

SPORTS

Community makes annual booster club steak feed successful

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Kennison Field was a huge project in Hermiston last year. While a good chunk of the money came from donations, most came from the Hermiston Sports Boosters Steak Feed, which is set for 5:30 p.m. March 7 at the Hermiston Conference Center.

Joe Thompson, who has been involved for 23 of the 36 years, said the event, like Kennison Stadium, is just another indication of the support given by the community.

"I've just been very fortunate and blessed to be part of this group, to be part of a community that's so giving and supportive of these

things," he said from Eastside Market. "It can be hectic at times getting everything put together, but it's fun. When you see the end result, you just feel good with what you've done. There's so many people that put it together. You're just one piece of the puzzle. It's good stuff."

Tickets have already sold out for next week's dinner, which includes raffles for Mariners, Seahawks and Trail Blazers tickets. The packages include four seats, lodging, dinner and a stipend for gas. Other items will be auctioned in a live setting, as well as a silent auction and raffles, and 100 percent of the net proceeds go directly to the Sports Boosters to pay for various

things, from an extra coach to equipment.

Ford Bonney, the owner of Hale's Restaurant in Hermiston, is the auctioneer, and he helps coordinate the dinner because of his vendor connections. RDO, Three Mile Canyon Farming, Columbia Bank, Lamb Weston, Sherrell Chevrolet and Rogers Toyota are title sponsors and donate whatever they can to help the event. Tom Spoo, a local FFA alumnus, coordinates the barbecue, and Coca-Cola and Budweiser provide drinks.

This year's steak feed is the same format as it's been in recent memory.

The meal, prepared by Spoo and the FFA alumni, feature steaks, salads and potatoes.

"You can't have a meal in Hermiston without potatoes," Thompson joked.

Reser's Foods are also a staple in assisting with food, and Columbia Pressed Wines also brings in beverages.

Not only do people contribute through the official channels of the night — by winning an auction bid or by buying raffle tickets — some like to donate privately instead.

"We do have some cash donors," Thompson said. "People who will just write us a check. We have that. It's another part of the equation where we got people who want to be involved, just on a quieter level. They're not looking for (recognition) ... They

just want to help. There's a lot of great folks who will do that anonymously or quietly as possible. Like, 'You know what? I want to be help, but don't need any big deal.'"

Thompson said that phase two of the Kennison Field project — building a grandstand on the north side of the field — is still planned, but still on hold.

"Nothing right now," Thompson said of any projects. "But there's always stuff that comes up. People have ideas about things. You never know."

Thompson said the fundraising goal is "always to do more than last year." Last year, the event raised about \$79,000 gross and netted about \$69,000. It

was more than half of the \$100,000 the booster club raised in the calendar year.

"It's great night. It brings the community together, people that have a common love for athletics and the kids," Thompson said. "It's kind of a celebration in way."

By the sports boosters' bylaws, the funds are restricted to athletics. Some funds go to helping student pay for various fees related to athletics such as physical exams, equipment to pay-to-play fees.

Some of the money also goes to its adopt-a-dog program, which is aimed at giving students an avenue to participate in extracurricular activities if they can't afford athletics.

GUTIERREZ:

continued from page A9

She had no idea she would contribute in a completely different way for the first three months of this season: from the bench. At first, it was a difficult proposition for her. She felt like she let her team down. She felt like she was somehow hurting her teammates because she was watching and cheering instead of running and scoring.

During try-outs, she sat with her back up against the folded-up bleachers, legs extended, with her schoolwork out. Every now and again she looked longingly out at her teammates doing what she wanted to do. It took awhile for her to accept her role.

Once she did, however, she was all-in.

"She brings a smile to practice every day," Hoffert said. "She encourages girls every drill. When she goes in, she makes the most of it because she wants it so badly."

When Gutierrez first returned to the basketball court about a month ago, she admitted she wasn't the same player. She couldn't run as fast. Her feet wouldn't cooperate. Sometimes she made "freshman mistakes," as she put it.

Her teammates support for her never wavered, however. They never stopped encouraging, never stopped passing her the ball. Hoffert was the same. He never stopped giving her opportunities and making sure she was alright. Two days after her surgery, with Gutierrez sedated and stuck in bed, the seventh-year coach came to visit her to make sure her knee was as good as it could be, that her spirits were up, that she would come out for the team.

"They were really loving and caring like a family, just really supportive," Gutierrez said of her team. "I liked that."

Gutierrez certainly appreciates that Hoffert left an open spot on the roster for her.

"I was really grateful for that," she said. "Because



Hermiston senior Jazmin Gutierrez (30) is back playing basketball after suffering a gruesome knee injury in June that required surgery and forced her to miss the first three months of the basketball season.

I've always looked forward to being on varsity and competing at this level, and then just leaving that open for me without even having to tryout. I was so grateful."

Hoffert, in turn, is grateful to have not Gutierrez the player, but Gutierrez the person. He said, in 30 years of coaching, he's never seen any high school athlete have the perspective that she does. He said she understands that anything a person loves can be taken away in an instant, like her senior basketball season, and that it's imperative not to take things for granted.

Her attitude and perspective has rubbed off on her teammates — some intentionally, some unintentionally — and it's brought the

team closer together as a unit. At practice Friday, she was in the thick of things, banging in the post, being a leader, getting some buckets. Hoffert also doesn't treat her any differently. He holds her accountable the same way he does Jansen Edmiston or Sara Ramirez.

She is also the team's biggest cheerleader.

When Hermiston went to Lake Oswego in December for the Nike Interstate Shootout, an opponent of Hermiston's would get super excited after each basket. So when Hermiston went to La Grande for its second game after that tournament, Hoffert said he wanted that energy from the bench.

Gutierrez led the charge.

"After that, I was like, 'Let's be the heart. Let's be the heart when we can,'" she said. "I just feel like that was (my role). 'I just wanted to encourage my teammates. I've always encouraged people to do better and cheered them on, (but) this season it's different. Something's different with the team we have. We have a lot more unity and we're a lot more of a team. I don't want to say I'm the reason why that happened, but I feel like with me being from a different angle I can encourage people in different ways.'"

Now, eight months removed from the devastating injury, the strength in Gutierrez's knee has almost fully



SAM BARBEE PHOTOS

Hermiston senior Jazmin Gutierrez (30) said she wouldn't take back her knee injury because she learned about what it means to have perspective, be a teammate and live in the moment.

returned. She sports a brace from her shin to her thigh to keep her knee stable. She said every now and then she'll feel the scar tissue pop, which is completely normal. The first time that happened she said she panicked and thought she had re-injured it, but now she knows better.

She admits that her skills have diminished some, which is to be expected after such a long layoff, but that doesn't matter to her.

"It feels great (to be back)," she said. "I'm humbled and grateful that I get this opportunity again. My doctor told me that most people don't come back because they're discouraged and they don't want to do it. I took that as a challenge. I said, 'Let's get after it. I want to play again.' I'm definitely grateful and taking it less for granted."

In Hermiston's 79-24 win over Hood River Valley, Gutierrez got some run in the fourth quarter of the blowout. The senior got to the free-throw line and made one of two, her only points of the season thus far. She didn't get in on senior night, though, which hurt Hoffert more than it hurt Gutierrez.

"The game didn't go how we thought, (and) she didn't get an opportunity to play, and I told her that it bothered me," Hoffert said. "It stuck with me all night. She came to me and told me 'It's OK, coach. I get it. I'm upset I didn't get to play on senior night, but you

don't have to worry about it. You don't have to lose sleep over it anymore.' So I talked to the team and told them to put themselves in Jazmin's shoes for 10 minutes. Jaz handled that decision with more maturity than most adults would. She never stopped rooting on her teammates, and when it came down that she never got in, she was all team."

Gutierrez wonders if the injury never happened if she would have understood what it means to be a teammate in a tough time. If given the opportunity to go back to last June and successfully navigate that drill without tearing apart her knee, she said she wouldn't. She would go through everything — the surgery, the rehab, the sitting — again because of the lessons she learned. Plus, she said she found her calling as a physical therapist, something she might never had been exposed to had she not had injured herself.

"It was a learning experience," she said. "I don't think I would've learned as much about myself as I have or matured as much as I have or learned the importance of (being a teammate)."

"There's a lot more to life than basketball, and we get that from her," Hoffert added. "We do want to win. We do want to be successful, but there's more to life than basketball. She's going to move on and be phenomenal in whatever she does."

VIKINGS:

continued from page A9

Viks plan on pressuring Amity's guards, who have shown on film difficulty handling strong ball pressure. Umatilla has done a good job this season of limiting easy post-entry passes by either strong ball pressure or total denies down low.

Bows said he plans on letting Aleesha Watson, Sidney Webb and Kassandra Galbraith run amok among the Warriors.

On top of that, Umatilla has an advantage in conditioning. During the past week practice, Bow has run his girls hard. Monday, they ran 2.5 miles along the McNary Dam trails. Wednesday, they ran 1.5 timed miles on the high school track. Umatilla plans to use that advantage heavily on Saturday.

"Watching teams (out west), they are fatigued. They are tired at half," Bow said. "They're tired in the third quarter, fourth quarter. The defense doesn't sit anymore. Nys-

sa's coach told me Amity's coach had to call timeout four or five times in the fourth quarter just to get his girls water and breaks. My kids don't need that. We're ready to roll conditioning-wise."

Because of their athleticism, Bow expects his Vikings to have a distinct advantage today.

"If our legs are strong, and we can shoot the ball, we'll be fine," Bow said. "Getting up and down the floor, we'll be fine. I don't think they're going to beat us down the floor. They

never beat Nyssa back. They never beat Day-

ton back one time. They just mostly got put-backs

(and) easy baskets down low."

BULLDOGS:

continued from page A9

ship or consolation bracket. "When we get beat, it's about character," Williams said. "We come back and win. We've just got to do our job in the back door. We're gutsy enough to do it."

"Our whole team is solid," Colbray said, who won both of his Friday bouts by pin. "That's what counts,

the whole team effort and not just a couple of front-runners. I think we have the heart to pull it off."

Rodelo exhibited plenty of heart in his 4-2 quarterfinal victory over Justin Montgomery of South Albany. After two previous shots at Montgomery landed outside of the circle, a third with 27 second remaining in the match landed and resulted in the bout-deciding takedown.

"It usually comes down to the end," Rodelo said. "I take one shot, get one take-down and I'm good."

Hermiston finished the first day 3.5 points behind Dallas in the Class 5A team standings. Dallas finished runner-up to Hermiston each of the past two years. Sandy is in third, Hillsboro fourth.

The Bulldogs will go for an eighth state title in nine years today.

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