

Meeting expectations

There's a lot to say about the Hermiston girls basketball team.



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

The Bulldogs lived up to expectations, they pushed the ceiling higher and they continued the success started by the football team. And they did all these things before they even took the court Friday night to play newfound rival La Salle Prep in the state championship game.

But I think the one word that best describes the Bulldogs is resilient.

At the beginning of the year, the rotation was a question. Not that head coach Steve Hoffert didn't have any players, but some things had changed.

Jazmin Gutierrez wasn't ready to play yet. Maddy Juul, a freshman, was making it really difficult to keep her out of the starting lineup in place of the injured Gutierrez. Tavin Headings was back after a year in the pool, and Hoffert didn't know how that would all fit together. He told me at the first practice that he would have a really hard time not starting Juul, that she literally just walked in and was varsity ready.

She's started every game. Headings came in and found her stride a week into the schedule and eventually became a first-team all-league performer off the bench. Her shooting gives a lift that Hermiston really needs.

Things didn't go well at first, however. I've written multiple times about those first two games of the year against good teams: Kamiakin and Beaverton. Although they weren't blowouts, they were still home losses, and, for a team with state title aspirations, 0-2 isn't a good way to start. Not in the least.

I say resilience because this is a moment where the Bulldogs could have folded. It was a realistic possibility. Not that Hoffert — or the girls, for that matter — would have let it happen, but the season hung in the balance there, even for a moment. One or two more early losses could have damaged their confidence too severely for a significant rebound.

It didn't happen, however, and everything came together very, very quickly.

Suddenly, Hermiston

SEE RESILIENCE/A10

was the juggernaut everyone thought it would be. Hoffert knew it. The girls knew it. Heck, even the fans saw a change.

I think it was at the Nike Interstate Shootout in Lake Oswego around Christmas that everything gelled, and I can point to a specific game there.

It was against 'Iolani from Hawaii, a small-school power and a team that consistently wins state titles in various sports. It took three overtimes for the Bulldogs to dispatch the Raiders, and I would bet that Hermiston learned a lot about itself then. It was the first game that the reserves played just as important of a role as the starters, and it allowed the starters to rest against a small, quick, aggressive 'Iolani team.

It was the game when every player found her role. Sydney Moore became the energy-bringing, ball-hawking back-up point guard that could hit an open jumper. Riley Andreason could come in and hit some shots and spark a run. Headings became a marksman from three-point range. No longer did Hermiston depend on its starters for every last bit of contributions.

From there, Hermiston had all the momentum it would need.

But here's another game that cemented the Bulldogs as favorites in my mind: the win over La Salle three days after a loss to Sunnyside, Washington.

Without starting wing Kynzee Padilla, Hermiston went to La Salle and downed the Falcons on their home floor 61-57. If the Bulldogs weren't confident before that game, they certainly were after. That win secured the OSAA top ranking, which they held. They cruised through the Columbia River Conference slate unscathed and made their way to the state championship final.

It's strange to think that the season almost hinged on games played in December, but it really felt like that.

Things could have gone sideways, but Hoffert and the roster held firm. It's

DISAPPOINTING LOSS

Bulldogs drop state title game to La Salle

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Hermiston got the championship game it desired, with a No. 1 vs. No. 2 matchup against La Salle Prep. The result didn't go quite the way Hermiston had hoped, as La Salle knocked off the top-seeded Bulldogs 51-46 in the 5A state championship Friday night at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis.

Falcon sophomore guard Aleah Goodman poured in 27 points, the highest total of the 5A state girls basketball tournament. Sara Ramirez led the Bulldogs with 15 points.

The loss ended Hermiston's 13-game winning streak, which started against the same Falcons squad in January, a win that catapulted the Bulldogs to the top of the OSAA rankings, while the Falcons avenged their earlier and only loss this season by defeating Hermiston to take home the state title. Tavin Headings and Ramirez were both named first team all-tournament performers, and Jansen Edmiston was selected to the second team.

The Bulldogs found themselves in some serious foul trouble in the first half when Abi Drotzmann and Ramirez were both whistled for their third. That forced Riley Andreason onto the floor for long stretches. Hermiston missed Drotzmann's rebounding and interior defense and Ramirez's aggressiveness and activity on the defensive end. Drotzmann could never get things going, finishing with just two points.

Hermiston got behind early when La Salle caught fire from outside. Taycee Wedin hit three three-pointers in the first four minutes to spring La Salle ahead 11-1, and it was an uphill fight the rest of the way for Hermiston. It was an early indication of La Salle's shooting ability, and it never stopped. The Falcons finished the game 8-13 from deep. Speaking with Erick Olsen on KOHU after



EO MEDIA GROUP PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Hermiston's Sara Ramirez drives past La Salle's Taycee Wedin in the Bulldogs' 51-46 loss to the Falcons Friday in the 5A state championship game in Corvallis.

the game, Hermiston head coach Steve Hoffert said the Bulldogs failed to sufficiently close out on shooters and lost track of matchups on switches.

He also said he knew that La Salle's offense almost comes exclusively from Goodman and Wedin, but the pair of underclassmen found shot after shot. Wedin had 20 in the win.

The Bulldogs slowly worked their way back into the game, early on. Ramirez's deep three-ball with 1:23 left in the first quarter cut the lead down to four at 11-7, but Wedin came right back with a deep 3 of her own to push the margin back to seven at 14-7.

It was a common theme throughout the night: Every time Hermiston made a run to get back into the game, La Salle responded to stretch the lead.

The same happened in the second quarter when Hermiston came within one point at 18-17 on a Maddy Juul free throw, but La Salle closed the second period on a 9-3 run to set the halftime margin at 27-20.

Edmiston, who was largely forgotten in the first half and held to less than 10 points for the first two

games of the tournament, finally popped and started the third quarter on a tear, scoring Hermiston's first seven points, and Headings' jumper with 5 minutes on the clock tied things up at 29. It was the only time Hermiston tied all night.

Again, La Salle answered. Wedin sandwiched two three-pointers around a pair of Edmiston free throws for a four-point lead, which grew to six at the end of the period.

Hermiston cut the lead to three in the fourth when Headings got a layup to go, but La Salle made all four of its free throws down the stretch, and the Bulldogs' only points in the final two and a half minutes were a pair of Drotzmann free throws with 3.6 seconds left and the game already out of reach.

LA SALLE PREP 51, HERMISTON 46

LSP	14	1	3
15	9	51	
HHS	9	1	1
16	10	46	

La Salle Prep — T. Goodman 1-1, 0-2 2; M. Cook 0-2, 2-2 2; A. Goodman 8-15, 9-10 27; A. Jansen 0-3, 0-1, 0; T. Wedin

6-15, 2-2, 20; D. Mantero 0-0, 0-0, 0; S. Tran 0-2, 0-0, 0; C. Jansen 0-1, 0-0, 0; A. Klein 0-0, 0-0, 0.

Hermiston — A. Drotzmann 0-5, 2-2, 2; M. Juul 1-2, 2-4, 4; S. Ramirez 5-12, 4-4, 15; K. Padilla 0-3, 1-2, 1; J. Edmiston 3-13, 3-6, 10; S. Moore 0-3, 0-2, 0; T. Headings 5-7, 0-1, 12; R. Andreason 1-1, 0-0, 2.

3-point field goals — La Salle Prep 8-13 (A. Goodman 2-2, A. Jansen 0-1, T. Wedin 6-10); Hermiston 4-14 (S. Ramirez 1-2, K. Padilla 0-2, J. Edmiston 1-5, S. Moore 0-2, T. Headings 2-3). Fouls — La Salle Prep 17, Hermiston 19. Fouled out — J. Edmiston (HHS).

HERMISTON 56, CORVALLIS 49

Sara Ramirez led the way in Hermiston's semi-final win over Corvallis, netting a game-high 20 points to put the Bulldogs in the state final for the first time since 2008. The win exorcised some demons for Hermiston as Corvallis knocked off the Bulldogs by 20 points last year in the semi-finals.

Hermiston led by as many as 14 in the second half, and the seven-point margin of victory was the smallest it was that entire second half.

HERMISTON 48, PENDLETON 30

In the fourth and final matchup between Columbia River Conference rivals, Hermiston was dominant Wednesday. The Bulldogs got key contributions from unlikely sources, as Abi Drotzmann and Kynzee Padilla led the Bulldogs with 10 points each. Sara Ramirez and Jansen Edmiston were each held to eight points.

Early on, both teams struggled to acclimate to the new surroundings at Gill Coliseum, but Hermiston adjusted quicker and Pendleton never found its rhythm. The Bucks made just eight field goals out of 39 attempts, and Hermiston pulled away, leading by as many as 20 in the final minutes.

Cougar softball team starting new season with confidence

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Positivity surrounds the Echo softball program going into the upcoming season.

After a frustrating 2014 campaign, 2015 promises to be a step forward with numerous returners and some confidence that was lacking last season.

A year ago, the Cougars finished 9-14 (5-9 Eastern Oregon League) and lost five of their last seven games. They finished a distant fifth behind Nyssa in the EOL. Head coach Bryan Bailey said that team was miles behind from where his team is now.

"We got a great schedule this year," Bailey said during practice Wednesday.

"We're gonna see some quality teams. We're back up playing 3A again. I think we're gonna compete. I think we're gonna be in the thick of the playoff hunt this year. I'm pretty excited about what we've got."

Bailey has a mix of key returners and a few newcomers to push the softball program higher. He said it is important the girls score runs, something they struggled to do last season. Echo had a minus-18 run differential (140-158) last season, and only Umatilla scored fewer runs in the EOL.

"We're gonna play traditional softball," Bailey said. "Last year, as team, we batted just over .200, and that's with two batters over .400. We fell off the cliff after three, four hitters."

To combat that lack of offensive

potency, Bailey has gone back to basics. His girls are hitting off the tee, taking soft toss and side tosses, in addition to hitting off a pitching machine. He wants them to build the fundamentals of hitting early without the added variables of a pitcher trying to get them out or of live batting practice with a pitcher who might be struggling.

On the field, Bailey said he needs four girls to have big years to help drive the Cougars: Bailey Strofe, Erika Parks, Hannah McCarty and Kenzie Blankenship. Strofe will play shortstop and second base, Parks catches, McCarty mans the hot corner and Blankenship is at first base.

SEE COUGARS/A10

Umatilla runners sign letters of intent with EOU

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Three Umatilla track stars have signed letters of intent to compete at Eastern Oregon University next year.

Andrea Lemus-Cisneros, a state champion in the 100 meters, Amie Zitterkob, who took second place in the 100 meters, and Berenice Chavez, who joined Lemus-Cisneros and Zitterkob on the second place 4x100 meter team, all signed National Letters

of Intent Wednesday to become Mountaineers.

"I wasn't sure where I wanted to go, but then once I knew that they were going (to EOU), I kind of thought it would be (for me)," Chavez said Thursday, flanked by her current and future teammates. "It's not so far from home, but it's still close so you have your family there, but you also get that college experience that you want. And just knowing you're gonna

SEE RUNNERS/A10



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Umatilla seniors (from left) Amie Zitterkob, Andrea Lemus-Cisneros and Berenice Chavez signed National Letters of Intent to run track at Eastern Oregon University next year.

GO SEE IT

Saturday, March 14

Track and Field
Stanfield @ Hood River, 9 a.m.

Sunday, March 15

No events scheduled

Monday, March 16

Lacrosse
Hermiston @ Southridge (WA), 5 p.m.
Baseball
Stanfield @ Mac-Hi, 4 p.m.
Softball
Echo @ Heppner, 4 p.m.

Tuesday, March 17

Baseball
Hermiston vs. Ridgeview @ Armand Larive Middle School, 4:30 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Touchet (WA), 2, 4 p.m.
Softball
Umatilla vs. Touchet (WA), 2, 4 p.m.

Wednesday, March 18

Lacrosse
Hermiston vs. Richland, 5 p.m.