

First edition: Fall sports power rankings

SAM BARBEE FROM THE SIDELINES



With a new fall sports season upon us, I wanted to try something new with this space. Once a month I'll rank the top five local teams and give you reasons why I ranked them where I did. It's my hope that this will be interactive and hopefully we can create a dialogue about who you think should be ranked where.

So, without further ado, let's get started.

1. Hermiston football

This seems the obvious choice. Of the 15 area teams I cover, only Hermiston won a state championship last season. So they're tops on this list. I've written ad nauseum about the newness of the Bulldogs on the gridiron from a new coach, to a new quarterback to 18 new starters. There is still a lot to learn. How will Dayshawn Neal handle the quarterback duties? When, or will, Nathan Hunsaker make an appearance behind center? Who's going to carry the rock? How can Hermiston navigate yet another tough schedule?

These are all questions I'm excited to either answer or see answered. Bob Coleman told me recently that any expectations short of repeating as state champions would be "selling ourselves short." There isn't any shortage of confidence at Kennison Field.

In addition to the whole state gunning for Hermiston, rival Pendleton is in pretty good shape with its core from last year's playoff team returning. But Friday night against Hanford will say a lot about where Hermiston is as a football team.

2. Hermiston cross country

Also a district/league champ, the Hermiston runners sent six to state last year and the boys placed third. Just one runner is gone from last year's group — Tim Swarat, who's running at Northwest Nazarene — so it would make sense that the Bulldogs would again pace the Columbia River Conference.

Back are standouts Hayden Earl, Josiah Niederwerfer, Angel Castellanos and Donnell Rome on the boys side. Back are freshmen standouts Melany Solario and Morgan Hancock, who hope to improve on their solid freshmen campaigns. It seems a foregone conclusion that the boys team will be, again, right at the top of the CRC and the state, but the intrigue is how the girls will improve. Hermiston didn't lose a single runner from the girls team, and seniors Sofia Gispert and Laura Zepeda and sophomore Jailee Vogt are all back.

I expect the Bulldogs runners to be at the top of this list all year, maybe even grabbing the top spot a time or two.

3. Umatilla girls soccer

This team surprised me last year, and it shouldn't have. They made the playoffs in 2013. They finished third that year in Special District 2 before going undefeated in district play last year before losing to Perrydale/Western Menonite, 4-3, in a match they led 3-2 late. I have them ranked highly despite their 2-1 loss Saturday to Hermiston because of the reigning league title hanging around their competitive necks, but also because they held their own against a bigger school in a tough place to play. With the win and turf, Kennison Stadium can provide unique challenges to teams that are used to neither, and the wind was bad enough on Saturday it was taking things out of my hands.

With most of its key players returning, expect Umatilla to again compete for a district title. Head coach Tim Lee has been talking with his team about leaving a legacy, a mark. I think this Umatilla team has

See RANKINGS, A10

Williams' move in the works for months

Ex-Hermiston wrestling coach interviewed for Spokane job in the spring

By SAM BARBEE Staff Writer

The departure of Hermiston wrestling coach Shaun Williams to Central Valley High School in Spokane, Wash. seemed sudden, but according to CV Athletic Director Grant Walter, it was in the works for months.

According to Walter, Williams interviewed for the vacant head wrestling coach position in March when John Owen retired. Walter said Williams was their top candidate after the interviews, but a hold up with the special education department protracted the process. School started Tuesday and Williams has



Shaun Williams

begun teaching special education there.

"While Shaun was definitely our No. 1 candidate coming out of the interviews, it was made very clear to us if there wasn't a teaching position he wasn't coming to CV," Walter said. "The time frame took so long because of the teaching position, and obviously he wasn't going to say anything whether or not there was a teaching position. If there wasn't a teaching position, he wouldn't have left Hermiston."

The move came as yet another blow to an athletic department hit hard by turnover in the past four months. Head football coach Mark Hodges announced his resignation in May, and that was followed shortly thereafter by the retirement of head volleyball coach Becky

Wadekamper. Then, last month, the Hermiston School District announced a vacancy of the head boys basketball coach, and Hermiston has two other vacancies, as well, in softball and boys golf.

Walter said there was a change in leadership in the special education department and the school had to determine which positions would be filled in-house and which would be filled with transfers. In mid-August, Walter said, a teaching position came open for Williams, and he notified Hermiston principal Tom Spoo shortly thereafter.

Attempts to reach Williams by phone have been unsuccessful.

As a wrestling coach at Hermiston, Williams led the Bulldogs to three straight team state titles since taking over for Curt Berger in 2012. Previously, Williams was an assistant at Central Valley and at Moses Lake before coming to Hermiston.

He attended North Idaho Community College in Coeur d'Alene before transferring to the University of Oregon as a student athlete. A native of South Africa, Williams represented his country in the 2004 Olympics in Athens.

"We're extremely excited to have Shaun," Walter said. "Obviously his success at Hermiston speaks for itself. He had an excellent reputation as an assistant at Moses Lake. We know his reputation as an Olympic wrestler. We have not had an in-building wrestling coach for 13 years. We are very excited to have a wrestling coach who's a teacher and has access to those kids."

"We also believe that Shaun will be an outstanding addition to our teaching staff at Central Valley High School. We see him as being an excellent teacher as well as a wrestling coach. And that's very important to our community."

After slow start, Bulldogs roar past La Grande

Bulldogs give Dorothy Smith first win as varsity head coach

By SAM BARBEE Staff Writer

Early on in Hermiston's volleyball debut against La Grande, things were ugly.

The Bulldogs, playing their first game under new head coach Dorothy Smith, were tight and the play showed. But despite the slow start, Hermiston finished strong to sweep the defending 4A Greater Oregon League champion Tigers 3-0 (26-24, 25-21, 25-15) in a non-league volleyball match Tuesday night at the Dawghouse in Hermiston.

"I think the girls felt better after that first whole game," Smith said.

Hermiston (1-0) won the first four points of the match but gave the lead right back to La Grande (0-1), which scored six straight of its own. Game 1 was a seesaw from there, with Hermiston gaining as much as a six-point advantage before La Grande stormed back again to tie it at 24. Hermiston rallied and finished off the first game with a kill from Myers.

La Grande, though, took a turn building an early lead, gaining a quick 4-0 advantage in Game 2, but Hermiston scored eight of the next nine points to take an 8-5 lead it would not relinquish. Sophomore middle blocker Maddy Juul took over in that game, unofficially scoring four kills and a block to pace the

Bulldogs.

La Grande, though, tied it at 14, 17 and 20 before Hermiston really took control. And in Game 3, the Tigers had no answer. But things appeared to turn in Game 3 when La Grande though they had scored a point.

The Tigers appeared to have pulled within two at 11-9, but the point was awarded to Hermiston when La Grande served out of turn. This, along with a more relaxed mindset since Game 1, gave Hermiston all the momentum it would need. The Bulldogs went on to score 13 of the next 19 points to ease into the sweep and the first win of the year.

Smith said it was a bit of a relief to get the first win out of the way.

"I think it also gives them confidence that everything we've been working on they can do," she said. "We were sitting there and coach was saying, 'OK, they should be running a seven, they should be running a 'c,' but, again, it's that confidence of, 'Can I hit that ball that goes up over there?' We have other plays we can do, but that (the girls) weren't that confident in. So hopefully this next week we'll be able to."

Sophomore Regan Myers led the Bulldogs with five kills and missed on just one serve, and fellow sophomore Maddy Juul pounded four and had 13 blocks. Junior Kynzee Padilla led in digs with 10.

Hermiston next takes the court Friday at the Mountain View tournament in Bend. Game times and opponents are yet to be determined.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Hermiston's Baylee Powers spikes the ball guarded by La Grande's Larissa Jensen on Tuesday in the Bulldogs' 3-0 win against the Tigers in Hermiston.

Hermiston gears up for early test

By SAM BARBEE Staff Writer

The Hermiston Bulldogs began its 2014 title run with a 48-13 shellacking of Richland, Washington's Hanford Falcons early last September.

But with a new group and a new quarterback, first-year Hermiston head coach David Faaeteete isn't taking Friday's season opener for granted against a team that went 0-10 last year and is hungry for a win.

"I think last year they lost and they're out for revenge," he said. "I think we're gonna get their best game. It's gonna be a lot of physicality. It's gonna be a really physical game."

After a quarterback battle that lasted the length of camp, Faaeteete announced Monday that sophomore lefty Dayshawn Neal will start behind center for the Bulldogs. He beat out senior Nathan Hunsaker, the only QB between the two who has played in a varsity game, for the starting job Friday night.

But, Faaeteete pointed out, that doesn't mean Neal has a long leash. It's the opposite, in fact.

"It depends," he said. "It shouldn't change. He throws a really good ball and does some things well. But he has to understand that Nate Hunsaker is one play from going in. Anything can happen on Friday night. We have two quarterbacks that are ready to play. Right now the guy we decided to go with is Dayshawn Neal."

Hanford is a familiar opponent for a couple of reasons. First, and most obvious, these teams played last year, as is the case for each of Hermiston's opponents this season. But Hanford runs similar schemes on both sides of the ball. They like to spread it out on offense and throw it around the field, and line up in a 4-2-5 defensive formation as a counter to spread attacks. The only real difference, Faaeteete said, is Hanford runs a shotgun with the quarterback, with him lining up five yards behind the center. Hermiston runs what's known as a pistol, with the quar-

terback closer to 2.5 yards behind center.

"We're gonna be a spitting image of each other," Faaeteete said.

What Hanford has, though, that Hermiston might not, is a stout defensive line. Faaeteete said it reminded him of last year's defensive front in Hermiston in terms of effort and physicality. The first-year coach said it will be important to win the battle at the line of scrimmage in an attempt to neutralize that strong defensive line.

"They have two D-ends that get off the ball really well. And they have two inside D-tackles that kinda remind me of our defensive line last year with the tenacity they play with," he said. "Those guys on that D-line are just getting after each other. Our offensive line is gonna be tested real early."

But that's the way Faaeteete wanted it. With so many unknowns currently surrounding the Bulldogs, an early litmus test

More fall sports

Look for more fall sports coverage, including schedules, in our special fall sports preview section inside today's paper.

Season's first linebacker club luncheon scheduled

The first Linebacker Club luncheon of the season and in David Faaeteete's tenure has been scheduled for Thursday, Sept. 3, from noon to 1 p.m. at Desert Lanes Bowling Alley in Hermiston.

Be there to listen to Faaeteete discuss Hermiston's first opponent, Hanford, as well as the season to come.

Those attending are asked to RSVP by calling 541-567-5215 by 3 p.m. on Wednesday. The cost is \$12 for members and \$14 or non-members.

against a good unit is a plus. Regardless of the result, Faaeteete said, they will know more about their team Saturday morning.

"You can't simulate that type of atmosphere," he said.

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Hermiston's Colbray not with the team

Entering the 2015 football season, the defending 4A state champion Hermiston Bulldogs had just from Hermiston's Colbray not with the team.

Colbray was the team's star player last year, but he was not on the team this year.

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