

In good shape

When this season started, I didn't know what to expect from the Hermiston girls basketball team. I knew the Lady Bulldogs were good — they had placed third in the state tournament the season before. I knew they had players; Jansen Edmiston and Sara Ramirez are for real, and there is good young talent in Maddy Juul and Kynzee Padilla, among others.

But then the Bulldogs lost their first two games. Part of it was working in new rotation players Juul, Tavin Headings and others. Part of it was a tough early-season schedule. Beaverton, which is 20-4 and ranked third in 6A this season, is a consistently good team. Kamiakin from Kennewick is 14-6 and the top seed in the Washington regional bracket.

I wondered then that maybe this was a season Hermiston would have to endure, maybe it was a re-building effort, not a re-tooling year.

I pointed out that the offense just wasn't working well yet. Edmiston looked like she was trying to do too much. Ramirez wasn't shooting lights out like she's capable of doing, and those new rotation players hadn't quite found their roles yet. Plus, Headings, who has really come on lately as a sharpshooter, was still getting back into the swing of the sport after taking a year off to swim.

You know what? I couldn't have been more wrong. Man, these girls can play.

The only loss since their first two was to a Sunnyside (Washington) team that went 19-2 and somehow didn't make it out of its district tournament. The Bulldogs' 21-1 run includes a win over then-top-ranked La Salle Prep, which is now the second-ranked team (most likely) behind Hermiston headed into the postseason.

And, as much as Edmiston and Ramirez do, the emergence of other key players has elevated Hermiston from merely really good into a legitimate title contender.

Let's, though, start with Edmiston, since things usually start with her on the court.

During that oh-so-brief losing skid, Edmiston was trying to do too much. She would get into the lane — something she's very adept at doing — then force a pass to someone who was kind of open instead of finding the most-open receiver. It created turnovers and runouts for Kamiakin and Beaverton, and both teams made the Bulldogs pay. As the season progressed, though, Edmiston became increasingly fundamental with her play, to the point where she is dominating stretches of games.

Tuesday night against Pendleton, Edmiston was doing Edmiston things:



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

jumping passing lanes, dropping easy passes into the laps of her teammates and scoring. The emotional lift she provided was obvious, and Hermiston rode that energy like a horse to a convincing nine-point win to close out its schedule.

Like Edmiston, it looked like Abi Drotzmann didn't have it for whatever reason, early on. Easy shots found their way out instead of in. Sometimes she was out of position on defense, even just slightly, and the Beavers or Braves used that extra space to score.

Recently, though, Drotzmann has been invaluable. It all seemed to come together for her after she signed her letter of intent to play softball at Linfield. Suddenly, she was always in the right spot as Edmiston drove, ready for a dump-off and layup, which she's been very good at doing. When Drotzmann gets in the eight- to 12-point range, Hermiston is close to unbeatable because that means Edmiston is breaking people down off the dribble and drawing all the defensive attention, leaving Drotzmann standing on the block with a huge smile and an open lane.

I don't have enough space to go through everyone, and I would if I could. So, I'll finish with Headings. When she's on from three-point range, you can't affect her shot. It's a quick release, and she has confidence in it, something that has grown since the beginning of the year. Gone is the timid shooter who only pulled if she had five feet of room. Gone is nervous player who doesn't want to make a mistake. Gone is the "I'm just happy to be playing basketball again" attitude. Here is the "You give me an inch, and I'm shooting" Headings, who is a dangerous weapon. You pair that with Ramirez, who has a similar attitude, with Edmiston off the bounce, Drotzmann on the block, Padilla slashing and Juul doing a bit of everything, that's a good variety of scoring threats for a team that can play stifling defense.

I was wondering about this Hermiston girls basketball season because I was only using those two losses as evidence. The sample size was very small, and maybe I was a bit quick to indict them. But the Bulldogs are for real and, in my mind, the favorite to win a state title. If they get La Salle in the state championship game (which would be an amazing story line), it could be one of the best high school basketball games this state has seen.

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

Bulldog grapplers have good first day at state

BY ERIK SKOPIEL
EO MEDIA GROUP

Hermiston junior Bob Coleman was one of six Bulldog wrestlers to emerge unscathed from Friday's opening two rounds at the OSAA State Wrestling Championships at Memorial Coliseum.

While Coleman's passage into today's semifinals might be reward enough, his quarterfinal win over Spencer Barnett of Sandy was satisfying for a variety

of reasons.

Barnett ousted the 170-pound Coleman from state last year with a 6-2 consolation-round victory. The rivalry continued onto the gridiron. This time, Coleman and the Bulldogs not only knocked off Barnett's Pioneers in the opening round of the state playoffs, but a Coleman tackle knocked Barnett out cold, too.

Knotted in a hotly contested rematch Friday, another blow to the head

turned things up a level. Barnett elbowed Coleman on an escape, providing enough ammunition for Coleman to reverse last year's state result and beat Barnett 7-3 to stay unbeaten in Portland.

"I'm a very mild-mannered guy, but when you make me mad I kind of get mad," Coleman said.

The Bulldogs state title defense opened with a flurry Friday but closed with a sputter. Thirteen of 15 Bulldog wrestlers won

their opening matches, but only Liam Tarvin (113), Andy Wagner (120), AJ Tuia (132), Coleman, Sam Colbray (195) and Jesse Rodelo (220) qualified for today's semifinals. Included in the defeats were a pair of quarterfinal matches Hermiston coach Shaun Williams highlighted as pivotal — CJ Hendon's (126) and John-Henry Line's (182).

Still, all 15 Bulldogs remain alive in the champion-

SEE BULLDOGS/A10

GUTIERREZ'S PAIN PROVES TO BE A BLESSING

Senior wouldn't take back gruesome knee injury

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

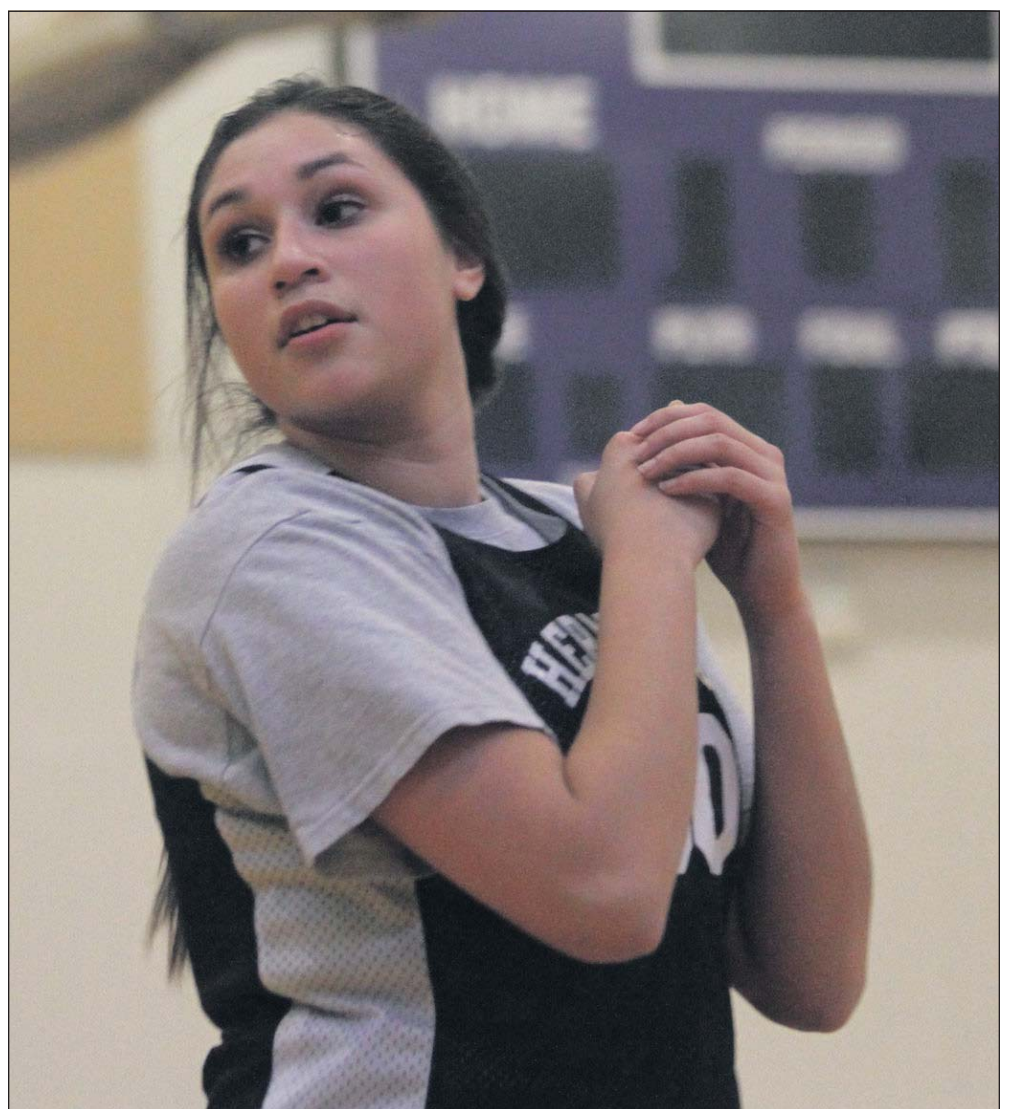
The day was almost over. The Hermiston girls basketball team was running a clinic in June, and it was coming to a close. Senior-to-be Jazmin Gutierrez took an entry pass in the last drill of the last day of camp, spun right, jumped and came down awkwardly on her right knee. It buckled and popped and she fell to the floor in pain.

"I thought my knee got caught on the other girl," Gutierrez said at practice Friday. "The first thing that popped into my head was I'm not going to be able to go on my mission trip that I fundraised for all summer."

Initially, the doctor told Gutierrez it was just a meniscus injury, something that would require surgery but would have her ready for basketball season.

But after an MRI, the full scope of the damage was revealed. Gutierrez's anterior cruciate ligament, which connects the upper and lower portions of the knee, was completely gone. She also partially tore her lateral collateral ligament, which also holds the knee together, and sprained her medial collateral ligament and had a bone contusion. She had to be off her feet for months, and basketball season was in serious jeopardy.

Gutierrez's doctor had a colleague in Sacramen-



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston senior Jazmin Gutierrez suffered a gruesome knee injury in June, rupturing her ACL, partially tearing her MCL and LCL and bruising a bone in her knee.

to, California who specialized in ACL replacements, which is exactly what she needed. So she went down there, had a cadaver ACL surgically inserted and was off crutches in a week and started physical therapy in two, which took her three months to complete.

"It was really hard process to sit and wait, but I gained patience and character, and I learned that

my teammates need me to support them either way," Gutierrez said.

Head coach Steve Hofert was in another gym when Gutierrez injured her knee, and some players went to get him. He said when he saw Gutierrez on the floor in immense pain, he couldn't help but feel a little deflated.

"At the time, we planned on Jazmin being either

on our starting five or our backup five," he said. "It was something she worked for, and she was getting to the right place, and it was a disappointment for us."

Gutierrez was preparing to take over for graduate Shelby Sanders at the block and said she was ready to work on her game and help her team on the court.

SEE GUTIERREZ/A10

Vikings ready to tackle Warriors

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

After the Umatilla girls basketball team beat Nyssa to clinch its spot in the state playoffs, head coach Scott Bow had a surprise for his players.

He handed out blue long-sleeved shirts that read, "Rose to the Occasion," a play on orange "Rise to the Occasion" warm-up shirts the Lady Viks have been wearing all season.

The gesture was meant to acknowledge the Lady Viks reached their goal of advancing further into the playoffs, a goal they had set before the season.

No. 12 Umatilla is hop-

ing it can rise to another occasion with its play-in round matchup with fifth-seeded Amity at 6 p.m. today in Amity. The Warriors are 20-5 on the year and finished second in the West Valley League behind third-ranked Dayton.

On paper, these two squads are similar. Umatilla has scored 1,277 points and allowed 893. Amity has netted 1,272 and allowed 983. Both teams' longest winning streaks have been seven games or more, and their longest losing streaks were just two.

That's where the similarities end.

Umatilla employs an up-tempo style and can run

various sets on offense or schemes on defense. Amity, on the other hand, has its system and sticks to it. The Warriors possess serious size down low and run an aggressive 1-3-1 zone.

"I know that their posts are pretty big, and they go strong to the hoop," senior post Iri Campos said. "They have really good weak-side rebounds, too. They're aggressive."

At practice Thursday, Umatilla was working on how to attack the Amity zone. The Warriors allow easy-entry passes into the corners and short corners due to a lack of lateral quickness from the posts. So the Vikings' offensive

game plan today is to swing the ball around the perimeter and get the defense moving so they can free up opportunities for open jumpers.

When the Warriors played Eastern Oregon League rival Nyssa, Bow said he was impressed with the looks the Bulldogs got on Amity's tough 1-3-1.

"I was very impressed with how many great looks Nyssa got on 'em," Bow said. "To put that in perspective, we should have a lot of opportunities to shoot the ball and do a lot of things against them."

Defensively, the Lady

SEE VIKINGS/A10

GO SEE IT

Saturday, February 28

Girls Basketball
Umatilla @ Amity, 6 p.m.

Sunday, March 1

No events scheduled

Monday, March 2

No events scheduled

Tuesday, March 3

Boys Basketball
Hermiston vs. TBD in play-in game, TBD

Wednesday, March 4

No events scheduled

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Mixed Martial

Arts action coming up

Cage fights are coming to Hermiston at 7 p.m. March 21 at Hermiston High School. The 14-fight card is a fundraiser for the Hermiston wrestling team and features fighters from all over Oregon and Washington licensed through the Oregon State Athletic Commission. Ticket prices are \$20,

and doors open an hour before the first fight.

Hermiston Little League sign-ups are open

Registration for Hermiston Little League is now open. People can sign up at HermistonLittleLeague.com or at a walk-in registration sessions from

5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday at the Hermiston Convention Center. Prices range from \$35 to \$75 depending on the level of the child, and discounts and payment plans are available and can be seen at HermistonLittleLeague.com. A state-issued birth certificate is required if a child is new to the league. Opening ceremonies kick off the 2015 season April 4 at the Field of Dreams.