

Umatilla
football
close to
breaking
through

Nothing is better in sports than earning respect. Nothing. Nothing in sports is worse than being a laughingstock.



SAM BARBEE
FROM THE
SIDELINES

Nothing. Umatilla, now, has experienced those two things, for better or for worse. For all intents and purposes, they were a laughingstock last year, blowing games and getting blown out on their way to a forgettable 0-9 record. I've been there.

But they've already earned the respect of two teams they played last year. Union, which walloped the Vikings in last year's debut, went down to Umatilla, 7-6, and Pilot Rock, who came back on the arm of a freshman quarterback a year ago, came up short against the Vikings 14-6 this week.

Two demons exercised. Two pieces of revenge. However you want to say it, Umatilla is no longer an automatic win on the schedule. And I know just how it feels.

After winning a combined one game in two years as a sophomore and junior, my senior class decided that 2008 would be different. And it was. After dropping a rain-soaked game at psuedo-rival (I say that because they thought we were rivals and we didn't think they were — it was a bad decision on our part) partially due to a blown coverage on my part, I was walking back to the locker room and talking to a guy from the other team named Elijah Denis who I had grown up playing baseball against. I told him all we wanted to do was earn their respect as a football team, "To show you guys we can play football," was what I said.

He nodded and said we did that, that they respect us as a football team. Those are the words you die to hear. Respect of your peers is the ultimate form of something athletes chase. We lost, and it stung. The half-hour bus ride felt like it took all night, but we weren't a laughingstock any longer.

With two wins in two tries to open the 2015 season, Umatilla is getting noticed. Don't look now, but the Vikings are now the only undefeated team in the Eastern Oregon League! They're the only team to have a positive point differential, and own the No. 7 spot in the OSAA rankings.

It may be unreasonable to assume Umatilla will win the EOL this early in the year. Vale, last year's league champ and defending state champ, has a loss to 3A Idaho power Homedale on its schedule, so it's too early to be looking to Weeks 8 and 9. But that's ultimately unimportant this year. Winning is a process. First you must learn to compete, then you must learn to win, then you must win those games. Umatilla is closer than you think to earning the respect of the EOL. Trust me.

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Knights, Vikings both face early test

Resurgent programs get their first big trial of the year in Umatilla

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

It's been some time since Umatilla was in a big football game.

But now, the Vikings get their chance to play under some scrutiny when they host the 2A Irrigon Knights Friday night at 7 p.m. in Umatilla.

"(The players) are really excited," head coach Mike Mosher said. "We just gotta keep them grounded. We're 2-0, but we got some things to fix. We got talent. We know we have talent, We just need to fix some little things and well be alright."

"I think the energy's pretty high. But at the same time, we want to keep them grounded. We're happy we're 2-0, but we want to be 3-0, 4-0."

To get to 3-0, though, Umatilla has to get through a hot Irrigon team. The Knights (2-0) have allowed the second fewest points



FILE PHOTO

Several Umatilla High School football players tackle a Union High School player during a game last season.

(eight) in 2A football and scored the second most (100). They are buoyed by a pair of explosive running backs — senior Freddy Vera and junior Carlos Zacharias.

The two rushed for a combined 289 yards on just 10 carries in the Knights' 53-0 win over Enterprise last Friday in Hermiston. The tricky wing-T attack fooled Enterprise with regularity, and Mosher said that's going to be a

key this Friday.

"They need to keep their eyes (disciplined) and not watch the magic show in the backfield," he said.

Similarly, these teams match up a bit differently. Mosher said Irrigon, with the blazing speed of Zacharias and Vera and the strong, tough running of senior quarterback Nate Verley, will have the speed advantage. But

Late goal lifts Bulldogs

Sophomore Hannah Thompson scored in the 79th minute 'out of nowhere'

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

For 78 minutes on Tuesday, Hermiston and David Douglas played to a scoreless draw. Neither team could find an advantage despite numerous attempts at the net, and with just a minute remaining, it seemed as if neither would get a goal.

But Hermiston sophomore Hannah Thompson took a long pass from the midfield and beat Scots keeper Ainsley Dolton to the far post for the only goal of the night and an improbable 1-0 win in a non-league, inter-division soccer match at Kennison Field.

"It's nice to get the win, but sometimes it's scary waiting that long," Thompson said. "We just had to know that there was still a minute left after my goal, and keep up our work to make sure they didn't score."

David Douglas (1-3) had a scoring chance and a corner kick in the final minute, but the corner, com-

See SOCCER, A12



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Hermiston's Alysia Garcia (10) and Hannah Thompson (21) battle a David Douglas player for a loose ball in the second half of Hermiston's 1-0 win Tuesday afternoon over the Scots.

Echo volleyball off to another strong start

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

Eight games into Echo's 2014 volleyball season, the Cougars were 5-3 and playing rather well, but it didn't last. Echo lost 10 of its next 14 matches to finish 9-13 and fourth in the Old Oregon League.

This year, Echo is hoping it can sustain its fast start, and it proved it can with a pair of sweeps over the Irrigon Knights (25-9, 25-18, 25-16) and the Pine Eagle Spartans (25-16, 25-17, 25-12) Saturday afternoon in Echo.

"Since I've been coaching (in Echo), we always start off really good in the preseason stuff, then we kinda teeter off and everybody else gets better as we are going downward," head coach Janice Scott said. "I think this year's going to be a little bit different."

Now eight games into the 2015 slate, Echo has again put itself in a good position as league play looms. The Cougars had a four-game winning streak



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Echo's Hannah McCarty (12) tips one past a Pine Eagle Defender and in front of Spartan Ashley Taylor (2) for one of 10 kills during the Cougars' 3-0 win over Pine Eagle on Saturday in Echo.

snapped Friday night at Ione, but rebounded with the two sweeps. Echo has now won six of its last seven matches after starting the season with a loss at Pilot Rock.

After starting each game slowly, the Cougars (6-2, 1-0) roared

back to take big leads. Echo and Pine Eagle (1-3, 0-1) traded points in Game 1, but Echo scored three straight points twice to lead by as many as eight before finally taking the game 25-16.

In Game 2, Pine Eagle jumped to a quick 3-0 lead, and, Scott said, that might have caused a collapse on Echo's sideline. Not Saturday.

"They don't want to be a fourth place team in league," Scott said. "They have a goal that they want to meet, and they want to go into district and do the best that they can. We're just gonna keep going. They're not letting up at all. I call them gas pedal girls."

"When they get down, they come back and they don't lose. They come back and they win."

Echo was down 3-0 in Game 2 and 3-1 in Game 3 before mounting rallies in each game to, again, roar back and win by big margins. Echo turned the 3-0 deficit into an eight-point win, and turned the 3-1 deficit into a 25-12 win. Junior middle blocker Hannah

McCarty, who led the Cougars with 10 kills, two blocks and an assist, said communication was a key aspect to the Cougars' win.

"We worked well together, we communicated really well," she said. "Kelsey (Ranger) and Lizzie (Cox) (gave) amazing sets and everyone else was getting good hits off it and we were able to work well as a team."

As Echo moves past the eight-game mark of the season, last year's season-ending slide lurks in the background, but Scott, McCarty and the Cougars aren't worried. With strong leadership, a seniors first mentality and short memories, the Cougars are putting themselves in a position to be contenders in the Old Oregon League.

"We just take it a day at a time, every point at a time, every serve," McCarty said. "So we take it one at a time and if we focus through that the whole game, we'll do pretty good together."

Echo hosts Cove Friday at 4 p.m.

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