

This IS my first rodeo

SAM BARBEE
FROM THE
SIDELINES



I've never been to a rodeo. They exist west of the Cascades, but they aren't all that popular, as far as I know.

Longview has a rodeo, even. It started in 1979 and became known as Thunder Mountain in 1981 after Mount St. Helens blew its top and almost buried southwest Washington. I never went. Like Farm-City, it runs during the local fair and a couple times I'd hear the faint sounds of buzzers and cheers as I left. Rodeos just never interested me that much.

Then, about a year ago, I was asked in my job interview if I knew anything about rodeo. I said a bit, that you want to stay on a bucking animal for eight seconds or you want to complete your task as quickly as possible. On its surface, that's the point of a rodeo, I suppose, but I know there is a lot more to it than that. Sure, these are skills that started on ranches, and therefore (for the most part) are practical skills that cowboys use on regular bases.

I watched NFR last fall on television and tried to learn as much as I could. I listened to the Round-Up on the radio as I drove to work, and tried to pick up terminologies. Knowing a sport is one thing; talking it is another.

So what are the events I'm most looking forward to? Thank you for asking.

Steer wrestling, or the better term, bulldogging, is interesting to me because of its controversy. In some brief research, I read that steer wrestling is banned in some states because of the potential harm that could come to the animals. Historically, it's also not a task generally done on the ranch, usually team roping or tie down roping is how a loose steer would be handled. It's also exciting. A guy hangs off his horse, grabs the fledgling horns of the steer, and in one motion leaves his horse, digs his heels into the arena floor, and tries to flip the steer to his side by leveraging the horns. Where else in sports do you get a show like that? And it'll happen 81 times this week! Rough stock is also always entertaining, and seeing the best in the world at what they do in any setting is an experience. Hell, seeing the best calligraphers in the world methodically create a page would be interesting to me, because they're the best.

All that said, I'm genuinely excited about this week. One of the cool things about being a reporter is having opportunities to go to cool places, talk to interesting people and, maybe most importantly, get out of your comfort zone a little.

And this is definitely getting me out of my comfort zone. But that's a good thing. This whole year has been full of firsts, and now we simply add another.

— Sam Barbee is a sports reporter for the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian based in Hermiston. He can be reached by phone at 541-564-4542 or by email at sbarbee@hermistonherald.com. Follow him on Twitter @SamBarbee1, and follow Herald Sports @HHeraldSports.

Thompson returns to alma mater as announcer

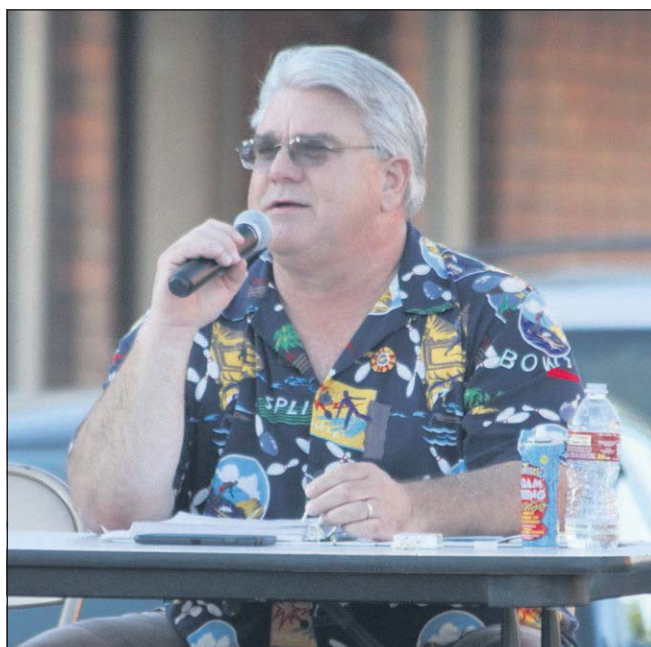
Longtime Hermiston football announcer will also take the mic for Oregon State soccer matches this fall

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

Joe Thompson, the longtime public address announcer for Hermiston High School football games is adding his distinctive voice to another sport and another school at another level.

Thompson is the new public address announcer of Oregon State University soccer. There's also a chance that he might fill in for baseball games or late basketball games if necessary. He will continue to announce Bulldog football games.

"I just enjoy the heck out of it," Thompson said of public address announcing. "I'm just humbled that I have this opportunity. And it gets back to the community that Hermiston is. I've been asked to do events for them and I've enjoyed the heck out of it. I just want to thank the community for being in my corner this



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Joe Thompson, the longtime public address announcer at Hermiston High football games and other community events, acts as MC at the 2015 Umatilla County Fair Parade Saturday in Hermiston. Thompson, who graduated from Oregon State University, will be the Beavers soccer PA announcer this fall.

whole time."

Thompson was scrolling through Twitter one day when he saw an advertisement for a public address announcer at Oregon State for soccer games. He figured it was worth a phone call, so he left a message with Oregon State's marketing department and waited. A couple days later he received a call from Oregon State's Sports Information

Department, where he once worked, and they asked for a tape. Thompson didn't have one, but that didn't matter. He got a schedule and a list of game-day protocols and he was on his way.

"That was always kind of a goal (for me) out here," he said.

Thompson has been involved in broadcasting in some form or fashion since

his freshman year at Eastern Oregon University in 1979. After taking a year off from school in 1980, he transferred to Oregon State where he became involved in the school's radio station, KBVR< and worked in the sports information office.

There, he helped when Oregon State hosted a portion of the 1984 NCAA Men's Basketball Tournament at Gill Coliseum. He recalls seeing the late Jim Valvano, the famous coach of the North Carolina State Wolfpack who improbably won that tournament, in press conferences after his games.

"I don't think his feet ever touched the ground," Thompson remembered of Valvano. "He just floated in."

He also did some public address at volleyball games, kept the book at baseball games and did "a little bit" of baseball.

After he graduated from OSU, he returned to Hermiston in 1985 to help the family business at Eastside Market. Shortly thereafter, Billy Joe Burns née Owens, then Hermiston's volleyball coach, asked if Thompson was interested in helping her with public address at volleyball games.

Thompson jumped at the chance to get back behind the

mic. As he said, some folks like to play, but "I talk."

"I just took it from there," he said, "and done everything from fair parades to boxing matches to Little League state tournaments to high school soccer. Of course I've been doing football for about 23 years now ... There's not a lot I haven't done."

And one more item to add to the list is Oregon State Beavers men's and women's soccer. The Beavers men's team begins its season in Corvallis against Marquette on Aug. 28 at 5 p.m. The women have an exhibition against Trinity Western in Corvallis at 7 p.m. on Aug. 15. Thompson's full schedule will include about 20 matches of both exhibitions and regular season games.

Thompson said his experience at Hermiston will be a big help with his new gig. Under athletic directors such as Mike Kay and Blain Ganvoa, he said Hermiston "does it right" when it comes to putting on a good show at sporting events. When it comes to pieces such as live reads and timing, he said he's learned new techniques from three decades behind the mic. However, the bright lights of Division I soccer aren't too bright for him.

"It's pretty much what I've done for years," he said.

Borders inherits young Umatilla squad

After a year as a volunteer assistant, Sonia Borders was handed the Umatilla volleyball program this fall

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

Sonia Borders isn't entering her first season as head volleyball coach at Umatilla fresh. Not entirely, anyhow.

The Eastern Oregon University alumna is in her second year as a member of the Vikings staff, last year serving as a volunteer assistant to Megan Olsen, who stepped down after last season.

"It's a bit nerve-wracking," Borders said of becoming a first-time high school head coach. "But it's exciting, yeah. I know the majority of the girls. They have a lot of potential and I'm excited to be able to finally get my hands on them and make them work together better than they did last year."

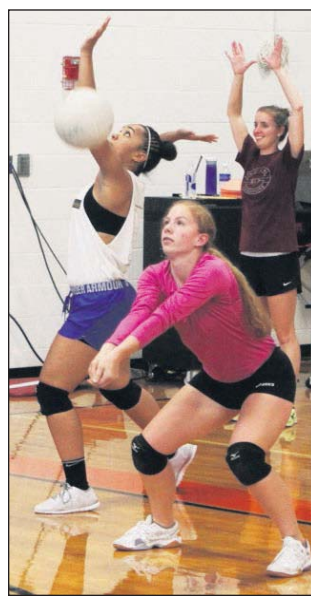
Though Borders has taken her first varsity job, she has head coaching experience. After two years of assisting Becky Wadekamper at Hermiston, Borders was in charge at Armand Larive Middle School for another two years before taking a teaching and volunteer assistant job at

Umatilla.

The nerves, though, are somewhat warranted now because Borders is currently the only coach on staff. She and Umatilla Athletic Director Ryan Ferguson are conducting interviews today to find an assistant.

"Umatilla is small," Borders said, "and some of the kids need a little energy ... I'm more nervous about (the interviews) than about the team. I think the team is fine."

That team, which went 11-9 (3-3 Eastern Oregon League) last year and bowed out after a tough 3-2 loss to Nyssa in the district play-off, returns most of its roster. Senior Courtney Dohman, a tall middle hitter who started playing volleyball last year, is back, and Borders wants to move her around the court and not abandon her at the net. Guadalupe Flores, a sophomore setter, has "one of the greatest passing platforms I've seen," Borders said. Also around is senior Sidney Webb, who was the setter last year.



FILE PHOTO

In this file photo, Sonia Borders (rear) coaches at an early-season practice in Umatilla last fall. After a year as a volunteer assistant, Borders was named head coach of the Lady Vikings this summer.

In addition to Dohman, Flores and Webb, Umatilla has other young players that will fill the void left by departed Cassandra Galbraith and Kelly Barajas. Taija Coffey, now a junior, figures to have a bigger role this year, and Mari Paz is a solid backline contributor, as well.

"We have a couple young girls that I think will end up

stepping up," Borders said. "They had a lot of game time last year, and I think their nerves have kinda gone down a little bit, so I think they'll be able to fill some shoes. But we have a couple taller girls that are fairly new, and I think they'll feel more comfortable this season, too, knowing they already have a season under their belt."

Dohman is one of those tall, fairly new players. By the end of last season, Dohman looked comfortable at the net and began racking up blocks and kills. But Borders doesn't want to leave her up front and leave it there. She wants to make Dohman a more versatile player who can be effective at the net and on the back line.

"Everything was new to her last year," Borders said of Dohman. "She came a long way. I told her on the first day of practice that she would be the most improved, because she would have the most game time and she's gonna have the most growth playing with the older girls."

"I don't want her to just be a hitter. I don't want her to just be front row. I'd like to work on confidence with the entire thing and see how that goes."

Flores has been working

during the summer and after school during the winter and spring to improve her game. She's been working on jump serves and learning some things that Borders hasn't seen other Vikings doing. Borders isn't against sending Flores down to JV periodically to get the sophomore more court time. Webb will likely fill a captain's role.

Borders is small in stature and soft-spoken, but her words have an energy in them if her voice doesn't match. She isn't focused on results for results' sake. Her first order of business is to bring the Lady Vikings together as a group, and, according to her philosophy, the success will come with togetherness.

"I think as soon as the pieces of the team work together, I think they'll go farther than they did working as individuals," Borders said. "We can have the best player on the court, but as soon as you have one bad attitude they can single-handedly ruin a team. My goal is to have everyone work together, whether we win or lose. However far we get, I think as long as we work together we'll go pretty far."

"Attitude is everything. Grades are important. As long as we back each other up, the talent will come with it."

SPORTS IN BRIEF

Hermiston girls basketball parking to raise money

The Hermiston girls basketball team is again manning the Hermiston High School parking lot during Farm-City Pro Rodeo, Wednesday through Saturday, as a fund raiser, head coach Steve Hoffert said.

The team has been invited to play in the Nike Tournament of Champions in Phoenix, Arizona over Christmas break. It is one of the best high school basketball tournaments in the country, with 144 state champions and 13 of 16 consensus national champions since its inception in 1997, according to its web-

site.

Hoffert said the invite was based on program records, season records, and season finishes. Hermiston went 24-4 (9-0 CRC) in 2014-15 and secured the top seed in the 5A state tournament before a 51-45 loss to La Salle Prep in March in the state championship game.

"We've been trying to get an invite for several years and are pretty excited about it," Hoffert said.

The entire trip will be paid for through fundraisers, Hoffert said, which include rodeo parking, AAU tournaments and other events. Parking costs \$5 per car to park at Hermiston High, but Hoffert and

the Bulldogs will take donations.

"It's one of those experiences you can't pass up because of the cost," Hoffert said.

Golf scramble scheduled for Saturday, August 29

Pregnancy Care Services of Pendleton and Hermiston announced that its Golf 'Fore' Life Tournament and BBQ Dinner will be held Saturday, Aug. 29, at Echo Hills Golf Course.

The tournament is a four-person scramble format that will span nine holes at the course.

Registration for the tournament or the dinner needs

to be completed by Thursday, Aug. 13, and can be done one of two ways. You can sign up online at pregnancycareservices.com or mail your registration to the PCS offices at 311 SE Dorion Ave., Pendleton, OR, 97801.

Sign in for the tournament will start at 1 p.m., Aug. 29, with a shotgun start at 2 p.m.

For more information, contact the PCS offices at 541-276-5757.

Echo Sage Trail Run scheduled for October 4

The 2015 Echo Sage Trail Run will be held on Sunday, Oct. 4.

Registration for the 2015 Echo Sage Trail Run has opened, and will be open until Oct. 2.

The 5k, which starts at 9 a.m., costs \$20, the 10k, with an 8 a.m. start, is \$25, and the 5k, at 7 a.m., runs at \$50. Prices increase by \$5 after Sept. 14. The course runs through the Alkali Canyon south of Echo on private property belonging to Lloyd and Lois Piercy.

You can register at EchoSageTrailRun.com, and you can call 541-521-4793 or 541-554-2517 with questions, or you may email Greg and Linda Spike at echosagetrailrun@gmail.com. All proceeds go to Echo School District music and sports programs.

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