

Winter sports power rankings: First edition

So now that we're into December, it's time for another set of power rankings, this time for winter sports. But first, there are a few minor things I want to get to.

First, here's the final edition of the fall sports power rankings for your reading pleasure:



Sam Barbee
FROM THE SIDELINES

1. Stanfield Football;
 2. Hermiston boys soccer;
 3. Hermiston cross country;
 4. Hermiston football;
 5. Umatilla boys soccer;
- Honorable mention: Fabian Cardenas. Yeah, they're pretty much the same as last month.

In other news, Donald J. Trump must be interested in small-town eastern Oregon high school sports, because the guy followed me on Twitter. And no, it's not a fake account. It's actually him. I can't tell you why, but, yeah, I'm being followed by a presidential candidate. What did you do last week?

And now, without any further ado or jokes, let's get to the winter rankings, shall we?

1. Hermiston wrestling

In all honesty, the first time I wrote out these rankings I had Hermiston girls basketball at the top and Hermiston wrestling second. Feel free to punch me in the face. No disrespect to the Hermiston girls basketball program and Steve Hoffert and all the girls. I'll get to you guys momentarily. But eight state titles in nine years — and a third-place finish the one non-title-winning year — numerous individual champs and numerous guys sent to the next level make this the obvious choice heading into the new winter sports season and new calendar year. And there isn't any reason to think that Hermiston will fall off at all under new head coach Kyle Larson. He's got his sights set on bigger and better accomplishments. He doesn't want to merely be the best team in the state. He wants to be the best team in all 50. That's a tall task with some great wrestlers in the Midwest and Northeast, but do you doubt it? I don't.

2. Hermiston girls basketball (no rankings released yet)

So, I could probably put Hermiston wrestling and girls basketball 1A and 1B, but I won't because sports. Most of the roster returns. The Bulldogs' two all-state players — Jansen Edmiston and Sara Ramirez — are both still prowling the back court and causing havoc on both sides of the court. And they have motivation: the last time these girls took the court in an official capacity they lost — in the final game of the year. Head coach Steve Hoffert told me that they're focused on returning to the state title game. Now, he understands that these seasons are long, and it's nearly impossible to say "title or bust" before the opening tip of the season. But he knows what his players are feeling and talking about, and they're feeling like that have to get back. It's all they talk about. This team is on a mission and I fully expect them to make another run. The Bulldogs' schedule is a tough one — as you'd expect from a top program in a small, sub-par league — but it worked in their favor last year. If Hermiston falls from this spot, I'll be surprised. And it'll probably have to do with another team vastly exceeding expectations than this team vastly falling short of their lofty expectations.

3. Stanfield boys basketball

Stanfield is coming off its best football season since "I like Ike" was a thing and the interstate highway system was barely a year old. If you recall from last season, Stanfield lost two brutal games to Heppner by a combined total of two points, the second of which ousted the Tigers from the Columbia Basin Conference Tournament in the first round while being ranked seventh in the state. But all of those sophomores — Dylan Grogan, Ryan Bailey, Tony Flores,

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STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

The Heppner Mustangs celebrate as time runs off the clock in their 48-0 rout against Kennedy in the state 2A championship game Saturday in Hermiston.

Mustangs flip the script from 2014 in championship win

By ERIC SINGER
Staff Writer

Heppner Mustangs senior Weston Putman said all he wanted to do was give head coach Greg Grant a state championship.

On a cold Saturday night at Kennison Field in Hermiston, Putman and his Mustangs teammates did just that — and in pretty convincing fashion.

The No. 2 seed Heppner squad dominated the No. 4 seed Kennedy Trojans from start-to-finish on its way to a 48-0 win to earn the OSAA Class 2A state championship — the school's first title since 1992.

"We've had a mission all year long, and just to finally say we've done it is a crazy feeling, I don't even know what to think right now," Putman said with a wide grin. The game turned out to be the complete opposite of the 2014 state championship game, in which Heppner (12-0) was on the opposite side of a blowout, falling 49-0 to Burns. But this was the perfect ending to what has been a completely dominant season for the Mustangs, who's smallest margin of victory this year has been a whopping 20 points.

"My team showed up to play, they were really ready and they have been through the whole playoffs," said Grant. "This is a special group. This is my 26th year here and we just haven't had quite as dominant as a team



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Heppner's Weston Putnam (20) and Logan Grieb (5) celebrate with teammates and coaches in the final seconds of the Mustangs' 48-0 rout against Kennedy in the state 2A championship game Saturday in Hermiston.

as these guys were."

Offensively, Heppner had its way with a really good Kennedy (10-2) defense — minus the first possession in which Heppner accrued a total of minus-6 yards and a quick three-and-out. But after that drive, the Heppner offensive line won the battle of the trenches, the running backs ran with ease, and quarterback Kaden Clark had an easy day throwing the ball.

The first scoring drive covered 68 yards on 10 plays that was capped off on a direct snap to running back C.J. Kindle who plunged three yards into the end zone to give the Mustangs an early 6-0 lead. Kindle

— a senior — would go on to score four more touchdowns and gain 144 all-purpose yards in the game to earn game MVP honors.

"That was all due to the lineman," said Kindle. "Oh man, those holes were big and all the room in the world to run. We just stuck to the little things we need to do, did our jobs and they were great."

The Mustangs really opened the game up in the second quarter, putting up 28 points to open up a 34-0 lead on Kennedy that the Mustangs would take into halftime.

Defensively, the game was another showcase of what was

arguably the best defense in Class 2A. The Mustangs were tasked with facing a pair of tough Kennedy running backs in Bishop Mitchell and Jacob Lopez, as well as quarterback Brett Traeger, and handled them with ease.

Kennedy mustered just 105 yards of total offense in the game and a mere four first downs. The Trojans rarely had the ball in Heppner territory, and even had a drive that started at Heppner's 21 yard line following a turnover, but would end after just four plays, nine yards and a turnover on downs.

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Hermiston Elks Hoop Shoot draws nearly 2,000



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BY ERNST KERN

Izaak Mendoza of Boardman accepts his trophy from director Ernst Kern after winning the 8/9-year-old hoop shoot November 21 at Sandstone Middle School in Hermiston.

By SAM BARBEE
Staff Writer

Almost 2,000 participants turned out for the 2015-16 Hermiston Elks #1845 Local Hoop Shoot Nov. 21 at Sandstone Middle School.

The 1,814 contestants, ranging in age from 8 to 13, from Hermiston, Stanfield, Umatilla and Boardman had 25 chances to make as many free throws as possible. The winner of each age group advances to the NE District Hoop Shoot Jan. 10 at Sandstone. Those winners move on to the State Hoop Shoot in Milwaukee on Feb. 13.

Contestants were separated by gender and grouped into three age groups. The 8/9-year-old boys age group came down to a shoot-off, when Izaak Mendoza, Drake

Devin and Luis Mendoza each made 13 of 25. Mendoza, of Sam Boardman Elementary, made all five shots in the deciding round, with Devin taking second with three and Mendoza third with two.

Giana Mendelez of Sunset Elementary won the 8/9 group outright making 16 of 25, two more than runner-up Italy Daltoso of Sam Boardman. Neyly Carrillo of West Park Elementary was third with 13.

Victor Baros of Stanfield narrowly missed perfection, sinking 20 of 21. He didn't need his final four shots as he shot after second-place Cooper Rothenberger of West Park, who made 19. Fellow West Park student Enrique Carrillo was third with 17.

JaLay Burns of Stanfield slipped past Maya Meza of

Clara Brownell Middle School with 13 makes to Meza's 12, and West Park's Michelle Loyola was third with nine.

The 12/13-year-old boys group also came down to a shoot-off between Ulises Armenta of Clara Brownell and Anthony Jimenez of Armand Larive after both made 14 of 25. Armenta advanced by making four of five, and Jimenez settled for second with two. Tyler Schneider of Windy River in Boardman won a shoot-off to claim third place after making 12 of 25 then all five in the bonus round.

Stanfield's Courtney Gregerson took the 12/13 girls division with 13 makes. Jenna Wallace of Armand Larive was second with 11, narrowly edging second runner-up Jennifer Flores' 10.

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