

Rising expectations



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE SIDELINES
Sports reporter

Progress. It's a tough thing to quantify. Win-loss records can show improvement. Numbers and statistics can point to improvements, or we can simply use the eye test: "Does this team look better than last year?"

There's another way to identify progress that is a little tougher to see from the outside, however. It's expectations. Internal expectations, that is. Hermiston lacrosse team head coach Scott Hammond keeps talking about his athletes playing up to their potential, playing as well as they can. He said after Friday's 10-1 win that if they play the best they can against a team like Summit, a team that's rolling to the High Desert Division title, and they lose by, say, five but played their best, he'll walk away from that game satisfied. If they win and play poorly, however, he'll be upset. He said he's not looking for wins, but looking to fulfill his expectations.

The Bulldogs dominated just about every aspect of the game Friday, from offense to defense to scooping ground balls, and yet a smile was noticeably absent from Hammond's face.

Senior attackman Noah Davis did smile after the win. After all, his team has more wins than losses for the first time since he's been a Bulldog. His team is in the thick of the playoff hunt, a concept foreign to him and his teammates.

But Davis was also looking at what the Bulldogs could have done better. I asked him if it's a little ironic that they won 10-1 but are still focused on what they can improve at, where they can shave some mistakes off and leave a lean, aggressive team and style.

"Hammond knows we weren't playing at our level," Davis responded. "We played La Salle Prep (last) Tuesday, and that was a way more intense game. It was down to the wire, goal for goal in that fourth quarter, and we came out on top. So he knew we should've been doing a lot better against this team."

The internal expectations have risen. The players have shown the coaching staff what they're capable of, and now they're being held to that standard. It's a sign the program is moving from the depths. Four years ago, Davis' freshman year, the Bulldogs didn't win a game. Four years later, they're in the playoff hunt and shrugging off

10-1 wins like they're nothing.

That's a big deal for a program that doesn't have much history surrounding it. That's a big deal for a program that remembers how important it was to win a game at all. Now they're looking at their performances critically instead of just being happy to be playing, winning, scoring or whatever it might be.

The internal expectations have risen.

But it's not all harping on perfection. Hammond conceded that sometimes athletes don't have their best days. I'm sure Jesse Owens had days where he wasn't the fastest man on the track, but that didn't stop him from dominating his events at the 1936 Olympics in Berlin. High school athletes also have down days. Perhaps Hermiston had a down day Friday. Hammond suggested it did but liked what that created.

"We obviously didn't have our energy (Friday night), but our kids fought through that adversity and still got it done," he said. "There's a lot to be said for that. It shows a lot of growth by the kids, as well. A lot of teams, when they don't have their best, just fold it in and give away a game like that, but our kids didn't do that. They battled through that. I'm proud of that, for sure."

So two kinds of progress are on display here. First, the progress of not simply being happy that "we" scored more goals than "them." The Bulldogs are now more focused on how they're playing during wins than on merely winning. It's a culture-changing mentality.

One more sign of progress is just simply an observation. More and more people are bringing their folding chairs to sit on the grass at Sunset Elementary and watch the Bulldogs.

"The program's moving in the right direction," Hammond said. "We're excited. The kids are excited. How many people (did) we have out here? A hundred? I mean, there are a lot of people out here. It says we're doing something right and moving in the right direction and reaffirming what we're doing here, that we're doing the right things."

Too right, coach. Too right.

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

Bulldogs pluck Eagles

Taylor Betz leads Hermiston to first CRC win since 2013

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

Hood River Valley's softball uniforms are all navy blue with "SOAR" boldly screen printed across the chest, an overt reference to the school's nickname — the Eagles.

The Eagles' wings were clipped Tuesday, however, by a desperate Hermiston team 10-0 in five innings behind another stellar home outing from Taylor Betz and top-to-bottom run production.

Betz pitched all five innings, allowing just two hits and striking out five. Mikayla Kopacz went 1-for-3 with an RBI double in the first inning, giving Hermiston all the runs it would need. Ellery Jones also chipped in with a two-RBI single, and Ashley Moser scored the 10th run in the bottom of the fifth.

Hermiston head coach Kylee Lete was proud of the offensive and defensive effort in Hermiston's (7-12, 1-5) first league win in a season and a half.

"The girls came out with energy," she said. "That's the biggest thing we talked about (Monday) and we talked to them about (Tuesday). We tell them all the time, 'We got the talent,' and they just had it today. They had the look in their eye they weren't going to let anything go."

"I think it was very important for us because it was way overdue," Betz said of the win. "We knew that we could beat this team, and we knew what we had to do. We've been saying what we need to do, but nobody's been acting on it. (Tuesday), we just said, 'We need to get it done,' and we did."

The win ends a frustrating stretch for Hermiston, with leads blown and opportunities missed. Tuesday, neither happened, and most of it started with Betz in the circle.

It was actually Hood River who missed a major opportunity. In the top of the second, Betz plunked Jenni Packer to open the inning, and then Makena Zeller reached when the third strike found its way to the backstop, giving Packer time to take third.



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Jaime Hinkley pulls the bat back on a bunt attempt during the Bulldogs' 10-0 mercy-rule win Tuesday over Hood River Valley at Rocky Heights Elementary.

On the first pitch to Kaylin Winans, Zeller swiped second, giving Hood River runners at second and third with no outs and no hits.

Then Betz bore down. She struck out Winans swinging, coaxed an easy foul-territory pop-out to battery mate Jaime Hinkley, and then fanned Jessica DeHart to end the threat. DeHart lined a hanging change-up down the left field line, but it fell foul by inches, giving Betz the chance to sneak another change-up past the nine hitter.

"It made me really dig deep and know that I'm in this position for a reason and that my team has confidence in me and I need to have confidence in myself," Betz said of that second inning. "After that, I knew myself and my team could get out of any situation we needed to."

Hermiston had already led at that point 2-0 thanks to Kopacz's double and a sacrifice fly from Jones.

The Bulldogs blew the thing open in the bottom of the second, however, with five runs on three hits with help from two Hood River errors.

First, Breyanna Naylor and Makenzie Juul both singled with one out, and then Hinkley struck out but got to first when the ball, again, slipped past the catcher, allowing Naylor to

cruise across for a 3-0 lead. An out later, Alex Barron walked, and two runs scored when Hood River shortstop Kelsey Wells misplayed a sharp grounder from Kopacz. A batter later, Jones stung one into left field, plating Barron and Kopacz and putting Hermiston up 7-0.

The Bulldogs have had big leads before this season. They carried a four-run lead into the bottom of the seventh at The Dalles and gave up five to lose. They had no such problem Tuesday.

Wells doubled off the left-center fence with two outs in the fourth for HRV's first hit of the afternoon, but Betz forced a comebacker for the third out. The Eagles had a chance to extend the game in the fifth when two of the first three batters of the inning singled. Wells shot a bullet up the middle, but second baseman Bobbi Hofbauer played it perfectly for the second out. Betz tagged Breanna Weekly to load the bases with two outs, but Betz got Packer to lob one into center, where the speedy Moser coasted under it and retired the side.

In the home half of the fifth, up 9-0, Moser and Naylor walked to start the frame, and both moved up on a fielder's choice. Moser scored an out later on a wild pitch to send Hermis-



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston's Taylor Betz comes home with a delivery during the Bulldogs' 10-0 mercy-rule win over Hood River Valley Tuesday at Rocky Heights Elementary.

ton home happy.

"(Tuesday's win) finally just got us riled up," Kopacz said. "From going what, 0-4, 0-5, to just 10-running (Hood River), it just got us so ready and pumped for Friday ... I just think it's really starting us off." Hermiston hosts the Pendleton Buckaroos in both teams' final CRC doubleheader Friday at Rocky Heights Elementary. First pitch is set for 3 p.m.

HERMISTON 10, HOOD RIVER VALLEY 0 (5)

HRV	000	00-024
HHS	252	01-1072
K. Winans, M. Zeller and Z. Munn; T. Betz and J. Hinkley.		
2B: K. Wells (HRV), M. Kopacz (HHS).		

HRV soars past Hermiston

Eagles plate 11 in 10th inning

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

The Hermiston Bulldogs were ahead, then behind, then tied, then very far behind Tuesday in a wild Columbia River Conference baseball game against Hood River Valley.

The Eagles topped the Bulldogs 18-9 at Armand

Larive Middle School. Hermiston (8-9, 1-5 CRC) has now lost four straight league games and five of six overall.

The Bulldogs jumped on the Eagles early, plating six runs in the bottom of the first, but the lead wouldn't last. HRV got three in the third and fifth innings to tie things at six and took the lead in the top of the seventh on a single from Skyler Hunter.

Hermiston responded with a two-out RBI sin-

gle off Chase Root's bat to plate Landon Gammell and send the game to extras, where the score remained knotted at 7 until the top of the 10th inning.

Then Hood River completely exploded. After Eagles clean-up hitter Kellen Duffy was ejected in the ninth for saying something to the umpire, his replacement Riley Wilson tripled to the left-field fence in his first career varsity at-bat to score three runs and open

the flood gates. HRV scored 11 runs on 11 hits that inning with 17 Eagles taking turns at the plate.

Hermiston got one back in the home half of the tenth, closing the scoring at 18-9.

Hermiston visits DeSales (Washington) at 4:30 p.m. Thursday for a non-league matchup and hosts Pendleton Friday in the final CRC doubleheader of the season. First pitch for the War on 84 is set for 4 p.m.

GO SEE IT

Wednesday, April 29

- Girls Golf**
Hermiston @ Corvallis, 8 a.m.
- Boys Golf**
Hermiston @ Hood River, 10 a.m.
- Track and Field**
Hermiston @ Viking-Grizzly-Knight-Bulldog Invitational @ Kennison Stadium, 4 p.m.
Umatilla @ Viking-Grizzly-Knight-Bulldog Invitational @ Kennison Stadium, 4 p.m.

Thursday, April 30

- Tennis**
Umatilla @ Helix, 4 p.m.
- Softball**
Echo vs. Weston-McEwen, 4:30 p.m.

Friday, May 1

- Tennis**
Hermiston girls @ Bend Tournament, 1:30 p.m.
Umatilla @ Ione, 12 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Sherman County, 4:30 p.m.
- Softball**
Hermiston vs. Pendleton (DH), 3 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Riverside (DH), 1 p.m.
- Baseball**
Hermiston vs. Pendleton (DH), 4 p.m.
Umatilla vs. Riverside (DH), 1 p.m.
Stanfield vs. Nyssa (DH), 1 p.m.

Saturday, May 2

- Girls Tennis**
Hermiston @ Bend Tournament, TBD

- Umatilla @ Helix Tournament @ Hermiston, 10 a.m.
- Stanfield @ Helix Tournament @ Hermiston, 10 a.m.
- Boys Tennis**
Hermiston @ Madras Tournament, 9 a.m.
- Umatilla @ Helix Tournament @ Hermiston, 10 a.m.
- Stanfield @ Helix Tournament @ Hermiston, 10 a.m.
- Track and Field**
Hermiston @ Central Valley (Spokane, Wash.), 9 a.m.
- Echo @ Portland Christian @ 1A Track Classic (qualifier), 10 a.m.
- Echo @ Joseph, 1 p.m.
- Lacrosse**
Hermiston vs. Mountain View, 3 p.m.
- Softball**
Echo vs. Nyssa @ Echo Tournament, 1 p.m.
- Golf**
Echo @ Union @ Buffalo Peaks, 10 a.m.