

# Herald Sports



## A serendipitous voicemail

In November, we ran a history piece about the 1957 Stanfield Tigers football team which went undefeated and won the state championship. Carl Banker came in the office with these old pictures of the team that were forgotten and found after nearly a half century.

It was a cool look at local sports history and those are the things I absolutely love. I'm a self-described history buff, and any sort of history will do: Medieval, American, ancient...it's all fascinating.



Sam Barbee FROM THE SIDELINES

But this history was living history and pertinent to folks in the area. You wouldn't believe how much work it took to identify the players after 60 years, but it was fun and ended up paying off in a small way.

About a week or so ago, I received a voicemail from my editor, Gary. In the email, he said it was a guy asking about the Stanfield history feature we ran in November, and I should give him a call. I listened to the voicemail — which oddly reminded me of my grandfather, however weird that sounds. It was from a man named Paul Kangas, who was a member of the 1957 Stanfield Tigers.

He proudly said he was the smallest player on the team — and he speculated he might be the smallest player in the program's history — and that he would very much like a digital copy of the old team photo.

Banker gave me a couple of copies to hold onto, and I was more than happy to send Kangas the digital copy we ran in the newspaper. Kangas is living in San Francisco and is writing about climate change issues, and, he told me, he had forgotten about his high school football memories until Banker sent him a copy of the Nov. 18 Hermiston Herald with their football team gracing the front page.

It just so happened that Nov. 18 is Kangas' birthday. What a coincidence.

We chatted a little about that year and what he's currently doing now, and I hung up the phone with a certain sense of gratification. It's honestly not often we get genuine thank-yous from readers about the content we create, but Kangas was happy we did it. It made me think of a hokey phrase my high school football coach gave the team when I was a junior: four years to play, 40 years to remember.

Though Kangas had forgotten about it, the memories were still kicking around in his head. When he received the paper from Banker in the mail and saw his team on the front page, the memories were there as if they never left.

Sports can do that. The bonding experienced and relationships formed are lasting. It was fun working on that piece, and it was fun getting the reactions of Banker and Kangas when they saw it.

— Sam Barbee is a sports reporter for the Hermiston Herald and East Oregonian based out of Hermiston. He can be reached by email at sbarbee@hermistonherald.com or on Twitter @SamBarbee1. Follow Herald Sports @HHeraldSports.

## Cougars' rally falls short

### 14-3 fourth quarter lifts Grizzlies

By SAM BARBEE  
STAFF WRITER

For three quarters, the Griswold Grizzlies couldn't figure out the Echo Cougars in a 1A Old Oregon League girls basketball game on Saturday at The Cougar Den in Echo.

The Cougars held a 27-19 lead heading into the final period, mostly due to 19 Grizzly turnovers in the first three periods. But, somehow, Helix turned in a 14-3 fourth quarter and downed Echo 33-30.

"(The players) played great defense, and that's what's won us a lot of ballgames all year long," Griswold coach Kirk Flerschinger said of the comeback. "We held 'em to, like, seven points, eight points in the second half total. That's our defense. That's how we win games."

Echo (9-10, 2-5) led by as many as 10 in the third quarter. Kelsey Ranger, who missed the first matchup between Echo and Helix (a 45-29 Helix win) hit a 3-pointer with 5:20 remaining in the third quarter to put Echo up 27-17.

"Kelsey's a big deal for them," Flerschinger said.



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Helix's Paden Flerschinger (in black) wrestles with Echo's Erika Parks for a rebound during the Grizzlies' 33-30 comeback victory on Saturday in Echo.

Echo built its lead with an aggressive press and antsy first-half play from the Grizzlies (13-4, 6-1).

"Most of my timeouts were, 'Hey, guys, settle down. to win

this game you gotta settled down and play defense. And you gotta score. Get the ball inside, and we'll score,'" Flerschinger said.

But in the third quarter, the Griz-

zlies started to settle down. They started to work the ball into the post to Paden Flerschinger, Makenzie Mize and Sadie Wilson, all of whom are 5-foot-10 and all of whom are bigger than any player for Echo.

Despite the effort, Helix still trailed by eight heading into the fourth quarter at 27-19. Helix's defense turned up, allowing just five third-quarter points, but its offense was still lagging behind, netting only two points.

"We try to go inside all the time," Flerschinger said. "We got big girls. We can throw four of them at you all night long. That's what we do."

That began to take effect in the fourth quarter.

Helix started the period on a 10-0 run to take a 29-27 lead, and Echo pulled back even on Hannah McCarty's runner with 2:55 on the clock. The Cougars took a brief lead when Lizzie Cox hit one of two free throws to move the count to 30-29, but Mize rebounded her own miss and scored with 51 seconds left to move Helix back in front at 31-30.

Echo's chance to take a lead with about 30 seconds left went beg-

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## HERMISTON'S KOPACZ BECOMES HAWK

### Bulldog shortstop signs with Columbia Basin College

By SAM BARBEE  
Staff Writer

Hermiston infielder Mikayla Kopacz signed a National Letter of Intent Tuesday to play softball at Columbia Basin College in Pasco, WA where she will study nursing or business.

"I think last year it hit me (softball) was gonna be the sport I would go far in," she said.

Competing in the Northwest Athletic Conference (NWAC), the Hawks went 28-23 (14-14 NWACC), good for fourth in the East Region. The Hawks were ousted in the fourth round of the NWAC Tournament in Portland in May after a 7-2 defeat from SW Oregon to finish fifth.

At CBC, Kopacz was recruited by and will play for Adrian Ochoa, who is entering his eighth season as head coach of the Hawks after working as an assistant at the school for two years. In the last four seasons, the Hawks under Ochoa have turned in a record of 80-99 (47-65 NWAC) with the best single season being a 26-21 (16-12) effort that put the Hawks in third place in the East.

Ochoa also coached the Washington Angels, on which Kopacz played this past summer. She said Ochoa "helped her out a



STAFF PHOTO BY SAM BARBEE

Hermiston's Mikayla Kopacz (center) poses with parents Kristi and Marek after signing her National Letter of Intent to play softball at Columbia Basin College in Pasco.

lot" both in terms of developing her skills and finding the right collegiate fit.

"He actually saw what I had and what I was bringing to the field," Kopacz said. "He helped me tremendously in hitting and fielding and gave me an offer I couldn't really pass up."

For various reasons, Kopacz was behind in her

recruitment and had trouble earning scholarship offers. Two Division I schools back east, Bradley University in Peoria, Illinois and Campbell University in Buies Creek, North Carolina, were interested in Kopacz's services, but the cost of the first year, which wouldn't be covered by a scholarship, led her to CBC, where "the best

offer" laid. Plus, the familiarity with CBC's coach made it an ultimately easy choice.

Kopacz said she knew as a sophomore she wanted to continue playing softball. During that season, in which her first varsity at-bat resulted in a home run, Kopacz realized she enjoyed softball more than her other sport. That sea-

son, Hood River had star pitcher Kayla Byers, who is now a member of Eastern Florida University's program, and Kopacz was the only Bulldog who was making consistent contact with the fireballer.

"I think I've kinda known I could (play collegiately)," she said, "but un-

See KOPACZ, A12

## Bulldogs finish 2nd at TOC

The Hermiston Bulldogs completed the Reser's Tournament of Champions on Saturday evening, finishing in second place with 177 points.

Hermiston finished the tournament with three individual champions, with Valen Wyse at 152 pounds, Bob Coleman at 182 pounds, and Sam Colbray at 195 pounds. The team finished 24 points back of Crook County, who took first place.

At 152 pounds, Wyse advanced to the championship match as the No. 6 seed and faced No. 8 seed Cole Ovens from Crook County. Wyse did not waste much time to grab the victory, as he earned the victory with a

pin at the 1:26 mark of the match. The win improved his season record to 25-4, according to TrackWrestling.com.

Later at 182 pounds, the No. 2 seed Coleman faced off against the No. 1 seed Tyler Self from Glencoe. The match went the distance, and Coleman earned his 27th win of the season with a 4-3 decision over Self.

And finally at 195 pounds, the No. 1 seed Colbray needed overtime to earn his win, defeating Century's Jamarus Grant by 3-1 decision. Colbray moves to 27-1 on the season now with the win.

Other placers for Hermiston included Liam Tarvin taking fifth place

at 120 pounds, Andy Wagner taking fourth place at 126 pounds, Brock McDonough taking third at 170 pounds, and Beau Blake taking sixth at 285 pounds.

Wyse, Coleman and Colbray each entered the bracket with seeds and received byes in their first-round matches before winning twice to reach the semifinals.

Wyse, the sixth-seeded 152 pound wrestler, took his first win by pin in just 42 seconds over Redmond's Tamione Dunningham. He then ousted third seed Austin Harris of Roseburg with a 9-3 decision. He'll face No. 2 seed Tanner Earhart of Dallas in the semis.

Coleman was the No. 2 seed at 182 and earned a major decision in his first match by beating Roseburg's Gage Maddux 13-5, then pinned seventh-seeded Joey Vigue of Marshfield in 1:16 in the quarterfinals. His semifinal matchup is against No. 3 seed Cavin Gillispie of Crater.

The top seed at 195, Colbray didn't let either of his matches on Friday get out of the first round as he pinned North Medford's Joshua Robbins in 1:57, then pinned Sprague's Justin Vazquez-Ellis in 1:16. His semifinal opponent is No. 4 seed Carson Raymond of Crook County.

Five other Hermiston

wrestlers will still be trying to earn team points in the consolation bracket today as well: Liam Tarvin (113), Andy Wagner (126), CJ Hendon (138), Brock McDonough (170) and Beau Blake (285).

Hermiston has an uphill battle to bring back the team title, though, after finished Day 1 in fourth place with 91 points.

Crook County trailed Roseburg by 3.5 points at the top of the standings, but with six wrestlers in the semifinals the Cowboys are poised for a big boost with a strong Day 2.

Roseburg can hold them off with four wrestlers in the semifinals, and third-place Redmond (94) advanced three.