

SPORTS

Five Tigers earn all-state bids

BY SAM BARBEE
HERMISTON HERALD

The 3A Eastern Oregon League and district champion Stanfield Tigers baseball team was rewarded with several all-state nominations this week.

Five Tigers earned the

honors. All five are sophomores. Thylor Monkus was named a second-team outfielder and is the highest ranking Tiger. Dylan Grogan was named a third-team catcher, and Ryan Bailey was tabbed the third-team first baseman. Klay Jenson (pitcher) and

Tony Flores (infield) were honorable mention selections.

German George of Clatskanie was named the Player of the Year. Ryan Thompkins of Clatskanie and Glide's Al Skinner were named Co-Coaches of the Year.

Monkus led the Tigers with a .545 on-base percentage and also in runs with 47. He played extensively in center field and behind the plate. Grogan was third in batting average (.373) and led the team in slugging percentage (.639) and on-base

plus slugging (1.073) and home runs (3) as a shortstop, third baseman, catcher and pitcher. Bailey led the team in average (.386), hits (32), RBI (31) and second in slugging (.518).

As a pitcher, Jenson finished with a 2.65 ERA

with 58 strikeouts in 42 2/3 innings pitched. He led the Tigers in strikeouts and innings. Flores, who played predominantly at shortstop and pitcher, was second in average (.378) and struck out just twice in 100 plate appearances.

ALLISON

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pretty young, but there were so many tears. I was just bawling."

THE DEPTHS

For two years, Allison sat in his house and stewed. He could no longer vent his frustrations by throwing a lacrosse ball against a wall or workout or play catch. The diagnosis echoed in his mind. He couldn't shake it. He found himself drifting away from his friends.

This came to a head at a school assembly for the football team. He sat with his former teammates, only to be told because he was not a football player he couldn't sit with them.

"What a blow," DiAna Allison said. "Things like that were happening to him, a lot of crushing things like that. They would come over and try to spend time with him, and all they wanted to do was talk about football. It crushed him even more. He said, 'Mom, I don't have anything in common with them anymore. I can't even talk to them.' That was tough."

The young man was struggling with who he was. It was as if his former world cast him out.

"I went through a couple summers where I was really depressed," he said. "It was a rough time."

THE RISE

Allison was 13 and completely devoid of identity. He ached to grab his helmet and stick and go run around a lacrosse field — to be The Beast again.

That's when Hermiston Youth Lacrosse Program Coordinator Trampis Palmer contacted the beleaguered Allison and asked him if he wanted to be involved in the youth program. At first, Allison hesitated. He felt burned. He thought maybe sports wasn't for him anymore.

But with encouragement from his mother, he gave it a go. Thinking he would just be helping "as a ballboy or something," he made his way to Funland Park for the first practice of the spring. With a smile, Palmer greeted Allison with "Hey, coach!" surprising the 13-year-old.

He was the assistant coach of the fifth- and sixth-grade team. The next spring, as a 14-year-old, he was given the keys to the third- and fourth-grade team.

All accomplishments aside, rediscovering his love for lacrosse and sports put "the light back in his eyes," DiAna Allison said. He went from gloomy and barely speaking to bouncing around the house, telling stories, smiling. Pre-injury Andre had made an appearance, and he was there to stay.

"It was dark. He was in a dark place," DiAna Allison said. "Seeing him like that,

it was all I could do ... I was struggling to find things to bring him back ... to see him come back, I'm like, 'Yes! He's coming back! The light's coming back on!'"

THE LESSON

Allison called his experience an identity crisis. He experienced two years of being a ship without sails. He had no idea who he was, what he was going to do, or how he was going to do it.

Allison's injury changed him and who he was. His life changed for the better, however. He learned that he couldn't play sports forever, but that he needed a plan beyond that. His attitude improved.

"I figured, you gotta plan for everything after high school," he said. "You have to figure out who you are in high school and make a career for after high school. The injury taught me that sports aren't everything. Lacrosse is a big deal to me, and I love these kids that I'm coaching, and I love to see them grow, but the injury taught me that you may be good at sports, but sports aren't everything after high school."

As a 14-year-old, he earned parents' trust after one practice, and he's earned their respect, too.

"Coaching was therapy for me," he said. "I miss playing football with all my buddies. I miss being a part of the team, but I'm so happy it happened in high school because I was oblivious."



SAM BARBEE PHOTO

Andre Allison (in white), a Hermiston High School junior, smiles with his third- and fourth-grade youth lacrosse team after winning the Spokane Youth Lacrosse LAXFest May 16-17.

LACROSSE:

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Smith's son was recruited to play because of low numbers three years ago. He is dyslexic and processes things just a hair slower than his peers. This was known beforehand, and

everything went well. So, after that first year, Smith's daughter, who watched her brother's lacrosse games with enthusiasm while playing softball, decided that she, too, wanted to play lacrosse that spring.

"As an educator, it has been phenomenal for my son," Smith said. "He's

jumped three reading levels. He's been on honor roll every year since."

Lacrosse has given Smith's son an avenue for success that baseball wouldn't have provided. The relative simplicity of lacrosse compared to baseball was what he needed.

Some has to do with

friends playing lacrosse.

Hermiston's DiAna Allison, whose son, Andre, coaches a youth team, said some children see their friends playing and are interested, or they are convinced by friends who play. It's a growing sport on the West Coast and, until recently, was unknown to

many children.

For some parents, though, the environment is much more relaxed than baseball can be. They pointed out how political baseball can become at the lower levels, but much of that is absent in lacrosse.

Recent figures have youth participation up to

around 75 children, a number that seemed a pipe dream two or three years ago.

"It is a fun game," DiAna Allison said. "When you're on the field and you actually see them — on TV it's one thing, but to be right down on the field — it's different."

LEDBETTER:

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come visit, so I went and visited and loved the campus," Ledbetter said. "She offered me my scholarship, we talked about it at home and I thought it would be a really good fit for me. So I decided it was a good plan for my future."

Hill played college softball at Portland State University and set career records in home runs (31), RBIs (135), wins (67), appearances (147) and innings pitched (815 1/3), as well as the single-season record for home runs (12) and is the only 20-game winner in Vikings history, which she accomplished twice in 2006 and 2007.

"I'm really excited for her," Hermiston softball coach Kylee Lete said. "It's been a dream and goal she's had, I can imagine, since she was a young girl. I think that'll be a great tool for her and a great opportunity for her to play. I'm really excited for her and that opportunity."

Clark is a member of the Northwest Athletic Conference and competes in the South Division. This past season, Hill's second, the Penguins finished 14-26 (4-16 league), and Ledbetter, who plans on pitching, walks into a roster that is losing half its pitchers to graduation.

Ledbetter was first contacted by Hill towards the end of her senior season at Hermiston and visited

May 21. Instantly, she felt at home.

It was green, she said, but also felt smaller than it really is. Clark's enrollment is about 16,000, which makes it the second-largest community college in Washington. But, said Ledbetter's father Mike, it doesn't feel that big.

"It, to me, felt smaller than Blue Mountain," he said.

In 2011, Blue Mountain Community College had an enrollment of 2,732.

But it was more than just the small feel and coach familiarity that drew in Ledbetter. She felt welcome, too.

"I loved it. Everyone there is friendly," she said. "I walked in, and immediately people were like, 'Do you need help? Where are you at? What do you need to do?' So I just liked that everyone was friendly and outgoing and it wasn't awkward, like I was lost. They made me feel at home and I had been there for five minutes."

Ledbetter has some experience playing high-level, competitive softball. She's played on Washington Explosion, based out of Connell, Washington, of the American Softball Association (ASA) with girls from Washington, Oregon and Montana. The program has sent more than 20 girls to collegiate programs across the country. Ledbetter's coach, Ron Thompson was instrumental, Ledbetter said, in creating exposure for the pitcher.

Lete said Ledbetter's experience in that level of softball will help her in the transition to the collegiate game with better athletes

and better hitters.

"I think she's taken, as far as athletics go, she's been around the game since she was little," Lete

said. "She's played travel ball. I think the exposure to that, she knows what kind of athletes she's going to see at the college

level. And I think that's gonna be an advantage for her, knowing what she's going to see as far as that goes."



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