

Herald Sports



HERMISTON HOPES EXTRA TIME LEADS TO NEW TITLE

By **SAM BARBEE**
Staff Writer

It's a very natural thing to go home when practice ends. As a player, you've already gotten in a good workout, you've learned about the next team you'll play and have prepared for them. After the two hours are up, it's time to go home, eat, shower and do homework.

That hasn't necessarily been the case for the No. 5 Hermiston girls basketball team (23-5), who have been putting in extra work after practice to prepare for the state tournament which starts Wednesday at Gill Coliseum in Corvallis. The Bulldogs take on the No. 4 Corvallis Spartans (20-5) at 3:15 p.m. on Wednesday.

"We're just excited. We've been putting forth a lot of effort and work and we're excited with the results that we got last year," sophomore Rileigh Andreason said. "So we're ready to be back and prove everybody wrong."

That extra work is a function of coming up short in recent years. Three years ago, the Bulldogs turned in their program's best finish with a third-place trophy, with a loss to Corvallis on the way. Last year, the Bulldogs did themselves one better with a runner-up finish and win over the Spartans.

This is the last go-around for four-year varsity players Jansen Edmiston and Sara Ramirez. They were present for the third-place finish two years ago and last year's tantalizingly close loss to La Salle Prep. With their experience in hand, they hope their senior season can be the most memorable.

"I'm more determined, more focused than excited," Edmiston said. "It's my last year. It's our last year. Mine and Sara's and Kiana's ... We don't plan on losing a game. But if we do, we won't give up."

"It's shocking to think about (that's it's the last one) because it's kinda sad," Ramirez added. "But I don't feel any pressure. It's just like any of the other three years. We're gonna go and play as hard as we can and come up with what we can."

The Bulldogs enter as the fifth seed not because of a poor record, but because of how the OSAA ranks its teams. An important calculation in the OSAA's equation is the Colley Ranking, which depends on



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Hermiston's Hayden Meyers shoots the ball followed by Liberty's Alyssa Grenfell in the Bulldogs' 71-48 win against the Falcons on Friday in Hermiston.

playing teams within your division. Because Hermiston played a number of games in Arizona, and therefore didn't play any 5A Oregon schools — plus playing in the elite division in Lake Oswego against some 6A teams — Hermiston doesn't have the Colley Ranking other schools do. So they're ranked lower.

Hermiston doesn't take it as a sign of disrespect. They understand it's math and doesn't mean much outside of who plays who. They do recognize, though, that it takes a bit of pressure off them, internally and externally.

"That's a little motivation for us, because we feel like we're a higher ranked team than five by the coaches," Hoffert said. "We still have to go out and prove it ... The pressure of being first or second is not there. The talk from the girls hasn't been like

it's been in the past because we're not ranked one or two. We're not expected to be in the finals. But we are (expecting to be in the finals) and we're hoping to use that to our advantage."

Now the Bulldogs once again see the Spartans in their home city. There is certainly familiarity between these squads, but it'll be a tad different this year. Corvallis is generally similar to Hermiston: not exactly small, but not exactly tall, either, with good guard play and lots of athleticism. This year, however, Corvallis brings some size to the equation, which Hermiston is lacking. Though if Hermiston has its way, it won't be a detriment.

"They're big, they try to run, believe it or not, they try to push

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STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Hermiston's Jansen Edmiston shoots the ball guarded by Liberty's Andrea Gallegos in the Bulldogs' 71-48 win against the Falcons on Friday in Hermiston.

Bulldogs floor Falcons on home court

Big third quarter propels Hermiston into state quarterfinals

By **MATT ENTRUP**
Staff Writer

Going into halftime, the Liberty Falcons had to be feeling good about their chances of making a run at the Hermiston Bulldogs during the second phase of action in Friday's 5A girls basketball state playoff game.

By the time Hermiston junior Hayden Meyers sank a jumper in the lane to close the third quarter, the only hope the Falcons had left was keeping the score respectable.

But even that, apparently, would be wishful thinking.

When the Bulldogs were doing their thing there was nothing the Falcons could do to slow them down, and Hermiston turned a dominant second half into a 71-48 rout for a return to Corvallis and the state bracket's final site.

"It's so exciting for all of us," said junior Kynzee Padilla. "Our seniors deserve it so much, and our whole team deserves it because we work so hard."

The Bulldogs (22-3) were in control the entire way, but a lapse in the second quarter allowed the Falcons (13-12) to cut a nine-point lead to one when Kenzie Pimentel sank a three-pointer to make it a 24-23 ballgame with 3:39 left in the frame.

"We talked all week about the certain things we have to do," said Hermiston coach Steve Hoffert. "In the second quarter we didn't do those certain things. We did the things that allows Liberty to keep themselves in the basketball game."

Hermiston put its foot down there, though, and following a Liberty timeout went on a 10-2 run to regain their buffer before halftime.

Bulldogs junior Rileigh Andreason scored five of her team-high 15 points during the three-minute stretch, and Hermiston took a 34-25 lead into the locker room.

"We just needed to step up our defense," she said. "We had a lot of open looks and people on the boards the whole time."



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS
Hermiston's Sara Ramirez shoots the ball in front of Liberty's Cami Smotherman in the Bulldogs' 71-48 win against the Falcons on Friday in Hermiston.

The second half couldn't have started much worse for the Falcons, or much better for the Bulldogs.

Hermiston senior Sara Ramirez stole a lazy inbound pass to open the third quarter, and when her three-pointer bounced out Andreason was there for the putback. Hermiston went on a 6-1 run over the first three minutes that prompted two Liberty timeouts, which did nothing more than delay the inevitable.

With Hermiston shredding the Liberty press and dominating the offensive glass the lead quickly ballooned, and Meyers' basket with four seconds left in the third made it 54-32.

"We cracked down on no turnovers and smarter shots in the second half," said senior Jansen Edmiston, who finished with 13 points and a team-high nine rebounds. "We'd been practicing for a couple days how to break (the press). We'd seen film on them, we watched them play Pendleton who they played in their play-in game, so we just studied them for a couple days and knew how to do it."

Hoffert said the third quarter, during which the Bulldogs outscored Liberty 20-7, went even better than he could have hoped.

"It was the game plan, two times better than we did it in practice," he said. "We executed everything defensively, offensively, and it just sort of clicked."

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Tradition never graduates for Hermiston girls basketball

You might see the phrase around a Hermiston girls basketball game. I've seen it on T-shirts, mostly sported by the girls, coaches and their families, but you can catch it on a banner from time to time. "Tradition never graduates."

It's catchy, and I liked it from the first time I saw it. It's simple; just three words. But it also looks back and forward simultaneously, which means it's exceedingly well-crafted.

And so, with the 5A girls state basketball tournament starting today, that phrase could mean more than in years past. If Hermiston wins, then it would take on a whole new meaning.

Hermiston has boasted some pretty good players recently. Maloree Moss started all 33 games for Eastern Oregon this season as a senior. But Jansen Edmiston and Sara Ramirez have been bedrocks for this program.

Edmiston is a four-year starter at point guard. Just that fact in itself is impressive. The first basketball story I wrote here was

about Edmiston, and how difficult it was to become the starting point guard as a freshman and everything that went into that. By all accounts, she handled it really well, and has worked her way to being one of the best guards in the state.

Ramirez is quiet, but she plays loud. At practice, she shoots. When the team's doing a drill and she's on the sideline, she shoots. When practice is over, she shoots. In games, when open, you guessed it. She shoots. And boy is she good at it.

These two have given a stability over the four years that is invaluable. Head coach Steve Hoffert wouldn't worry about who would distribute and who would score. Those two already existed and would for four years. It was just who would go around them.

If this isn't the best roster Ramirez and Edmiston have been on, then it's very close.

Yeah, the ranking isn't what it was last year, but the Bulldogs closed out their league schedule convincingly — with



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FROM THE SIDELINES