

Larson takes over Bulldogs grapplers

Former Hermiston star wrestler leads program as rookie head coach

By **SAM BARBEE**
Staff Writer

When Kyle Larson began wrestling at Hermiston High School, the accolades, banners and expectations that dominate the Bulldogs' program weren't yet around. Hermiston wasn't a wrestling power, but it soon would be.

Larson, a sophomore on that team, helped and watched as Curt Berger transformed the Bulldogs from wrestling also-ran into state juggernaut, winning eight of the last nine 5A team titles.

Now, Larson has moved to the other side of the equation, taking over as head coach of the Bulldogs after the sudden resignation of previous head coach Shaun Williams in August.

"I'm just excited to be involved as much as I can," Larson said. "We just want to get the community support."

Larson wrestled at Oregon State University under Jim Zalesky. Wrestling at 141 and 144 pounds, Larson tied for the Beavers lead in pins with eight in 2007, and is 44th all-time in pins with 17. In 2006 at 141 pounds, he posted



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

First-year Hermiston wrestling coach Kyle Larson (left) speaks with an assistant at his first practice as head coach Monday in Hermiston.

the best Beavers record at 26-7 (.788).

After graduating in 2008, Larson coached in Hermiston for one season under Berger before moving to Boise and Borah Senior High School, where he spent four years as an assistant. Then, in 2013, former Bulldogs coach Shaun Williams brought the former Bulldog back onto his staff where he has remained since.

While at Oregon State, Larson decided he wanted to coach. He entered the sport at 4 years old and

has done nothing since. Now 30, Larson has been around wrestling for 26 years. As a head coach, he's inexperienced and admits it as this will be his first season running a program. But he isn't inexperienced in wrestling or coaching wrestling at all. He's known he's wanted a head coaching job since his early 20s, when his career was still alive. That said, he doesn't look at his new job as special of a former Hermiston wrestler, and one from the foundation-building years at that.

"Hermiston deserves it," Larson said. "There's a huge tradition in Hermiston. There's a huge wrestling community here. And from what I understand, we want to win. It's not just me who wants to win. It's not just the guys. When we go out to Tri-State, when we go to the Reser's Tournament of Champions, people are seeing that and they want to see Hermiston at the top. That's good. That keeps our coaching staff, our coaching staff at the (middle school), youth

program, it keeps them on their toes."

Larson is a product of Hermiston's youth wrestling program, and feels it is an integral part of maintaining a state championship-caliber program. There will always be guys joining the team late — as eighth graders, freshmen or later — he said, but it's important to be coaching the fundamentals and techniques at the lower levels that are being taught at the varsity level. It simply creates cohesion and continuity. Techniques don't have to be un-learned then re-learned. It's all the same.

"The high school head wrestling coach has to be involved at all levels — (middle school) as well," Larson said. "If we're not all on the same page between the kids program and transitioning into (middle school), we could end up with a mess. It's definitely something that's on my mind. Myself and all the other coaches have to have a foot in that program."

Larson put a special emphasis on the middle school program. There isn't anything wrong with it, he said, but he feels it's arguably the second-most important level of the program, to the varsity. Like the youth program, the middle school program doesn't get the visibility of the high school, yet the middle school is crucial to Larson's plan.

"The kids coming in have to know what we're coaching," Larson said. "If they already know what we're teaching in high school, then they're a step ahead when they come in."

Larson just understands the value of the youth and middle school programs and his role within them.

"When you have a core group of kids that started in our kids program, (then) transitioned to (middle school), that's how you win state championship," he said. "It's that important."

Larson is relaxed at the helm. As a product of the program, he understands the expectations, internal and external, applied to his program. The amount of state championship banners don't make him nervous, they make him proud. But he isn't content on merely living with the past glory of the program. He wants more. He doesn't want to merely win state championships. He wants to win national championships. He doesn't want a handful of state championships, he wants 14.

"We definitely have goals, and our goals are set high," Larson said. "We've proven we can win in Oregon. Now what's the next step? And that's where we want to go. We won last year with a group of kids and it was a tight race at the state tournament. We need to get better."



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Heppner's Weston Putman gets tangled up with Regis' Adair Pelayo and Brandon Piete (11) in the Mustangs' 26-3 win against the Rams on Saturday in Hillsboro.

MUSTANGS:

continued from Page B1

enced Heppner defense. He threw three second-half interceptions, but threw two or three more passes that floated and could have been intercepted.

"Our defense was great all day long," Grant said. "They really rallied to ball and made the plays they needed to make."

Meanwhile, Heppner's offense took absolute control. Its first second-half drive took 16 plays and 7:03 to go 71 yards, ending in a Kindle 1-yard run. Heppner threw the ball twice that drive, completing one. It set the tone for the remainder of the game.

Regis had five possessions in the second half. Two were three-and-outs, and three were interceptions. Logan Grieb picked off Wiltsey with 6:26 left in the fourth quarter, Jake Linsay grabbed one with 3:00 remaining, then Caden Hedman stepped in front of the third to seal the win.

To put the game away on the scoreboard, Grieb got a carry from the Regis 30-yard line, broke a tackle at the line of scrimmage and raced unmolested for a 30-yard touchdown and a 20-3 lead. Putman added a late

touchdown. The win gives Heppner a chance to redeem itself following the 49-0 loss to Burns in Hermiston in last year's final. That game, though, isn't in the forefront of Heppner's collective mind.

"I don't think you can go back and change history," Grant said. "Last year was last year. Burns had a team, one of the three or four best teams I've seen in my 31-year career at this level. I think that this year's this year, and these kids just want to play more football."

"You can see the joy on their faces because they get week 13. How cool is that?"

Heppner 26, Regis 3

REG (8-4)	0	3	0	0	—	3
HEP (12-0)	0	6	14	6	—	26

Second Quarter
Regis — A. Pelayo 25-yard Field Goal, 8:40
Heppner — C. Kindle 1-yard run (2-point No Good), 1:12

Third Quarter
Heppner — C. Kindle 1-yard run (2-point No Good), 4:57
Heppner — L. Grieb 30-yard run (K. Clark pass to W. Putman), 0:32

Fourth Quarter
Heppner — W. Putman 1-yard run (2-point No Good), 6:23

Statistics
RUSHING — REGIS (26-45): J. Scrocca 13-32; Bra. Piete 5-13; A. Pelayo 4-8; Bry. Piete 1-8; E. Gustin 1-0; A. Wiltsey 2-(-)16. HEPPNER (54-297, 4 TD): C. Kindle 24-195, 2 TD; L. Grieb 8-64, 4 TD; W. Putman 12-44, TD; K. Clark 6-(-)6.
PASSING — REGIS (7-19-3, 50 yards): A. Wiltsey 7-18-3, 50 yards; Bry. Piete 0-1-0, 0 yards. HEPPNER (6-11-2, 60 yards): K. Clark 6-11-2, 6 yards.
RECEIVING — REGIS: E. Gustin 2-20; S. Nieslanik 2-8; A. Moore 1-11; Bra. Piete 1-10; J. Scrocca 1-1. HEPPNER: W. Putman 4-32; C. Kindle 1-15; L. Grieb 1-13.
PENALTY — REGIS: 7-67. HEPPNER: 9-98.

TIGERS:

continued from Page B1

they capitalized on them."

Kennedy's rushing offense proved to be too much for Stanfield in the end, as well. Behind bruising fullback Jacob Lopez, running back Bishop Mitchell and quarterback Brett Traeger, the Trojans compiled 325 rushing yards on 52 carries. Each had more than 100 yards rushing, and no Stanfield Tiger went over the century mark.

Stanfield's offense, meanwhile, had a difficult time of things in the second half after matching Kennedy step for step. That first half saw just one punt and five touchdowns between the No. 9 Tigers and the No. 4 Trojans.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Stanfield quarterback Dylan Grogan topples over Kennedy's Tom Schmidt in the Tigers' 34-20 loss to the Trojans on Saturday in Hillsboro.

But turnovers and penalties hurt the Tigers. Aside from Monkus' fumble that stopped a drive before it started, Stanfield turned the ball over twice more in the second half, one of which resulted directly in a touchdown when Mitchell stepped in front of a hitch route and eased 17 yards into the end zone. That

made it 34-20 with 2:08 in the third quarter, and Stanfield could never recover.

Monkus rushed for 87 yards on 13 carries and a touchdown, and Grogan finished with 65 yards on 16 carries and two scores. He also passed for 146 yards on 9-of-15 passing and two interceptions.

Stanfield, though, loses just three seniors from a team that went 10-2, finished second in a good Columbia Basin Conference and won two road playoff games, one over the top seed in the tournament.

Salas is expecting "special" things in his second year at the helm in Stanfield. "The fuel should be that we have our team back, that we have our core team back," Salas said. "We only lost three seniors. I'm glad I got

to coach them, but we'll be back next year."

Kennedy 34, Stanfield 20	STAN (10-2)	6	8	6	0	—	0
	KENN (11-1)	7	14	13	0	—	0

First Quarter
Kennedy — B. Traeger 1-yard run (Extra Point Good), 9:05
Stanfield — D. Grogan 11-yard run (Extra Point Failed), 4:37

Second Quarter
Kennedy — J. Lopez 1-yard run (Extra Point Good), 3:35
Stanfield — D. Grogan 1-yard run (J. Keeney pass from D. Grogan), 0:29
Kennedy — B. Mitchell 36-yard pass from B. Traeger (Extra Point Good), 0:00

Third Quarter
Stanfield — T. Monkus 1-yard run (Extra Point Blocked), 10:39
Kennedy — J. Suing 18-yard pass from B. Traeger (Extra Point Good), 7:43
Kennedy — B. Mitchell 17-yard interception return (Extra Point Failed), 2:08

Statistics
RUSHING — STANFIELD (38-181, 3 TD): T. Monkus 13-87 TD; D. Grogan 16-65, 2 TD; J. Keeney 5-19; M. Blankenship 3-10. KENNEDY (52-325, 2 TD): J. Lopez 23-111, 1 TD; B. Traeger 14-113, TD; B. Mitchell 15-108.
PASSING — STANFIELD (9-15-2, 146 yards): D. Grogan 9-15-2, 146. KENNEDY (5-11-1, 102 yards, 2 TD): B. Traeger 5-11-1, 102, 2 TD.
RECEIVING — STANFIELD: T. Monkus 7-100; J. Fitzpatrick 1-33; J. Keeney 1-13. HOME: J. Suing 2-40, TD; O. Seiler 2-26; B. Mitchell 1-36 TD.
PENALTY — STANFIELD: 5-32. KENNEDY: 7-59.



HIGH SCHOOL JUNIORS!

BE A PART OF A YOUTH TOUR IN
WASHINGTON, D.C.

SPEND A WEEK IN WASHINGTON, D.C., ALL EXPENSE PAID, BY SUBMITTING AN APPLICATION TO UMATILLA ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

THE TRIP

>The Washington, D.C. Youth Tour will take place June 9-16, 2016.

>1,600 students from around the country will take an all expense paid trip to learn about our nation's history, government and electric cooperatives.

WHO CAN APPLY?

> A high school junior during the 2015-2016 school year in Umatilla Morrow Counties.

>The applicant's parent or guardian must be a member of Umatilla Electric Cooperative (UEC)

APPLICATIONS

>Applications are available at Umatilla Electric offices in Hermiston and Boardman, or online at umatillaelectric.com

>Applications are due no later than 5 p.m. Thursday, January 4, 2016.

Fully Digital Enya 3 Series Hearing Aid

Now Only **\$950**



• Enhances Speech
• Reduces Noise
Call 541-276-3155
Ruud's Hearing Aid Service

Sale price valid on the Resound Enya 3 series. Limit two at the promotional price. No other offers or discounts apply. Discount does not apply to prior sales. Offer expires November 25, 2015.