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Bulldogs end one era only to start another

Hermiston athletics wrapped up its final year as a member of the OSAA with state titles, league championships and other memorable moments

By **ALEXIS MANSANAREZ**
STAFF WRITER

HERMISTON — It's something most athletic programs build its success on: the rise, or fall, of its football program.

For the Hermiston Bulldogs, the 2017 football season marked more than the start of the athletic year that would end in heartbreaking fashion nearly nine months later with a loss in the softball quarterfinals. It also marked what would be the final year as a member of the OSAA. The storyline was followed in almost every sport, and the self-titled "Farewell Tour" had an impressive first stop.

The most memorable performance of the year goes to the football team after the Bulldogs defeated Churchill 38-35 on November 25 for the school's first Class 5A state football title since hoisting the trophy in 2014, and for the first time ever the state champions won't be defending their title come next season. Instead, Hermiston will move into a league with WIAA's Class 4A football champions, Richland, and 3A playoff contenders, Kamiakin.

Behind First-Team All-State quarterback Andrew James and Coach of the Year, David Faeteete, the Hermiston football team leads the top moments within Hermiston athletics for the 2017-18 season.

"We did have a good year," Hermiston athletic director Larry Usher said. "I know there are some other programs that probably had some higher expectations and would have liked to have done a lot better but overall, it was a good year and you say it was a good year mainly because you won a state championship in football which is kind of the crown jewel."

"To go out winning a state football championship was really really nice, and of course winning another conference championship in boys basketball to get that back on track was really nice as well," he added.

The Columbia River Conference title, the last of its kind with the reclassification happening across all classes in the OSAA, was the next stop on the Farewell Tour.

The boys basketball team has had one true opponent in the CRC, and it was their cross-county rivals, the Pendleton Buckaroos. For the past couple of years, it was Pendleton dominating the Bulldogs, winning four consecutive league titles. But Hermiston finally dethroned the Bucks on its way out.

A 50-46 win over Pendleton on February 20 at the Dawg House gave Hermiston the league championship, which was the first under head coach Casey Arstein. The Bulldogs will return nearly their entire roster after losing only three seniors to graduation, and the experience will be necessary as the team will prepare to face tough opponents in the WIAA Class 4A/3A hybrid Mid-Columbia Conference.

Things aren't only looking up for boys basketball: The wrestling program will feature reigning 100-pound champion Alice Todryk, who will now be competing in WIAA-sanctioned events — something the OSAA will start for the first time next year.

Also seeing improvements this year was the softball program, which went from a 10-17 season with seven freshman on the roster to a 17-10 year and a quarterfinal appearance.

The Bulldogs battled in the postseason after finishing league play 6-6 behind first place Pendleton, and won their play-in game 10-5 and then made it through the first round of the playoffs with a 4-3 win. The 11-8 loss in the second round was devastating, but it also showed what a year can do for the Bulldogs, who like the baseball program will face tough competition in Richland and Kamiakin.

The athletic year wrapped up with Hermiston's final trip to the historic Hayward Field for the state track and field champion-



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

Hermiston's Jordan Ramirez (33) and Cody Thacker (45) celebrate as time runs out on the clock in the Bulldogs' 38-35 win against Churchill in the 5A state championship game on November 25 in Hillsboro.



STAFF PHOTO BY KATHY ANEY

Hermiston's Stephanie Miers prepares to release the discus during the OSAA State Track and Field Championships on May 18-19 at Hayward Field in Eugene. In Class 5A, Miers finishes fourth with a personal best of 124 feet, 1 inch.

ships, where the girls team earned a third place finish after recording 50 points and senior Tyler Rohman won the 5A 110-meter hurdle state championship with a personal

best of 14.09.

"Of course to finish off the year with our girl's track program doing as well as they did and even some of our boys that did fantastic and

kind of exceeded expectations, it was a good, fun way to finish off the year," Usher said.

"Overall, I thought it was a great year for our athletic program," he added.

The excitement and momentum will be needed when Hermiston enters the very tough MCC next year.

Teams like Richland, a Class 4A school that brought home a football and baseball state championship; and Southridge, which won the Class 3A baseball state title, will be just a couple of the schools Hermiston will face in the new nine-team league.

"The competition level, it just got really, really stiff," Usher said. "We didn't just join a better league, we joined, arguably — and I think anybody in the WIAA would argue from top to bottom overall when you look at all sports — the most competitive league in the state of Washington. There's no question. They bring out so many state champions, it is unbelievable what the Mid-Columbia Conference does."

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