

2015 TOP SPORTS STORIES OF

A LOOK BACK AT SOME OF OUR FAVORITES STORIES FROM LOCAL SPORTS

Herald sports staff (of one) picks its top stories of the year

By **SAM BARBEE**
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The calendar is about to turn. Here at the Hermiston Herald, we thought it would be fun to take a look back at 2015 and the stories it produced. Being the only sports reporter, I went back and looked at some of the stories which struck me the most, I had the most fun writing, or the stories that had the most reaction from the community.

It isn't necessarily based on only athletic accomplishments. I met some wonderful people this year and wrote some stories I'm proud of and that got some good feedback. Those will all be listed here. Here's to a fun 2015 and a better 2016.



STAFF PHOTO BY EJ HARRIS

Hermiston's Tavin Headings (22), Kynzee Padilla (21) and Abi Drotzmann walk off the court as the La Salle's girls basketball team celebrate their 51-46 5A state championship win against the Bulldogs in Corvallis.

1. Hermiston girls basketball makes its deepest run

The Bulldogs were a powerhouse last season, especially in 2015. After the calendar turned, Hermiston lost just two games: a 55-49 home loss to Sunnyside (WA) and a 51-46 loss in the state championship game to La Salle Prep.

They finished 24-4 (9-0 CRC) and cruised to their fourth-straight Columbia River Conference title, continuing their dominance over the four-team league. The Bulldogs parlayed that record into the top seed in the 5A state tournament, but were stonewalled by the Falcons at Gil Coliseum in the state championship game.

The year started relatively slowly for the Bulldogs as they lost their first two games of the year, both at home. But they closed the regular season winning 21 of their next 22 contests to finish the season as strong as any team in the state. Following two blowout wins in the playoffs, things got tight against Corvallis — which had knocked Hermiston out of the tournament the year before — and the Bulldogs eventually fell just short of their first girls basketball state title.

It was the best finish in program history, and deserving of our top spot as best sports story of the year.



COURTESY PHOTO BY ADDIE TUIA

Members of the 2015 state championship Hermiston wrestling team pose for a photo at the 5A state wrestling tournament Saturday at Memorial Coliseum in Portland. Bulldog wrestlers accumulated 149 points to defeat Dallas, Lebanon and Eagle Point. Three Bulldogs won their weight classes to become state champions: Sam Colbray, Liam Tarvin and Isaac Aguilar.

2. Hermiston wrestling stays on top

It's difficult, sometimes, to appreciate constant winning. After one state championship, then two, three, etc., that level of success becomes the norm. But when you factor in attrition due to graduation,

this level of success becomes truly astounding.

The Hermiston Bulldogs wrestling program is in this position, where anything short of a state title seemingly seems like a failure. Then-head coach Shaun Williams said before the season that it would be a "rebuilding year." Maybe he was selling it short intentionally, maybe he was being honest. It's tough to tell because Hermiston again proved its mettle as it outlasted the Hillsboro Spartans with a Sam Colbray pin to earn Hermiston its (sixth-straight) team wrestling title and seventh in eight years.

At this point, we are recognizing Hermiston's ability to maintain its success rather than the fact it won a state championship. They're running out of room in The Dawghouse to hang all of the banners, and that's a good thing. Being the second-best sports story of the year isn't a bad thing. Ricky Bobby isn't always right.



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Brandi Howard (right) speaks with her daughter Courtney after opening ceremonies of the 6th annual Jeremy Howard — for the Love of the Game co-ed softball tournament in Hermiston.

3. 'More than a game' — local softball tournament fights skin cancer

This story is along the lines of one I thoroughly enjoyed writing. Brandi Howard's story of losing her husband to melanoma then starting a softball tournament in his honor was amazingly personal, and I was thankful she opened up to me about it as much as she did.

While we were sitting and doing the interview, she naturally became emotional at times, and, to her credit, never once backed away from a question I asked, however personal it was. She was honest and forthcoming, and I hope I did her courage justice.

To top it off, it was the most-read sports story on the HermistonHerald.com this year, and it deserves to be on this list. Sometimes the hardest stories to tell are the easiest to write, and this one was it. And sometimes stories can demonstrate the power sports have. It's not always about dribbles and singles and touchdowns. Sometimes sports are simply about people. This story whole-heartedly demonstrated that.



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

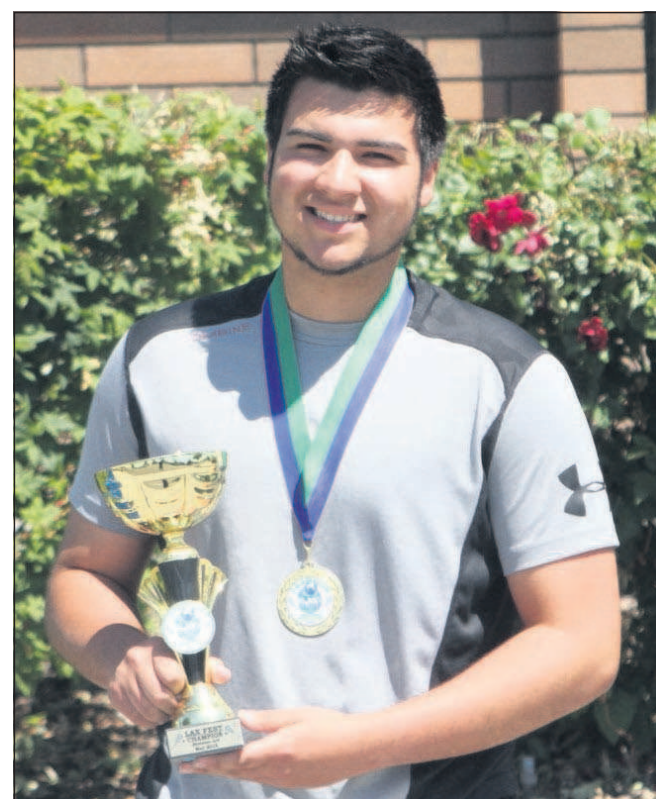
Stanfield quarterback Dylan Grogan topples over Kennedy's Tom Schmidt in the Tigers' 34-20 loss to the Trojans in Hillsboro.

4. Stanfield football makes historic run

Nearly six decades had passed since the Stanfield football team played its way into the final four of whichever classification in which it was a member. That's a really, really long time. Everything about the game has changed since the 1957 Tigers won the

state championship, its only outright football title (they tied the year before).

This season, a junior-laden Tigers squad emerged from a good 2A Columbia Basin Conference to advance to its first semi-final appearance since that historic 1957 season, and played arguably its worst game of the season against the Kennedy Trojans.



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Hermiston High School junior Andre Allison holds up a first place trophy from the Spokane Youth Lacrosse LAXFest May 16-17. Allison turned to coaching after his athletic career was ended with a severe back injury.

5. 'Broken and rebuilt on the field of play' — Andre Allison's story

Again, many thanks to Allison and those around him for opening up to me about this. Think about it: sports is your life then it's taken away abruptly. There aren't many worse things in life than losing one's identity, and that's what happened to Allison. And he was honest and up front, and that blew me away. He didn't make excuses. He didn't wonder what could have been, at least not when we spoke. He had figured out what happened and a potential reason why, and chased his newfound love. Every single parent I spoke to said glowing things about him. Every single one. The smile that came over his face when talking about coaching, when talking about spending time with the kids told me all I needed to know. He really loves coaching lacrosse. He really loves spending time with kids. And, he's *happy* he got hurt. It changed him for the better. It was truly a story of evolution and betterment.



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Heppner's Maddie Lindsay (20) drives against Stanfield's Natalia Esquivel (54) as Mustang Kelly Wilson (1) tries to get open during the second half of Heppner's 47-32 tie-breaker win over the Tigers at Armand Larive Middle School in Hermiston.

6. Echo girls basketball has best season in two decades

You win a district championship and a host a state playoff game, neither of which had happened in quite some time, you get on this list. From the beginning