

Fixing a broken system



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

I don't want to go so far as to say the Oregon state playoff system is broken, but it has to be examined.

In the girls 5A bracket, all of this year's four quarterfinal matchups are intra-league games. There is no diversity. There is no excitement over new opponents. It's just a rehashing of the league schedule in a big gym.

That's it.

It's kind of disappointing, really, especially for the girls involved. Part of the fun of the playoffs is to play other teams from around the state. What's fun — or challenging, for that matter — about driving four hours away just to play a team that hails from a half hour east, as is Hermiston's case with this quarterfinal matchup against rival Pendleton.

The answer: Not much. When I was at Hermiston's last practice in its own gym Monday, that was mostly the sentiment I received. All five starters: Abi Drotzmann, Jansen Edmiston, Sara Ramirez, Kynzee Padilla and Maddy Juul all were a little disappointed to get Pendleton in the first round of the state bracket.

Head coach Steve Hoffert acknowledged that the rankings and seeds are all done by numbers and formulas, and they are what they are. He said that this prevents a strong league from advancing two teams into the semi-finals, and he's right. After the playoffs this year, I received a few complaints, shall we say, from coaches about how the formulas are calculated and the weight given to certain games when calculating.

Roughly the same thing is happening in Washington, but it's also quite different. Washington has a regional playoff after districts to thin the field instead of having a play-in round of 16. A well-known basketball coach from my hometown was quoted as saying that the regional system "needs to go away."

I've heard the same things about the ranking systems used by the Oregon School Activities Association. Not that they need to go away, of course, but they need to be tweaked. They need to be looked at so the teams that most deserve a high ranking get one.

Try this on for size. In the NBA, if a team wins its division, it is seeded no worse than fourth in its given

conference. A team's record could be under .500, but if it wins its division, it is seeded fourth in the playoffs.

I think the OSAA could mimic that strategy. The Umatilla girls team didn't win its league, but it fell three spots in the rankings after losing its district title game to Vale, a team that wound up finishing third in the state.

The Lady Viks went from hosting a playoff game in a gym where they are nearly unbeatable to going on the road and playing the fourth-best team in the state according to its finish: Amity.

"There is no excitement over new opponents. It's just a rehashing of the league schedule in a big gym."

The system feels broken. In my mind, Umatilla did enough to earn a home playoff game. The Echo girls team, too, after winning its league and district got a tough draw against Adrian as the eighth seed. How does a team win its league and district and is seeded eighth? It doesn't make sense to me. Sure, they got a home playoff game, but a league and district champ should most certainly be higher than eighth. At least, that's how I look at it.

It's hard to know what the OSAA will do in response to the 5A girls bracket. It is the only bracket that has as many (or any) league matchups in it. But I think that's something officials should try to avoid in the future. I don't know if that means they should try to recalibrate the formulas or just tweak brackets once they're set, but they have to avoid this in the future.

As it sits, the 5A girls bracket is just a glorified set of district games. That's not a state bracket. That will never be a state bracket. It's now up to the OSAA to shrug its shoulders or roll up its sleeves and find a solution. I hope it's the latter.

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Hermiston girls to play Pendleton for fourth time

Bulldogs tip off at 1:30 p.m. today

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

The 5A girls state basketball bracket is full of familiarity.

All four quarterfinal games will feature intra-league matchups as Hermiston plays league rival Pendleton, Silverton plays Corvallis, Springfield gets Crater and Hillsboro faces off against La Salle Prep.

The Bulldogs' quarterfinal matchup with Pendleton (17-9), which is set to tip at 1:30 p.m. at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis, is viewed as both disappointing and favorable by top-seeded Hermiston (22-3).

Hermiston head coach Steve Hoffert said he has never seen a bracket that was so uncreative, and he doesn't like it.

"That's the disappointing thing to me," he said after Hermiston's 70-36 win over Crescent Valley on Saturday. "The state, I think, needs to consider looking at that kind of stuff and making the necessary adjustments if that happens because you're back to eliminating and limiting a strong conference from possibly having two teams in the semi-finals by doing this. I know it's the way the rankings fall, (but) I would hope they would look at this in the future and avoid this kind of thing from happening for that reason."

Hermiston freshman Maddy Juul agreed.

"It's kind of unfortunate we had to play one of our conference teams, but it's good because we know the team," she said at practice Monday. "We know what to look forward to and how to change our game to prepare for it."

Hermiston, however, is looking past its disappointment and is focusing on how to beat a team four times in one season after coming away the victors of their last three season matchups. As many Bulldogs noted Monday, it can be difficult to beat a team three times, never mind four. The Bulldogs, howev-



EO MEDIA GROUP FILE PHOTO

Pendleton's Kristin Williams and Hermiston's Sara Ramirez go up for a rebound in the Bulldogs' 57-54 win against the Bulldogs Feb. 3 in Pendleton.

er, had a few things going in their favor headed into today's game.

First, many of the Bulldogs have already played in a state tournament game in a large arena. Hermiston hasn't played in Gill Coliseum, as the bracket the last few years was played out in Matthew Knight Arena in Eugene, but the experience of playing in important games is something Hermiston has and Pendleton doesn't.

"We'll be more relaxed, I think," senior forward Abi Drotzmann said. "They'll be hyped because they're there, and they'll be super excited. My sophomore year when I first went to state, I was like, 'Wow, this is crazy. This is amazing.' My sophomore year, I didn't start, of course, but I still played, and I was nervous. I think they're gonna be so hyped and nervous. I feel like we have almost everyone on our team who's been to a state tournament before. So I think that's a big advantage for us."

In addition, Hermiston has already beaten the Buckaroos three times. In

those rivalry games, the Bulldogs have won by an average of seven points, with the closest matchup a 57-54 squeaker on Feb. 3 in Pendleton. Hermiston won by nine points in the final two games. In those games, Hermiston built sizable leads but let Pendleton back in the games.

"I think focus right now is our biggest thing," sophomore wing Kynzee Padilla said. "We can focus when we need to, but we should be able to focus all the time. I think if we focus all the time, we should be fine."

Despite their in-season success against a single opponent, the familiarity can be a detriment, too.

"We know they're gonna do this. They know we're gonna do this," Hoffert said. "The girls start to figure out things they shouldn't be trying to figure out instead of letting the game go, and they do too much analyzing."

Despite beating them three times, Hermiston isn't overlooking the Bucks. The Bulldogs are treating the Buckaroos as just another

team to qualify for the final eight.

"We have to go at it like it's any other game, like it's a state game or like a Pendleton game," junior guard Jansen Edmiston said. "We need to do what we're gonna do, even if it was anyone else."

In their previous wins over Pendleton, especially the two nine-point wins later in February, the Bulldogs took Pendleton out of its comfort zone with a pressing, aggressive defense. That is their plan again, but there aren't any secrets among the two teams. Pendleton will try to do the same thing: break the press and get layups and hope its 6-foot-3 center Kristin Williams can hold court in the lane and grab rebounds and get easy points.

In addition, Hermiston will try to deny Pendleton's leading scorer, Marlene Bodmer, and force other scorers to beat them. In the first matchup, Pendleton's Kiana Sperl rose to the occasion, netting 16 points in the three-point loss. In the final meeting between the Interstate 84 rivals, Bodmer was completely eliminated, scoring her first points in the fourth quarter and finishing with just two points on 1-of-9 shooting.

Hermiston will also focus on keeping the lanky Williams out of the lane by aggressively boxing out. The emphasis on rebounding is also heightened this week, as both Williams and Sperl are good rebounders and can create problems for the Bulldogs.

Hermiston knows that, however. Hermiston also knows that Pendleton knows exactly how the Bulldogs' offense and defense operate.

"It's just a mind thing," junior guard Sara Ramirez said of playing Pendleton four times. "You just gotta go out there and want to (win) more than they do every time you step on the court."

"There's so much heart on our team, and we have this want to be successful at the state tournament," Juul added. "I just feel like we're gonna go out there and do that."

If the Bulldogs win, they will play the winner of the Corvallis/Silverton game at 6:30 p.m. Thursday.

Hermiston dismantles Crescent Valley to advance

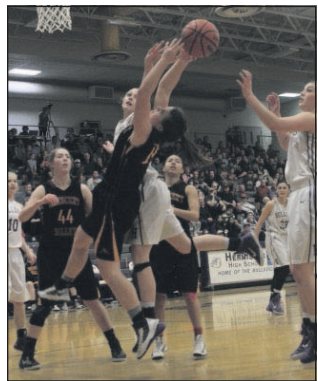
BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

The excitement is back for the Hermiston girls basketball team.

After a grueling league schedule and its 70-36 play-in round win over Crescent Valley Saturday, the Lady Bulldogs have secured a spot in the round of eight Wednesday in Corvallis. Sara Ramirez led the way for Hermiston with 16 points, and Jansen Edmiston was the only other Bulldog in double figures with 11.

Top-seeded Hermiston (22-3) overwhelmed the 16th-seeded Raiders from the opening tip. After four minutes, Hermiston led 11-2 then embarked on a run that would essentially put away the Raiders in the first half. Hermiston launched a 15-0 run that started in the first quarter and snaked around to the second to turn an 11-6 game into a 26-6 game.

"It's another check box on the list," head coach Steve Hoffert said after the win. "We expected to be (in the quarterfinals), but the excitement is real now because we're there. It's not, 'OK, we have two weeks to go and



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Jansen Edmiston (center) and Crescent Valley's Elisia Harder fight for a rebound in front of Bulldog Maddy Juul (right) and Crescent Valley's Kate Bird (44) during the first half of Hermiston's runaway 70-36 play-in round win over the Raiders Saturday in Hermiston.

we should be in the state tournament.' It's like 'Ok, now we're there. Now we're in it.'"

HERMISTON 70, CRESCENT VALLEY 36

CV 6 10 14 6 36
HHS 16 21 11 22 70
Crescent Valley — M. Frias 4, S. Huang 2, E. Harder 11, N. Barrett 3, V. Taylor 0, D. Barrett 8, M. Henke 0, A. Taylor 4, T. Gray 0, M. Sherman 0, K. Bird 4, J. Dolan 0.
Hermiston — S. Moore 6, S. Gilbert 6, A. Drotzmann 9, M. Foley 1, M. Juul 7, M. Kelly 0, J. Edmiston 11, K. Padilla 2, T. Headings 8, R. Andreason 0, J. Gutierrez 4, S. Ramirez 16.
3-point field goals — Crescent Valley 2, Hermiston 8. Free throws — Crescent Valley 6-15, Hermiston 10-16. Fouls — Crescent Valley 15, Hermiston 14.



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Abbi Drotzmann (12) rises for a layup over Maya Frias during the first half of Hermiston's 70-36 play-in round matchup over Crescent Valley Saturday afternoon in Hermiston.

GO SEE IT

Wednesday, March 11

Girls Basketball
Hermiston vs. Pendleton @ Gill Coliseum, 1:30 p.m.

Thursday, March 12

Girls Basketball
* Hermiston vs. Silverton/Corvallis @ Gill Coliseum, 6:30 p.m.

Friday, March 13

Girls Basketball
* Hermiston vs. TBD @ Gill Coliseum, 6:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 14

No events scheduled

* IF HERMISTON WINS