

Turning the corner?

At the beginning of basketball season, a number of questions surrounded the Hermiston boys team. How will the five football players handle the quick turnaround? Do they have enough replacements from last year's Columbia River Conference championship team? What will the team look like under new coach Jake McElligott?

These were questions that required time to be answered. Nothing was going to happen quickly. Early on, those questions appeared to be answered. How will the five football players handle the quick turnaround? Not well. Do they have enough replacements? Doesn't look like it. What will the team look like under McElligott? Not that good ... yet.

But those were early answers. Maybe too early. Probably too early.

Then the losses started to rack up. The Bulldogs looked out of sync. The offense was rushed, and the defense was uninspired. McElligott has talked about consistency all year, and that's been the Bulldogs' greatest weakness. They play a really good quarter, then follow it up with a poor one and hand over momentum like they owed it to the other team. They have a solid game and come back with a stinker.

But there was a light, a shining, glorious light that shown through the clouds. It was Thursday's thrashing of the Hood River Valley Eagles 84-58.

Now, there are a couple caveats about this game. First, Hermiston shot 14-for-23 from three-point range. I don't have to tell you that percentage is an aberration. I mean, if you shoot 61 percent from deep, you should win. Second, Carson Lloyd played out of his mind. I'm not discounting what he did because he played great, and he's been playing better every game I've seen him. But he isn't going to shoot 7-for-8 every game, either.

But they won, and they won big on senior night. They didn't win 84-83. They won by 26. That high of a point total by that large a margin means they played well offensively and defensively, save five three-pointers from Hood River's Skyler Hunter in the fourth quarter.

It was one part of a three-part philosophy McElligott preaches: defense, rebounding and turnovers. He calls them the pillars.

"Any time those pillars fall, the building crumbles," he said after Thursday's win.



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

So how did Hermiston do in those three pillars Thursday night?

Defense: check. McElligott gave his team an A- on the night. He liked the toughness down low. He liked how they forced tough shots and contested most everything. He said they were a little less tough in the third quarter and lost track of some shooters, but, overall, the score spoke for itself.

Rebounding: check. For the most part, Hermiston dominated the glass. Hood River struggled to keep possessions alive with offensive rebounds as Hermiston cleaned the glass, and the Bulldogs gave themselves second chances throughout the night. McElligott singled out the three primary rebounders — Keegan Crafton, Landon Gammell and Cole Smith — for their work on the glass.

"I thought Cole's effort and Landon's effort and Keegan's effort on the boards was great," the first-year coach said. "They worked their butts off."

Turnovers: check. Hood River threw multiple defensive looks at Hermiston. They went full-court man, three-quarter-court trap, 1-2-2 press and 2-1-2 press, and Hermiston handled them all. That was all on point guards Lloyd and Austin Naillon, who never panicked and methodically worked the ball up the court.

"That's what tough teams do," McElligott said. "Tough teams finish the game when they have to."

I was really impressed with how the Bulldogs played. It was by far the best game they've played this year and the best game I've seen them play. It's the kind of game that can make noise in the playoffs and the kind of game that can beat Pendleton on Tuesday.

The important thing to look for in Hermiston is that consistency. Can the Bulldogs have that same energy, that same fight, that same focus on Tuesday? Can they use this momentum to get things going positively? Was it just a brief glimpse of what could have been in an otherwise forgettable season?

I don't know those answers. But I do know that Hermiston's season is finishing how it started: with questions. And only time will answer them.

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Echo's first wrestling season a success

Monte Tombs building a solid foundation

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

When Monte Tombs took over the infant Echo-Stanfield wrestling program, he said the focus wasn't on winning — yet — but instilling the love of the sport and building a foundation.

After a disappointing first day at the 3A Special District 1 meet Friday, that message was still firm.

"Pretty much every kid we have is a first-year wrestler," he said after the meet. "They stuck it in there. They battled. Even though we didn't win a match today, we still fought through every match."

The Cougars were pinned in every bout Friday by wrestlers from throughout the district. That didn't matter to the wrestlers, however, who looked at the experience in a positive light.

Both Jason Fitzpatrick and Colton Evans said they rate this year an 11 out of 10, and both guaranteed they will wrestle next winter.

Both said they learned a lot about the sport and themselves, agreeing they've grown to love the sport and what it means. Evans said he has learned not only wrestling skills, but life skills, too.

"For them to come out, saying that they love the sport that much ... That means a lot to me," Tombs said.

Evans, in particular, can



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Echo's Colton Evans (left) throws Nyssa's Garrett Moyes during the 3A Special District 1 meet at Armand Larvie Middle School in Hermiston on Friday. Moyes would win by fall.

point to one area of growth above all others these past three months.

"In the beginning of the year, I thought I was mentally tough," Evans said. "I found out not so much. Now, it definitely shows that sticking with it and going hard at it, my mentality changed a lot."

Echo was without its most experienced wrestler, Hayden Hilliard, Friday, who was bull-riding instead. He was the only member of the Echo team not present at the dis-

trict meet, but Tombs wasn't disappointed. And aside from Hilliard, everyone who was at the district meet was at the first practice in December. To Tombs, that's a win right there.

"We pretty much ended with the same kids that we started with," Tombs said. "Even established programs don't have that kind of (dedication) — they have a lot more kids that quit and everything else. To be ending with what we started with, that's

huge right there."

Moving forward, it's a steady climb upwards. Tombs pointed out he doesn't have to teach the basics to this core group of mostly freshmen anymore. He said most of the wrestlers had no idea what a double-leg was, or even a singlet, at the start of the season. Now, however, their focus is on mat time.

"The only thing that matters is the mat time," Evans said.

Bulldogs clip Eagles

Lloyd nets 18 in first start

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

On senior night at The Dawghouse, an unexpected guy stole the show.

In his first start as a varsity player, Carson Lloyd dropped 18 points on 7-for-8 shooting — including 4-for-5 from three-point range — as the Hermiston

boys basketball team routed the Hood River Valley Eagles 84-58 Thursday night. It's the highest point total recorded by Hermiston this season, and the highest since it posted 69 against these same Eagles last month.

Chase Knutz led all scorers with 19 points.

Hermiston head coach Jake McElligott said it was the best game his squad has played all year.

With the win, Hermiston (7-15, 4-4) ties Hood River Valley for second place

behind Pendleton, who the Bulldogs will play at Warberg Court in its final game of the year Tuesday.

"You could tell in their eyes they were ready to play, and they really wanted to make a statement," McElligott said. "It's been an up-and-down season — more down than up — and these guys have worked hard for four years of their life, and they didn't want to leave a bad taste in their mouths coming in at home and playing poorly."

"Everyone was feeling confident," Lloyd added. "We were all ready to get the win, especially after coming out with a tough loss (to The Dalles on Tuesday). We were just ready to bounce back and do good things."

As a team, the Bulldogs shot a season-best 14 of 23 from deep. The Bulldogs were plus-three in turnovers and recorded a season-high in assists, too, with 20.

"That's probably more

SEE BULLDOGS/A10

Stanfield holds on, makes history Thursday

Tigers lose to Pilot Rock Friday

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

For the first time in six years, the Stanfield girls basketball team won a playoff game.

The Tigers took a 10-point lead into halftime and held off a Culver late run before securing a close 26-22 squeaker Wednesday.

Bailey Watson and Cynthia Curiel led Stanfield with five points apiece.

"We're all hyped," sophomore guard Watson said, whose free throw gave Stanfield a much-needed five-point lead down the stretch. "At the beginning of the season,

we didn't expect this. It's crazy. It hasn't happen for six years, since 2009. We're pretty excited. This hasn't happened for a long time."

The win was a culmination of a series of hurdles, as head coach Daniel Sharp put it, for a team and a program that has been a doormat in the 2A Columbia Basin Conference — and before that the Blue Mountain Conference — for years. That 2009 team was the No. 5 seed in the district tournament, so the 2014-15 Tigers have already made headway.

"We've talked about overcoming hurdles," Sharp said. "You win that first game of the season, OK. (We) win the second game, we got two. Now we need a league game. We got that hurdle. ... It was always

SEE TIGERS/A10



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Stanfield's Bailey Watson (20) drives against Culver's Hannah Lewis as Stanfield head coach Daniel Sharp looks on during the second half of Stanfield's 26-22 district win over the Bulldogs on Wednesday in Hermiston.

Echo boys lose Friday, girls playing in district championship

At Baker, the Echo boys basketball team suffered its second heartbreaking defeat to the Joseph Eagles in three weeks Friday at the Old Oregon League tournament.

Friday's 52-50 loss hurts especially bad. It places Echo (12-12) behind the eight-ball today versus Powder Valley. The Cougars must win Saturday to reach the state playoffs.

Joseph (13-9) overcame eight Echo three-pointers to clinch a playoff berth Friday. Echo's Klay Jensen was the long-range culprit most of the time. He con-

nected on four of eight attempts from distance.

The Echo boys basketball team started off its district tournament on a high note on Thursday, however, downing the Wallowa Cougars 50-38. Head coach Ben Campbell said his team started strong but slowed down a bit and let Wallowa back in it.

"We were trying to match them score for score," he said. "We got (the players) calmed down and kept the game at the speed we wanted it."

Michael Thompson continued his low-post domi-

nance, netting 16 points and grabbing 13 rebounds. Carlos Chavez added 16 points for Echo, Danny Tappo scored eight and grabbed seven rebounds from the point guard spot and dished six assists. Brock Moffit also had seven rebounds.

Girls basketball

ECHO 55, WALLOWA 25

At Baker, Hannah and Elizabeth McCarty led the Cougars to a state tournament bid sealing win Friday at the Old Oregon League

district tournament.

Echo (18-6) led 28-13 at the half and never looked back after intermission. The Cougars struggled to score from the perimeter but pounded the ball in the paint with regular success against Wallowa (13-10).

The McCarty sisters scored 15 points apiece. Hannah McCarty grabbed nine rebounds, her older sister seven.

Echo (18-6) earned a spot in the big tournament but still has work to do in Baker. Echo will play today for the OOL district championship.

GO SEE IT

Saturday, February 21

Girls Basketball
Stanfield @ Districts @ Pendleton Convention Center, TBD

Echo @ Districts vs. TBD @ Baker, TBD

Boys Basketball
Stanfield @ Districts @ Pendleton Convention Center, TBD

Echo @ Districts @ Baker, TBD

Sunday, February 22

No events scheduled

Monday, February 23

No events scheduled

Tuesday, February 24

Girls Basketball
Hermiston @ Pendleton, 5:15 p.m.

Boys Basketball
Hermiston @ Pendleton, 7 p.m.