compete. Maybe they didn't graduate from that certain school. Maybe their children graduated from there, and they've become proxy fans, like my dad and my high school.

The two Hermiston fans I recently spoke with — Jan Ross and Bernice Harlan — are two examples of people who know where they come from. They are Hermiston Bulldogs through and through, and that's something that I admire. It's something I've come to terms with myself.

When I go to R. A. Long sporting events, I don't just watch with a disconnected interest. I care. I live and die by what happens on the field, court or diamond. It wasn't that long ago I was out there, and I understand what the players are going through. I remember playing for the guys who came before me, playing for the guys who used the locker room, weight room, dugout, batting cage before I did. I played for the guys who came back and lived and died with us.

Ross and Harlan, though they didn't play at Hermiston High, feel as though they're a part of the school. And they are. They've seen so much happen. They've seen the football team go from an automatic win on opponents' schedules to state champs. They've seen the football stadium go from decrepit and condemned to the best in the state. They've seen the school grow, and they still come and support and cheer and gasp and do everything fans do.

As I was speaking with them, I could see the passion on their faces. They smiled when talking about the Bulldogs, as if all the fine memories were flooding back. They spoke of their families, and Harlan talked of watching the current players grow up because she's a custodian at a local elementary school.

SEE BONDS/A10

GO SEE IT

Saturday, February 14

Swimming
Hermiston @ district meet @ Hood River, 11 a.m.
Girls Basketball
Umatilla @ Vale, 5 p.m.
Stanfield @ Irrigon, 4 p.m.
Boys Basketball
Umatilla @ Vale, 6:30 p.m.
Stanfield @ Irrigon, 5:30 p.m.

Sunday, February 15

No events scheduled

Monday, February 16

No events scheduled

Tuesday, February 17

Girls Basketball
Hermiston vs. The Dalles, 7 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Nyssa, 5 p.m.
Boys Basketball
Hermiston @ the Dalles, 7 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Vale, 6:30 p.m.
Stanfield vs. TBD @ Districts, TBD

Wednesday, February 18

No events scheduled

Buckaroos nip the Bulldogs

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

The last time the Hermiston Bulldogs played the Pendleton Buckaroos, it was a back-and-forth affair at Warberg Court the Pendleton boys would eventually win.

Friday night in Hermiston, the game couldn't have been more different.

The Bucks led for the final 27 minutes of the game behind Wes Persinger's 19 points, seven rebounds and three blocks and they held off a late rally by Hermiston to win 62-51. Austin Nailon led the Bulldogs with 13 points, Keegan Crafton had 10 and Chase Knutz had 11.

"He was the hardest-working kid out there," Hermiston head coach Jake McElligott said of Persinger after the game. "He was the difference-maker. He was the equalizer in the game. He worked his butt off, and I told him that after the game."

Hermiston (6-14, 3-3 CRC) never led, but the Bulldogs did tie the game at three after Austin Nailon hit a three-pointer to put Hermiston on the board. Pendleton (14-7, 4-2), however, would close the quarter on an 11-6 run to seize control early and extended the lead to 12 at halftime. Hermiston never came closer than 10 points in the second half.

McElligott called this week "toughness week," and, by his account, it's not going well.

"Tough teams communicate, and I didn't think we communicated real well," he said. "Tough teams get rebounds and box out every time, not just some of the time. We didn't do that. Tough teams don't give up easy baskets. When you look at the shot chart after the game, we gave up four shots outside of 15 feet. That's not a tough team. Tough teams don't give up easy baskets all night long."

Whether it was Persinger slashing and grabbing offensive rebounds or posting up, or Caden Smith getting



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Chase Knutz (21) of Hermiston rises for layup against Pendleton's Wes Persinger (left) and Sonny Green during the first half of Pendleton's 62-51 win Friday night in The Dawghouse.

the ball inside on drive-and-kicks, Pendleton easily scored while keeping Hermiston from getting those kinds of looks.

The first quarter was a microcosm of the game, as Pendleton got a 3-pointer from Kai Quinn, an and-one from Persinger and all inside baskets, while Hermiston turned the ball over four times and forced shots. Hermiston couldn't get out of its own way, and Pendleton capitalized.

McElligott, though, singled out a couple guys who had good games. He pointed to Landon Gammell and Carson Lloyd, two reserves, who have gotten a bit more playing time as of late.

"I thought Landon came off the bench and gave us good energy and defense," the first-year Hermiston coach said. "I thought Car-

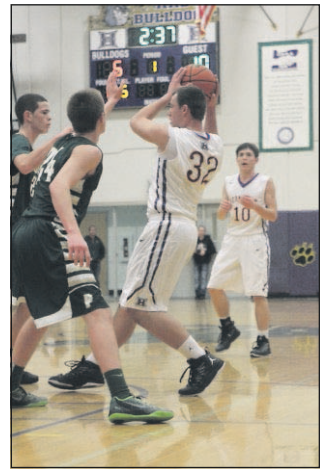
son came off the bench and gave us good energy and defense. Again, if you only have several guys, as opposed to a collection of guys, doing that on a night-to-night basis, you're gonna lose, and the scoreboard showed that tonight."

It wasn't until the fourth quarter that Hermiston began to make a run at the Bucks.

Down 53-33, Crafton scored, Pendleton's James Bradt missed the front end of the one-and-one and then Nailon made two free throws to cut Pendleton's lead to 17.

Following a Bucks' timeout, Crafton made two free throws, and Dillon Zimmerly hit a 3-pointer to cut Pendleton's lead down to 53-42.

It was a 9-0 run that covered just a little over a



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Cole Smith (32) fights off Pendleton defenders James Bradt (24) and Caden Smith as Bulldogs teammates wait for a pass during the first half of Pendleton's 62-51 win over the Bulldogs Friday night in The Dawghouse.

minute that had coach Brian Broaddus sweating a bit on the Pendleton bench.

"If they got under 10, I would've been worried," the first-year coach said.

Hermiston couldn't come any closer, however.

After Bradt laid one in to push the lead back to 13, Nailon hit two free throws, which prompted a Pendleton timeout. Smith made one of two at the line, and Sonny Green made one as well, to get the lead back to 13. Zimmerly hit a step-back 3-ball with 36 seconds left to cut it to 10, but that was all the comeback Hermiston could muster.

"Right now we're giving up a lot of easy baskets," McElligott said. "We got to get together as a coaching staff and put our heads together and see what we can do."

The Bulldogs get another shot at a Columbia River Conference opponent when they play The Dalles at 7 p.m. Tuesday on the road.

In other basketball action, the Stanfield boys rolled over Culver 75-14; Culver defeated the Stanfield girls 41-26; the Echo girls defeated Wallowa 55-38; the Echo boys beat Wallowa 45-32; and the Hermiston girls defeated Pendleton 66-57.

Drotzmann to play softball at Linfield next year

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

As an eighth-grader, Abi Drotzmann was showing signs of production on the softball field. She was starting to mature physically and was developing a strong passion for the sport.

"She loved it. She had a passion for it," Drotzmann's father, Dave, said. "I didn't have to push her too hard. So if you can put skill together with passion, you get a great athlete out of it. She's gonna be a successful softball player because of that."

Four years later, surrounded by friends, teammates, coaches, teachers and family Thursday, Drotzmann's solidified her future when the Hermiston senior signed her National Letter of Intent to play softball at Linfield College, an NCAA Division III school located in McMinnville, Oregon, about an hour west of Portland.

"I always thought I was going to play softball in college, and then, my sophomore and junior years, I realized how hard it was and the commitment I had to do to my fall teams," Drotzmann said. "Then I got lazy and said, 'I don't want to do this. It's too much work.' Then I realized it was way worth it. It's gonna be fun."

Drotzmann joins a softball program that is one of the most successful Division III programs on the West Coast and in the country. The Wildcats have won 11-straight Northwest Conference championships and are picked to win again this season. They



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston senior Abi Drotzmann, pictured here signing her National Letter of Intent, said the main reasons she chose to attend Linfield College are the academics, the coach and the town of McMinnville itself.

have also won two national titles since 2007.

Head coach Jackson Vaughn, who has been at Linfield since 2001, was a major reason Drotzmann decided to attend Linfield, she said.

"He's a nice guy. He's a super-nice guy," she said, adding the welcoming environment of the team also solidified her decision.

At the plate, Drotzmann has demonstrated why a successful Division III program was looking to land her.

As a sophomore, Drotzmann was named a first-team all-Columbia River Confer-

ence performer and a second-team all-state player as she helped lead the Bulldogs to a runner-up finish at the state tournament. As a junior, her trajectory kept pointing upward as she hit a staggering .459 and slugged .838. That summer, Drotzmann kept her bat hot and posted a .397/.507/.784 line at the plate.

She mostly played left field for the Bulldogs, although she has experience in the middle infield, but likely projects as an outfielder.

"That'll be up to the coach (at Linfield)," David Drotz-

mann said.

Linfield wasn't always her first choice, however.

She started by "heavily" looking at Willamette University in Salem, but the Bearcats' coach, Damian Williams, took a leave of absence for this season, eliminating the team from Drotzmann's considerations. She then thought about George Fox University in Newberg, Oregon, but she didn't think that was for her. She also considered Pacific University in Forest Grove, where

SEE DROTZMANN/A10