

The ending of streaks

There is a lot going on in area sports right now. The football regular season closes this Friday. Soccer and volleyball seasons have either wrapped up or are close to it.

But I'm not concerned with the future this week, or even the present. No, I'm looking back at a night that this town won't forget.

Remember that losing streak that no one in town likes to talk about? I'll wager most folks try to forget those 62 years between 1922 and 1984. I know I would. Twelve years is hard enough. But 62?

There is so much fun trivia surrounding Hermiston's 27-14 streak-breaking win. Lance Hawkins, who scored twice

that night, is back in purple and gold as Hermiston's baseball coach. Hermiston's previous win in the series was the first time Hermiston and Pendleton played each other in 1922, and Bulldogs weren't the Bulldogs then, they were the Irrigators, a named that would be better served in, well, Irrigon. So entering that 1984 game, the series stood at 55 Pendleton wins, one Hermiston win, and one tie.

Not the picture of a rivalry, is it? All is well now that the tables have turned a bit, and I'm sure most reading this would like to keep it that way. Hermiston's current three-year winning streak will be on the line this weekend against Pendleton. But flipping through old issues of the Hermiston Herald while researching that October night in 1984, I came across two things that made me laugh.

The first is the sign held by cheerleaders that graced the front page of the Herald. It's not that the sign is present — one would think there would be something signifying the accomplishment — but the sign meant that someone, anyone, was thinking about it. Someone had the brilliant idea of, "This might be the year!" And a sign was painted. As superstitious as I am, I wouldn't be a fan of that. And no, you can't make one during the game, either, because that will affect the so-called juju. That is a clinic in audacity, flying in the face of history. I love it.

The other bit is some alums popping champagne at midfield. This is something that most certainly would be frowned upon anymore, but is still awesome. It's part of NFL lore that the 1972 Dolphins engage in a champagne celebration after the last undefeated team loses in pro football's top (only) league. This is right along with that tradition in the best way.

Just imagine (if you were there then reflect) a bunch of excited high schoolers — some in pads and sweating the others delirious with joy — and some rowdy adults (civic leaders, no less) are popping bottles, as they say, feet away. How much fun would that be?

When I was in sixth grade, I was a ballboy for the high school I would eventually attend. We had this long losing streak to Kelso, about 30 years. I realize that's nothing when compared to 62 years, but it felt we would never win. Ever. When R. A. Long High School was Longview High School, the annual football game was traditionally played Thanksgiving Weekend, and it became known as the Turkey Day Game (this tradition was tabled after a riot broke out on the field during the game in the 1970s).

So Kelso had this winning streak, and we had a team to beat them. We had an idea going in — this is just us ballboys, mind you — that this could be the year. The season before we lost in double overtime when an exchange on an end-around was botched. It hurt to be that close.

But this year was different. I remember us recovering a fumble off a bad option pitch right in front of us. I remember storming the center of the field with the guys and jumping around. The picture that ran in the newspaper that day was reminiscent of that Oct. 4, 1984, issue of the Herald. There was so much joy. That's the only word that fits. It's just joy. There isn't any thought about the past or the future. The present dominates.

Funny, I start by talking about the past and end up in the present. Funny how memories can do that.

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War on 84 could decide CRC title

Hermiston brings brutal ground attack to Round-up Grounds

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

Playoffs? A few weeks ago, the playoffs seemed a long way off.

That famous clip of Jim Mora Sr.'s amazement at the suggestion of his Indianapolis Colts making the playoffs was unintentional comedy gold. But that response could have been for the Hermiston Bulldogs football team, which started the season 0-5 with five double-digit losses.

But with just one game remaining on the schedule, the War on 84 this Friday at the Round-up Grounds, the Bulldogs (3-5, 2-0) have worked

their way back into the playoff conversation, as well as the Columbia River Conference conversation.

The Bulldogs are currently at the top of the league as the only team undefeated in league play. A win over Pendleton clinches the third straight CRC title for the Bulldogs, and perhaps the most improbable. A Pendleton win, though, creates some interesting scenarios. A Buckaroo win coupled with a Hood River win would create a three-way tie for the top spot. The CRC champion would then be decided with a coin flip. If The Dalles beats Hood River Valley, then the winner of the War on 84 is crowned champion.

There is also a chance Hermiston could host a playoff game. If the Bulldogs finish the season ranked in the top 16 — as of Tuesday evening they

are ranked 16th — they'll host the first round of the playoffs.

On the field, the Bulldogs are coming into the ballgame as hot as they've been all season. Senior quarterback Nathan Hunsaker, filling in for the injured Dayshawn Neal, is finally comfortable helming the Bulldogs' ship. Though his passing numbers aren't eye-popping — 22-of-46, 414 yards, six touchdowns, three interceptions — he's a threat running as well as throwing for an offense that has steadily improved with him at the helm. Hunsaker is averaging 4.5 yards per carry and has scored three times.

But he's not alone in the backfield. The Bulldogs have a number of capable runners they can turn to. In last week's 36-28 win over Hood River Valley, sizable runners Hayden Simon and Bob Coleman com-

combined for 182 yards on 32 carries and a touchdown.

Starting with smaller and quicker back Mitch Brown and eventually working in Simon and Coleman, the Bulldogs ran 47 times into the Hood River defense, wearing it down. Hermiston has an edge at the line of scrimmage, and expect them to exploit it.

The Bucks have struggled all season with physical fronts, and Hermiston has one. The Bulldogs are averaging 205 rushing yards per game this season, and have put up 319 rushing yards per game in their current three-game winning streak.

Pendleton has also struggled at times on special teams, allowing big scoring returns. Hermiston ran a kick back in the second half against Hood River, but it was called back due to a penalty.

RUNNIN' WITH THE POPLARS

Foot falls, falling leaves and forested farm location create unique, annual sporting event

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

There is a joke amongst runners about the holy trinity. Not the Holy Trinity of Catholicism that attempts to explain the great mystery of the faith.

No, this is about running conditions.

"It's like you're tracking new ground," Layne Papenfuss said from the fifth annual A Very Poplar Run at the Boardman Tree Farm. "In the fresh snow, nobody's been there — at least it feels like that — or fresh leaves even if there has. It's just the natural environment."

Papenfuss, from the Tri-Cities, had seen the tree farm on various occasions when passing through, and his wife found the race online recently and decided to go.

"We don't have a lot of forest around (the Tri-Cities)," he said. "So this was our opportunity to get out and experience the tree farm."

He and about 600 others got one of those conditions: leaves. A Very Poplar Run weaves through the numerous poplar trees harvested by Greenwood Resources. Now a month into autumn, the poplar trees have ceased photosynthesis and released their leaves, creating an ideal autumn scene.

That scene has attracted folks from all over the region. Jenny Van Cott, the girls cross country coach at Shadle Park High School in Spokane, makes the drive along Interstate 84 to know about the tree farm and had always wanted to run amongst the trees. Recently, she heard about A Very Poplar Run and had to come down. She was at a friend's house in Seattle recently, then spent a couple days in Benton City before coming



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Connor Gustafson, of Boardman, nears the end of the one-mile course Saturday during A Very Poplar Run at the Boardman Tree Farm. The event included one-mile, five-kilometer, 10-kilometer and 15-kilometer races.

to Boardman Saturday.

"Oh my gosh, it was gorgeous," she said. "There were some sections of the course that were really sandy, so it was ... you were picking up your knees. It was beautiful. I will come out and do it."

Some runners came for more than the race. Brady Dickhaus and his family came to camp along the Umatilla River in addition to running. This is the third year the Dickhaus's have come to Boardman and they've camped all three years.

"It's a tradition with several families," Brady said. "We come down and do the run. As the boys get older, they go up in mileage. What originally brought us down was it was a fun run and it's a weekend where there aren't really any other runs going on."

"We live in the Tri-Cities, but we find it's better to camp on the river, spend the weekend and hang out with family and friends."

A Very Poplar Run is a fun run, at least it's supposed to be, and Pendleton resident Jim Youngman took that to heart. This was his first Poplar Run, he said, but he wanted to have some fun with it. So he strung some fake leaves on the back of his long-sleeved white shirt to stand out and get a laugh.

"It's a fun run, just to have fun," he said. "Just stand out a little bit in the crowd and make fun of the whole thing."



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Jenny von Cott, of Spokane, led all women in Saturday's 10-kilometer race at the Boardman Tree Farm. The event, called A Very Poplar Run, included one-mile, five-kilometer and 15-kilometer races.

And be colorful."

He heard about it last year and immediately thought it was something he wanted to do.

"It's great. It was worth it," he said.

Since Greenwood Resources Director of Resource Information Systems An-

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STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Pendleton's Nolan Bylenga is surrounded by Hermiston runners (left to right) Josiah Niederwerfer, Angel Castellanos, Tim Swarat and Donell Rome) as he heads down a hill at the Kyle Burnside Wildhorse Invitational. Niederwerfer edged out Bylenga at the finish for fifth place and a time of 16:41.56.

Hermiston boys finish second at CRC meet

Bulldogs send two girls to state in cross country

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

Entering Saturday's Columbia River Conference cross country meet, the Hermiston Bulldogs boys team was mindful of its dominance over the CRC. Since the league was founded in 2010, the boys had won each CRC title. Until this year.

The Hood River Valley Eagles, which Hermiston pegged as its biggest competition at The Dalles, took the title, scoring 32 points to Hermiston's 37. Hermiston's Hayden Earl was in the lead at the 200 meter mark, and the Bulldogs were in good shape to take the team title, as well. But a pair of Eagles seniors, Justin Crosswhite and Quinn Fetkenhour, surpassed Earl in those final 200 meters to push the Bulldogs into second. The girls finished fourth with 69 points, 17 points short of the state-qualifying Eagles. Melany Solorio (fifth) and Morgan Hancock (seventh) both qualified for state as individuals. Pendleton missed out on qualifying its girls team for state by one point.

"Our guys went out really hard," coach Troy Blackburn said. "It was awesome. They went

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