

# Spring an exciting time for sports

Ah, spring is here. That means warmer weather, water falling from the sky (sometimes), the smell of freshly cut grass and ... baseball.

It also means that softball, golf, tennis, track and lacrosse are in season, too. But nothing makes me happier than pine tar, dirt and leather.

Baseball has always been something that brings me closer to other people. Some of my best friends are people I met playing baseball, and I spent the majority of my childhood playing for my dad. One of my best memories was my sixth birthday, when my dad came and picked me up early from school and took me to a Mariners game at the Kingdome. He called in to have them put my name up on the Jumbotron when they acknowledged birthdays, and he brought a video camera to record it but was politely, yet forcefully, told to put it away. I also got my foot stuck in a seat when Jay Buhner went yard, and I was more upset about my foot than happy about Jay hitting one out.

To me, baseball is about community. In a way, it's a leisure sport. To some that makes it boring. To me, that makes it about people. There is ample time to talk and joke and tell stories. There's ample time to talk about what's happening, what happened and what will happen.

The Hermiston baseball team is interesting. The Bulldogs have a bunch of returners and also a group of freshmen coming in that first-year head coach Lance Hawkins is excited about. I'm interested to see how he fits the pieces together.

On the softball



SAM BARBEE  
FROM THE SIDELINES  
Sports reporter

side, Hermiston has a bunch of returners, too, including Linfield-bound Abi Drotzmann, so I'm looking to see how the girls can improve on last year's finish.

At Umatilla, it's not about winning; it's about building programs. Neither the baseball nor the softball team finished last year's schedule for various reasons, and Corleone "Booter" Lewis in baseball and Monty Williams in softball are looking to at least finish the year while also building a foundation.

I've always thought winning was a three-step process: First you have to learn how to compete. Then you have to learn how to win games. Then you have to win those games. Right now, Umatilla is on the first step. The Vikings have to learn how to compete — how to be in games for six or seven innings. That takes time. You're not going to make every play, but you can't become so wrapped up in not making that play that you don't make the next one, either. It might be a long spring for Umatilla, but, as the cliché goes, Rome wasn't built in a day.

In Stanfield/Echo, things are looking good. The Tiger baseball team is poised to improve on last year's finish — a 10-7 loss to Harrisburg in the first round of the state playoffs, and the softball team is looking to rebound after an "underachieving" year, according to head coach Bryan Bailey.

Stanfield has about as complete a team you could ask for; it's just young. It's three best

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## GO SEE IT

### Wednesday, March 18

**Baseball**  
Hermiston @ Pasco, 5 p.m.

### Thursday, March 19

**Track**  
Hermiston @ Pendleton, 12 p.m.  
Stanfield @ Pendleton, 12 p.m.

**Tennis**  
Umatilla vs. Helix, 4 p.m.  
Stanfield @ Riverside, 4 p.m.

**Softball**  
Echo vs. Union, 3 p.m.

### Friday, March 20

**Golf**  
Hermiston boys @ The Dalles Invite, 10 a.m.  
Echo @ Echo Hills Tournament, 10 a.m.

**Baseball**  
Hermiston @ Central Catholic @ Hillsboro Hops Stadium, 3 p.m.  
Umatilla @ Sherman County, 1 p.m.  
Stanfield vs. Orting (WA) @ Ephrata (WA), 3 p.m.

**Tennis**  
Umatilla vs. Weston-McEwen, 1 p.m.

**Softball**  
Hermiston vs. Post Falls (ID), 3 p.m.

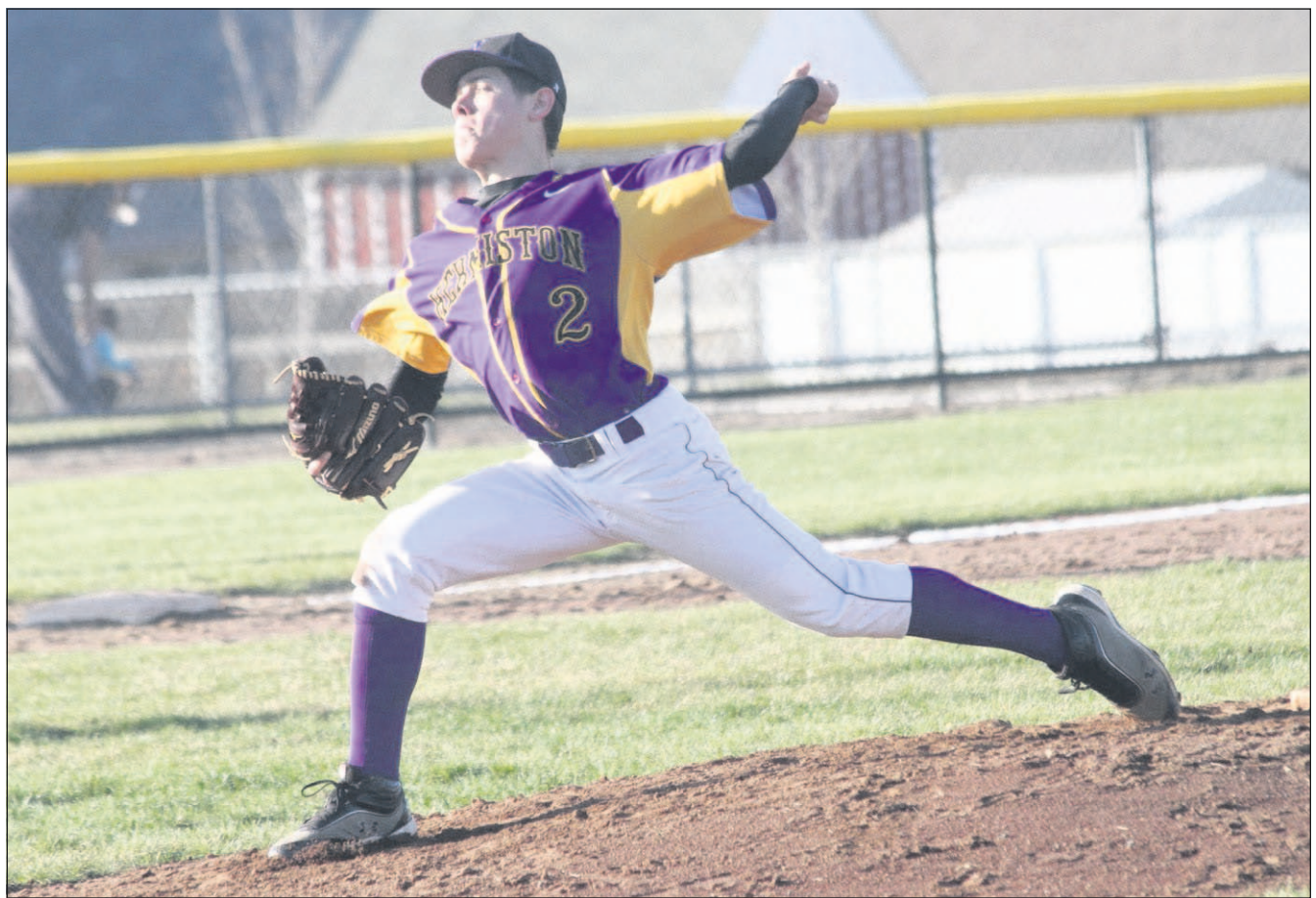
**Lacrosse**  
Hermiston @ Century, 7 p.m.

### Saturday, March 21

**Lacrosse**  
Hermiston vs. Canby, 2 p.m.

**Baseball**  
Umatilla @ Dufur, 11 a.m.  
Umatilla vs. Kennedy @ Dufur, 1 p.m.  
Stanfield vs. Cascade (Leavenworth) @ Cashmere (WA), 11 a.m.  
Stanfield @ Cashmere (WA), 1:30 p.m.

**Track**  
Stanfield @ Ephrata (WA), 11 a.m.



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston junior RJ Robles, pictured here in mid-delivery, was very effective in Tuesday's 9-4 loss to Ridgeview. Making his first start, the lefty went four innings of shutout ball, allowed just three hits, walked one and struck out six.

## Hermiston drops season opener 9-4

### Robles effective in first start

BY SAM BARBEE  
HERMISTON HERALD

In his first year as head coach of the Hermiston Bulldog baseball team, Lance Hawkins didn't quite know what he had.

He knew he had a couple arms and some experience, and he hoped the defense would play well. Unfortunately for him Tuesday, the defense let the Bulldogs down.

Hermiston blew a 3-0 lead when it gave up four runs in the fifth inning and

four in the sixth behind three errors to drop its season opener 9-4 Tuesday to the Ridgeview Ravens.

RJ Robles started on the bump and was the highlight for the Bulldogs (0-1). The junior lefty threw four scoreless innings, struck out six and walked just one on three hits.

"RJ threw well," Hawkins said. "I think all the pitchers threw well. We walked one and hit one, but I think the big thing (that hurt us) is early (with the bases loaded in the first two innings and scoring one and then giving up nine runs, and the ball doesn't leave the infield. That hurts.

"For a first game, we

coaches came to an agreement that we weren't really ready to show up," Hawkins added. "I'll take the blame there. That won't happen again."

Hawkins said he was surprised that despite a good two weeks of practice, the Bulldogs were flat. Hermiston committed three errors and allowed eight runs in the fifth and six innings.

Hermiston had opportunities early to put away Ridgeview but couldn't get the timely hit when needed. In the first, with Bulldogs Jay Lindeman, Close Smith and Michael Gossler on, Tyler Sexton grounded into a 1-2-3 double play to end

the inning scoreless.

In the bottom of the second, Dylan Caldwell and Robles walked, and Kyler Mikami reached on an error, which plated Caldwell. Lindeman was beamed, but an infield fly and a strikeout with the bases loaded again ended the threat.

Hermiston would get two runs more in the fourth when Caldwell, who walked, scored on an error off the bat of Robles, and Lindeman's single on a hit-and-run scored Robles.

With Robles on a pitch count and placed in left field and Hermiston up 3-0, Ridgeview made the

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## Despite second-place finish, Hermiston girls still hungry

BY SAM BARBEE  
HERMISTON HERALD

After the Hermiston girls basketball team lost the 5A girls state championship to La Salle Friday emotions ran high among the players, who were understandably disappointed and sad at the defeat.

Five days removed from that low point, the program is at its highest of the season, head coach Steve Hoffert said.

Following the most successful season ever for a Hermiston girls basketball team, Hoffert said the returning players — who are plentiful — are already thinking about next season, thinking about how to return to the state final, thinking about how to win the state final.

"There's a lot of hunger there now," Hoffert said. "We talk about getting there. We (hadn't) been there for years. But once you get there, preparing for the next season is much different, and, now, they're already starting preparations for next season, which never happened last year."

The mentality of the program has changed, and players, fans and coaches can trace it back to the 2014-15 campaign, Hoffert said. No longer is Hermiston a team that can only make it as far as the semi-finals. The Bulldogs have proven they're a program that can reach the finals, and with its two best players, Jansen Edmiston and Sara Ramirez, returning next season, Hermiston is looking to get their again.

Hoffert said this season's success can trace back to two games in December that were more important than the team realized at the time. The two losses to Kamiakin and Beaverton were what Hoffert called "gut-check" games. That was when Hermiston's mindset changed, he said.

The Bulldogs had another check in January, right before Hermiston took La Salle. The Bulldogs lost to Sunnyside, Washington, on its home floor after they blew a late lead. Hoffert said they never should have lost that game, but it provided



EO MEDIA GROUP FILE 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.

another "gut-check" that they turned around and used to beat La Salle on its home floor.

Hoffert used the word

"resilient" to describe his team after those moments.

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## Stanfield ready to continue winning ways

BY SAM BARBEE  
HERMISTON HERALD

The Stanfield baseball team is primed to improve on its early exit in last year's state playoffs.

The Tigers finished 20-8 (10-2) last year in the 3A Eastern Oregon League and earned a top-five ranking, but they couldn't get past Harrisburg in the first round of the state tournament.

Now, with most of its core returning, Stanfield

is ready to get things going Friday against Orting, Washington.

"The (coaching) staff has been pretty impressed with how dedicated they are," head coach Bryan Johnson said. "They're all coachable. They get it. We're starting farther ahead than we have. Unfortunately, basketball didn't make the state tournament. I think they're excited to play some other people."

Almost the entire group

of athletes played together over the summer, and Johnson said that, plus the early start with basketball players, which isn't usually the case, is a major contributor to how well the season has begun.

That core is largely made up of sophomores. Dylan Grogan, Thylor Monkus, Ryan Bailey and Tony Flores all factor in as important pieces to Stanfield's baseball puzzle.

"Those four guys are

kind of our top-performing returners," Johnson said. "They all four hit, play defense. They'll be pitching and catching. They're good athletes."

Add in some upperclassmen in Steven Allen and Johnathon Wampler, and Johnson feels rather good about his roster.

Johnson pointed out Monkus, who was practicing behind the plate last

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