

SPORTS • CLASSIFIEDS

TIGERS
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and Grogan is slugging a whopping .624. The Tigers have scored the sixth-most runs in 3A baseball with 198, while Pleasant Hill is roughly average with 169.

Pleasant Hill, like Stanfield, isn't a stranger to deep playoff runs, however. In 2013, the Billies beat Horizon Christian of Tualatin on a squeeze play in the bottom of the seventh inning of the 3A state championship game to win the title, and Stanfield beat

Portland Christian in a tight 3-1 final in 2011 to claim its first state championship. Pleasant Hill also played in the first Class B title game in 1946, beating Sherwood 6-2 in nine innings.

Early in the season, the Tigers appeared to be sputtering. They lost their

first three games to quality opponents from Washington, but quickly got back to winning ways. They won their next nine games to post a 9-3 record with league play looming, and a two-game losing streak in late April was the last blemish on Stanfield's schedule.

Since that brief two-game skid, Stanfield is 12-2 and currently on a five-game winning streak.

Pleasant Hill, meanwhile, also started 0-3 and won seven straight in April to get its season going.

The Tigers next goal is to play into June.

"Hopefully we go far this year," sophomore outfielder Klay Jensen said last week. "That's what we wanted. We had goals: league champs — got that, district champs — got that. We're trying to go for final four. We're playing good right now."

SIGNING
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eas of interest, such as pursuing physical therapy. Then, seemingly out of nowhere, Purugganan contacted Hoffert to ask him about Gutierrez.

The seventh-year coach said he was surprised, to say the least.

"The guy called, and I thought it was a joke at first," Hoffert said.

It wasn't a joke. The Raiders only have nine players currently on scholarship and they were in desperate need of post players. Gutierrez, a strong and skilled interior player, fit the type of mold for which Purugganan was looking. Hoffert put the ball in Gutierrez's court, so to speak. She was still unsure about the direction she wanted to go, but Hoffert let her make the decision for herself.

"I said, 'That's totally up to you, Jazmin. You will make the right decision because you always do,'" Hoffert said. "She called him that night, and the rest is history."

Gutierrez's interest only increased when she traveled to Tacoma for a workout a couple weeks ago and was elated to learn Pierce plays a system comparable to Hermiston's. She said she was up front about her knee's history, which was shrugged off by Purugganan just as quickly.

By attending Pierce College, Gutierrez's wish of going somewhere new is granted. Walla Walla Community College had showed interest, but it was too



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Hermiston senior Jazmin Gutierrez, center, is flanked by her mother, Angel, head girls basketball Steve Hoffert, second from left, her father, Victor, third from left, and assistant girls basketball coach Juan Rodriguez after signing her National Letter of Intent to play basketball at Pierce College in Tacoma, Washington.

close for her. Tacoma provides an opportunity for her to do some exploring, she said.

"I feel like it's not too close, and it's not too far," she said.

After Gutierrez penned her name Tuesday afternoon, friends and teammates swarmed around her. Her past year has been a series of ups and downs that Hoffert said he believes would have

broken most teenagers. Gutierrez managed to keep a steady attitude throughout, he said, which led to the continuation of her basketball career.

"She's amazing," her mother, Angel, said. "She has a lot of faith in God, and she, pretty much, when she was injured, from that point on our journey there to have surgery and our

journey back when the basketball season started and everything, she just was so strong in her faith, and I think that's really what helped her get through it and helped us as a family get through it. I think really just her faith and having her coaches being so supportive and her teammates being so supportive, it's pretty awesome.

COUGARS
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eye-opener," Bailey said.

That stretch got Echo rolling, but the team had the players all along. Led by Gonzales, the Cougars have showed the ability to score runs all season long. While sometimes the run totals weren't consistent with an explosive offense, the components were always there. The Cougars have six batters with averages over .300 and many with on-base percentages over .400. As a team, the Cougars are slashing .295/.435/.393/.828. That's a good enough offense to consistently score runs.

Echo's main problem, however, has been defense. Gonzales has been money in the circle, posting a 1.85 ERA during the course of 110 innings, but she has allowed a third as many earned runs as total runs. In Echo's last game, an 11-3 loss to Vale, the Cougars committed six errors, leading to eight unearned Viking runs. It turned a close game into a blowout and provided all the context Bailey needed to understand his team: When they play defense, they win.

"We gotta eliminate the errors, and that's going to be the difference going into the state playoffs," Bailey said. "We have to eliminate the errors. You gotta give them three (outs), and that's it. You can't spot 'em runs."

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