



STAFF PHOTO BY ALEXIS MANSANAREZ  
Three Echo Cougars committed to their respective colleges Monday. Daylon Eng (left) and Hayden Hilliard (middle) will be joining Blue Mountain CC's rodeo team and Alyssa Ray (right) will be playing softball for George Fox.

# Three Cougars college-bound

Ray to play softball at George Fox, Cowboys Hilliard and Eng commit to rodeo at BMCC

By ALEXIS MANSANAREZ  
STAFF WRITER

ECHO — Echo softball's standout pitcher Alyssa Ray didn't think she would be playing the sport at the collegiate level. After starting at the age of five, a bad experience in her early teens put her off softball, but now she's part of Echo's first-ever district and conference championship team.

"It's super exciting," Ray said. "I know as a freshman I never realized or thought that I would go to a college to play softball and now that our team is doing so good, it's just a

great way to end my senior year."

Ray signed her National Letter of Intent on Monday to play at George Fox University, a NCAA Division-III school in the nine-member Northwest Conference.

The university, located in Newberg about three hours west of Portland, checked all of Ray's boxes.

She had previously talked to a couple of schools but once Ray's father put the Bruin bug in her ear, she reached out.

"Coach (Jessica) Hollen was amazing at e-mailing me back," Ray said. "She made me feel appreciated and noticed me."

Ray then decided to visit her prospective school, attend a softball camp and seal the deal — all before her senior season.

"I just feel like I was a part of them and they really cared about who I was," she added.

Ray will join four other

pitchers and be the fifth in the Bruins bullpen under 10-year veteran Hollen — the 2012 and 2015 Northwest Conference Coach of the Year. This past season, the Bruins recorded their fifth straight winning season with an overall record of 35-11, improving from the 20-17 last year's season.

Two other Cougars also committed to continuing their respective sport at the next level. Hayden Hilliard and Daylon Eng will be joining Blue Mountain Community College's rodeo team.

The top two cowboys in the state took slightly different roads to get to the same team.

For Eng, he started competing his sophomore year after making the switch from baseball. By his second year, he was Washington State's high school rodeo champion.

"I was hoping I would get the chance," he said of continuing in college, "and

just working really hard at it to get where I'm at."

For Hilliard, he started getting on calves and steers around the age of six with the hope of always moving up the ranks, but initially thought he would skip the college step.

"I wasn't even going to go to college to start with," he said. "I was just going to go pro rodeo."

But the close commute and the chance to catch pro-circuit judges' attention while still improving was an opportunity neither Hilliard or Eng could pass up.

"There's a level of exposure," BMCC coach Shawn Eng said. "I would like to see them finish out strong this year in their high school events, whether they be first or third or fourth. They've got to look at the big picture; no matter how they do this year it's fine."

"If I would like to see anything, it's to see them be successful and know there's another stepping stone."

## SPORTS BRIEFS

### Ex-Bulldog earns All-American status

GULF SHORES, Ala. — Makayla Akers, the Hermiston alumnae and current Eastern Oregon University athlete, earned NAA All-American status while competing at the NAA National Track and Field Championships on Thursday.

Akers earned her All-American honor with a sixth place finish in women's javelin throw with a distance of 137 feet, 6 inches. The freshman qualified for the javelin finals Wednesday, when she threw the seventh best distance in the NAA at 43.13 meters.

### BMCC holds select basketball tryouts

PENDLETON — On Saturday and Sunday, Blue Mountain Community College hold select basketball tryouts in Pendleton. Any high school-aged boy with a minimum of one year of eligibility is welcome to register.

Select Basketball will host traveling basketball teams in July. The teams are made up of from players entering their freshman year through their senior year of high school. Each summer, 12-15 teams will travel to various NCAA certified tournaments in the West.

More information at [selectbasketballusa.com](http://selectbasketballusa.com).

### TrackTown Youth League comes to Hermiston

HERMISTON — The TrackTown Youth League will be coming to Kennison Field for a meet Thursday. The event is open to youth ages 7-14 and free of charge. The meet is scheduled for 5:30 p.m. with pre-registered participant check-in from 4:30-5:15 p.m., and day-of registration from 4:15-4:45 p.m. There is no previous track experience necessary, and the events will range from the 1,500-meter run to the 400- and 100-meter dash, as well as field events like long jump and turbo javelin.

The top two finishers in each event and age group will qualify for the statewide TrackTown Youth League Championship Meet at Hayward Field in Eugene in June.

Pre-registration is recommended, and for more information visit [www.tracktownyouthleague.com/meets](http://www.tracktownyouthleague.com/meets).

### George Fox coach leading Heppner basketball camp


HEPPNER — The Heppner High School girls basketball program is hosting a basketball camp on June 11-12 for all girls going into grades 5-12.

The camp will be led by George Fox University head coach Michael Meek, now in his eighth season coaching the Bruins with a record of 180-27 (.870) through his first seven seasons. Meek was named the 2011-12 NCAA Division III Coach of the Year by D3Hoops.com, and he had a prior stop at Southridge High School where he won various national and state coaching accolades.

There is no cost for Heppner students. The camp is split up into three sessions: 9-11 a.m. for grades 5-8 (fundamentals), 1-3 p.m. for grades 5-12 to (shooting), and 5-8 p.m. is a team camp for high schoolers.

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