

Moving on from loss

Brutal losses stick with people. They linger and taunt and tease and laugh. It's the kind of pain one can't lose and time doesn't heal. It nestles up between your head and heart and tears at both, never resting, never relenting, never restraining.

I have a few. Remember that football game against Woodland my senior year? I blew a coverage and gave up the go-ahead touchdown late-ish in the fourth quarter. That one still hurts. The last two games I pitched in high school were both losses. The first, a playoff game on our home diamond, I gave up a two-out, two-run one-hop-the-fence double to the opposing clean-up hitter on a change-up. I should've thrown a curve. I still think about that. Two games later, in a win-or-go-home game against a league rival, I started but only went a couple innings. We lost by two or three, and I still remember watching the other team celebrate going to state. All I remember thinking is, "That should be us." My coach had to pull me to the dugout. I couldn't leave. I couldn't believe we lost, that we lost like that. We had state title-caliber talent, and we didn't get out of districts.

This is where the Stanfield boys are right now after their soul-crushing 60-59 loss to Heppner in the district semifinals Saturday. It's pretty well known by now that Heppner hit a shot with five seconds left to put them ahead.

It was the third out-of-nowhere, wait-what-did-I-just-see game that the two teams played. Back in January, Stanfield overcame a horrid first half with unbelievably hot shooting in the third quarter and won 51-46. In early February, a Heppner shooter was fouled 30 feet from the basket and heaved a last-second prayer with the Mustangs down two. He would hit all three, and Heppner slipped past.

Then Saturday happened. I know exactly how the Tigers feel. I know exactly how seniors Milan Davchevski, Hunter Braithwaite and Erik Galarza feel. More than likely, they'll never get to play a competitive basketball game again. They'll never don a jersey and shorts, run out onto a home floor in front of home fans and play a game that has reporters in attendance and postseason ramifications. They'll never run out of the locker room with more energy and adrenaline than should be allowed. They'll never feel the uplifting joy of a big win or the abysmal feeling of a tough loss.



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

Man, I feel for them. They were a confident bunch, and they had a right to be. They could play basketball. They gave Irrigon a run for its money, a game that had Irrigon re-evaluating itself.

This loss, though, won't ruin these players' lives. The losses certainly didn't ruin mine. But they haven't left yet. The sting of those losses is still as sharp now as it was six years ago. It's just another memory and another thing to talk about. Every time I see the guy who was catching me in the home playoff game, he asks why I shook off a curve ball and went to a change-up. He knows I should've thrown a bender, and we laugh about it now. That doesn't change the fact that we lost and that it was my decision, but we don't stew over it and let it consume us. I hope the Stanfield boys don't do that. I hope they use that feeling to drive them into whatever's next, be it another basketball season, college or life.

Famous college basketball coach John Wooden once said, "Sports don't create character. They reveal it." Now I'm not trying to go toe-to-toe with a sports icon who can't rebut me, but I only subscribe to that partially. Sports do reveal who we are as people. Adversity brings out the true, if you will, from people. You see their mental makeup. You see their decision-making process right in front of you. You see how they handle pain and how they handle joy.

But sports do create character. Tough situations only make tough people tougher. It's a slippery slope. The more adversity a person deals with, the more that person can cope with and move through adversity.

What these Stanfield boys do with Saturday's loss will be the biggest legacy of the game. It won't be easy because these things aren't. They're inherently difficult. What's easy to do is pack it up and say, "Well shoot, that was our best chance. We won't be that good again." The hard thing to do is to sit down and say, "You know, that ended horribly. Let's make sure it never happens again."

I'll bet on the latter. I'm hoping for the latter, and I'm excited to see what they do with it.

You might see a Stanfield baseball team on a mission.

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

HERMISTON SLIPS BY PENDLETON

Lady Bulldogs clinch CRC title

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Early on in the final girls installment of the War on 84, Hermiston couldn't shake the pesky Buckaroos of Pendleton. The ninth-ranked Bucks matched Hermiston score-for-score in the first quarter and had a chance to either come within a point or tie things up in the final 10 seconds.

Hermiston junior Jansen Edmiston wasn't having any of that, however. The point guard picked off a forced Pendleton pass and laid it up at the buzzer to give Hermiston an 18-13 lead to end the first quarter, providing the Bulldogs with a spark they carried to a 53-44 win and Columbia River Conference title Tuesday in Pendleton.

"If we're just in their heads and just get the ball on defense, obviously it's going to convert into offense," Edmiston said after the game. "It was just natural."

Edmiston led Hermiston with 15 points, and Kynzee Padilla scored 11 for the Bulldogs. None were bigger, though, than Edmiston's six in the second quarter.

Up 24-21 with about two minutes left, Edmiston picked off a Pendleton pass and raced to the other end for a layup. After a Bucks' miss, Edmiston got the outlet pass and again scored an easy two. Immediately following, Edmiston picked off another



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Jansen Edmiston (left) is closely defended by Pendleton's Shelby Greb during the first half of Hermiston's 53-44 win over the Bucks Tuesday night at Warberg Court.

pass and converted it into points at the other end, prompting Pendleton head coach Michelle Gomez to take a timeout. The 6-0 run by Edmiston pushed Hermiston's lead to seven at 28-21, and a Tavin Headings' three-ball seconds later pushed the lead to 10.

It was a run that Hermiston head coach Steve Hoffert said he was waiting for.

"It was just telling (Edmiston) that there's nobody out here that she



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Jansen Edmiston looks to create space for a shot during the first quarter of Hermiston's 53-44 win over Pendleton Tuesday night at Warberg Court.

SEE BULLDOGS/A7

Echo boys' season over, girls play Saturday

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

On Monday night at Echo High School, the boys basketball team was eating tacos. The Cougars gathered in the cozy school library and read good-luck letters from young students. They received food money from the school. They boarded a bus and headed out to Crane with a police escort from wrestling coach Monte Tombs.

Unfortunately, that's where the Cougars' post-season ended after they lost Tuesday night to Crane 54-49 in the state play-in round.

It was the first time six or seven years, however, the Echo boys team has made it past districts, a fact that isn't lost on the team. "It's pretty crazy," junior guard Carlos Chavez said. "We've worked hard. We've worked hard all this year. Honestly, I thought we're gonna make it. I can't

really explain it that well."

Early on, it didn't seem like Chavez's feeling would come to fruition. The Cougars started 1-4, but a 65-33 win over Irrigon's junior varsity team got the ball rolling positively. A four-game winning streak in January put the Cougars up to 10-7, but a three-game losing drought dropped them back to 10-10. Then Chavez went down with an ankle injury, and Klay Jensen had to miss games for academic reasons.

The wheels were starting to fall off a little bit.

"I got scared," Chavez remembered. "I was like, 'Ooh, not sure how this is gonna work out now.' I recovered quick, thank God. (Jensen) got eligible again. We just played basketball."

Echo finished strong, winning three of its final four games — including two at districts, before losing to Crane.

The Echo girls also left

for state Monday. Their season hasn't been quite the roller coaster as the boys, but it had peaks and valleys, too.

The Cougars started 10-0 before dropping a pair to Country Christian and Tri-Cities Prep (WA). Echo lost two more in late January, a "wake-up call" to Wallowa and an emotional home defeat to former league rival Dufur. Two-straight losses at the end of the slate to Nixyaawii and Powder Valley had the Cougars re-evaluating their team.

"I took it as a reality check," senior guard Bailey Strofe said. "Not having Hannah (McCarty) those two games (and) going 0-2 that weekend, I took it as a reality check. I think a lot of us did. We just came back that next week at practice and worked harder because we didn't like that feeling, that locker room. We knew that we were better

than that."

With a renewed focus, Echo rolled through the district tournament, defeating Wallowa and Powder Valley. In the district title game, the Cougars' nerves got to them, with Strofe saying she was close to vomiting on the court. But a big third quarter rocketed the Cougars to their first district title in recent memory. It sets up the first home state playoff game in Echo in decades.

"It's pretty cool to say we're a part of that team," Strofe said.

Neither head coach JD Brazil nor the captains — Elizabeth McCarty, Kelsey Ranger and Strofe — said the Cougars are peaking right now, but they are happy with how they've been playing these past couple weeks.

"We're in a good spot," Brazil said.

The Echo girls take on Adrian at 7 p.m. on Saturday.

Hermiston's Santoyo signs with Kansas' Tabor College

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Luis Santoyo never thought about playing football in college. In fact, he hadn't thought about college that much at all.

Then Hermiston High football coach Mark Hodges pulled the senior-to-be into his office before this year's football season and said that if the guard worked hard and did everything he needed to, he could play at a small college somewhere.

"I just gave him a blank stare for about five minutes," Santoyo said Tuesday. "I couldn't imagine myself playing. Af first,

I only knew about the big colleges — Oregon, Oregon State, not small colleges, but once he talked to me about it, I was hooked on it."

After a successful senior campaign that included Bulldog league and state titles and a first-team All-Columbia River Conference pick for Santoyo, he signed his National Letter of Intent Tuesday to play guard at NAIA Tabor College in Hillsboro, Kansas, a short drive north of Wichita.

The whole process took about two weeks, Santoyo said. Hodges sent out game tapes and talked to coaches, and, shortly after, Tabor

contacted Santoyo. He said the coach told him he saw early starting potential in the 6-foot, 240-pound offensive lineman.

"That's what caught me," Santoyo said. "I wanted to start early."

Two weeks later, Santoyo's decision was made. He would be a Tabor Blue Jay.

Tabor competes in the Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference, and last year the football team went 7-4, missing the playoffs by one game. The Blue Jays employ a triple-option offense that relies on mobile guards to pull outside and deal with outside linebackers or

defensive backs. That immediately caught Santoyo's attention, as he enjoys playing in space but never got the opportunity in Hodges' power-run/high-flying offense.

Santoyo watched a Georgia Tech game this season and saw how the Yellow Jackets ran their version of the triple option and where he could fit in. He said, if he wasn't convinced before then, he was after that.

"That's what I always wanted to do," he said.

Santoyo hasn't been to Tabor yet but said he plans to visit in April. While

SEE SANTOYO/A7

GO SEE IT

Wednesday, February 25

No events scheduled

Thursday, February 26

No events scheduled

Friday, February 27

Boys Basketball
Umatilla @ Dayton, 7 p.m.

Saturday, February 28

Girls Basketball
Umatilla @ Amity, 6 p.m.