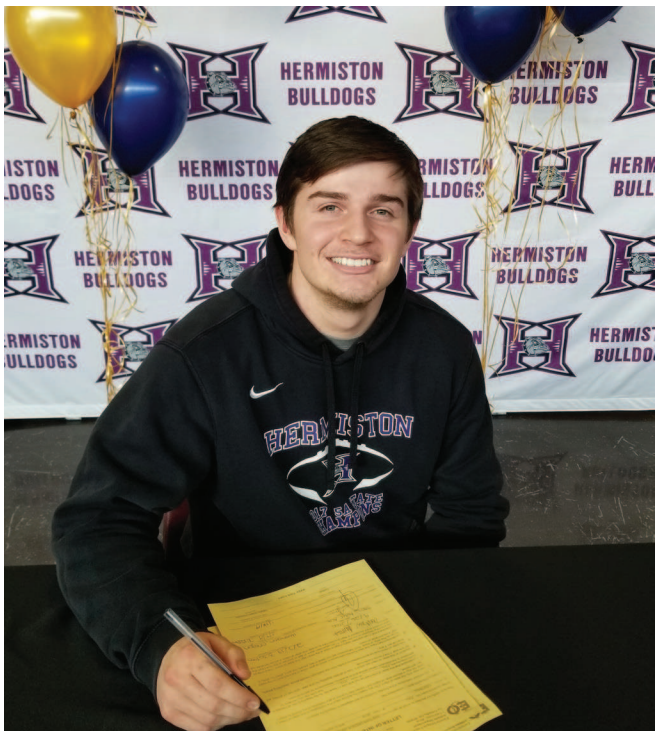


# After dynamic career with Dawgs, James is headed to EOU



Staff photo by Annie Fowler

**Hermiston quarterback Andrew James signed his letter of intent Thursday to play football at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande.**

By **ANNIE FOWLER**  
STAFF WRITER

With one swoosh of his pen, Andrew James officially joined the Eastern Oregon University football family on Thursday afternoon.

James, Hermiston High's starting quarterback the past three seasons, joins a recruiting class of 24 for coach Tim Camp's Mountaineers.

"I'm excited," James said. "I knew this would happen one day or another. I will never forget this day."

It will be a long time before Hermiston fans forget what James brought to the field.

"I am happy and proud," Hermiston coach David Faaeteete said. "He's ready to move on to his next journey. Our program wouldn't be the same without him. He was a great leader and a

great communicator. Credit to his parents, and coaches who have had the opportunity to coach him."

James is the 10th player Faaeteete has coached over the past four years that has signed to play at the next level. James will join former Bulldogs Jonathan Hinkle (linebacker) and Joey Gutierrez (wide receiver) at EOU.

"They are doing it with their hard work," Faaeteete said of his players moving on. "Our program gave them an opportunity to shine. I'm going to miss Andrew, he's a good kid."

James said he is looking forward to his next chapter of football.

"There are a lot of guys there I already know," James said. "It will be some of the best years of my life."

This past fall, Hermiston moved into the Mid-Co-

lumbia Conference with the Tri-City schools, and had its share of success, including a road win over defending 4A state champion Richland.

The 5-foot-10, 195-pound James threw for 1,391 yards and 12 touchdowns, and ran for another 753 yards and 12 touchdowns, finishing second in the MCC in total offense (2,144 yards).

His efforts earned him the East Oregonian All-Area Player of the Year honor for the second year in a row.

A shoulder injury in the first game of the season limited James' passing, and took him off defense. His junior year, he threw for more than 2,300 yards and 29 touchdowns as the Bulldogs won the Oregon 5A title.

He will have shoulder surgery on March 5 in Portland, and will miss baseball season.

James isn't sure when or

where he will play at EOU, but he is not afraid to put in the work.

"I have gotten into a groove here," he said of Hermiston. "I have to get out of that. I will have to grind to get a spot there. I'm not completely sure where I will play. I might move to slot or play defense. I just like to play football. I will play anywhere."

James also got interest from Linfield, Whitworth, Oregon State and Western Oregon, but there were a couple of things that made Eastern his top choice.

His dad David, a Pendleton grad, played outside linebacker for the Mounties from 1980-81, and James believes EOU's program is on the rise.

"They are coming back up," he said. "They are getting close to a national championship."

## Chemistry

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"He was always the biggest guy on the floor," Usher said. "He had to learn to play the game, not just one position."

Before Mendez joined the team, they endured some ribbing.

"We would get to tournaments in Yakima and other places, and the other teams would make fun of us and their parents would laugh at us because we were so short," James said. "Then we'd win by 20 or 30."

Ortiz played a few tournaments with the team in fourth and fifth grades, then joined the team full time in the seventh grade.

"Cesar couldn't even dribble the ball during one of his first tournaments with us," James said. "Then he shot a 3 with a guy in his face and turned and went down the court. He's still doing that."

Ramirez was the last to join the group, showing up in the seventh grade.

Usher knew as the pieces came together that this group could be special.

"There are so many youth parents who think there is a magic pill to be good," Usher said.

"There is not. They were in the gym a lot. We would play 15 to 16 weekends a year. We would practice four or five times a week. We played in tournaments in Seattle, Portland and Reno to find the best competition we could."

While the team had success, it did come with challenges.

"Ryne refused to wear socks in the second grade," Usher said. "I don't know why. I have been in Hermiston for 16 years, and we have never had size in the program. Trevor Phillips was 6-7, but he was a guard."

With his son DJ on the team, Usher didn't just want good players, but good families.

"The first step, and biggest step, in putting together a program like this is commitment," Usher said. "We didn't so much look at the kids, but the families we enjoyed spending time with. They are all good kids, for the most part."

It's been 10 years since Usher started working with the players, and he has enjoyed watching them grow as players and young men.

"Andrew is the kind of kid who wears his emotions on his sleeve," Usher said. "He holds himself to a higher standard. You still see that in him. Cole has always been a mature kid. He provides a lot of leadership. He is the most coachable player I have ever had. He uses all the tools he's been taught."

Then there are those who have needed a little extra push.

"Cesar, all he wanted to do was cherry pick and hit 3s," Usher said. "Not much has changed. Still trying to drive playing defense to him. When Jordan showed up in the seventh grade, he was pretty raw. We had to teach him the rules."

By the time they were freshmen in high school, they were more than good.

James earned a spot on the varsity team, while his buddies played on the freshman team, where they posted a 24-0 record.

### Let the big Dawgs run

Not much has changed when the Bulldogs walk onto a gym for a game.



Photo courtesy of Larry Usher/

**Three of the Hermiston seniors were in the fourth grade when they played on this Hermiston AAU team. Front row (from left): Thomas Mabbott, DJ Usher and Zane Davis. Middle row: Andrew James, Ryne Andreason, Andrew Earl, Cole Smith and Mathew Eckhardt. Back row: coaches Larry Usher and David James.**

Hermiston is the shortest team in the Mid-Columbia Conference by a country mile. That didn't stop them when they were 10, and it certainly doesn't stop them now.

"Our thing is to go out and play harder than other people," James said. "In this league, everybody's team has good guys, but so do we."

While all six mostly agreed that James was the better player when they were younger, they could not make that same statement now that they are high school seniors.

"Andrew was bigger and stronger when we were younger, but when we got to high school, we all were a little better," Andreason said. "Now, I think we are all pretty equal."

Ortiz agreed.

"We all have our strengths," Ortiz said. "We know our roles."

The players were given a chance to say, in their own words, what they bring to the team. Funny thing is, their teammates had their say on that, as well.

"I'm pretty athletic," said Andreason, who out-jumps most of the big men in the league.

"I play some pretty good defense, and I'm a good shooter. My favorite shot is when we play high post and I can shoot a mid-range jumper."

James is the vocal leader of the group, among other things.

"I bring motivation," he said. "And leadership. If something goes wrong, I try to fix it."

Smith, who has been a valuable sixth man off the bench this season, quietly goes about his business.

"I bring a sense of tempo, and I'm smart," Smith said. "I take care of the ball. We feed off each other out there."

Ortiz is one of the top 3-pointer shooters in the MCC, but as of late, he has been taking his game inside a little more.

"I bring leadership, 3-point shooting and size," Ortiz said. "I've been trying to help Adrian out down low. I lead by example on the court."

Mendez is an admitted chatterbox on the court, and not just to his teammates.

"I talk to everyone," he said. "I bring humor and I concentrate on defense."

Ramirez said he brings energy to the court, but in an effort to save time, Andreason wrapped things up for his teammate.

"He is one our most consistent players," Andreason said. "He creates shots for the rest of us."

There were other discussions about who is better at ping-pong, video games, and they have all pretty much agreed that their kids will not marry the kids of their teammates.

And, if they all were lost in the woods, Smith would be the only one to survive.

As the players left the room, there were plans to end up at the Ramirez house. With this group, no one ever is alone.

"Basketball brought us together, but we will be always be in touch," Andreason said.

"It's not like basketball is the only thing that keeps us together."

That's the one thing they all could agree on.

## STATE WRESTLING

# Dawgs ready to make history on the mat

**Hermiston will send 7 wrestlers to Mat Classic XXXI in Tacoma**

By **ANNIE FOWLER**  
STAFF WRITER

Come Friday morning, the Hermiston wrestling team will make history as the first non-Washington athletes to participate in a WIAA state event.

The Bulldogs are sending seven guys to Mat Classic XXXI at the Tacoma Dome.

"It will be pretty cool," Hermiston athletic director Larry Usher said. "We are pretty excited about it."

Competing at state for Hermiston will be Jon Lee (220 pounds), Sam Cadenas (195), Hunter Dyer (120), Gage Shipley (126), Jordan Franklin (132), Trevor Wagner (160) and Dustyn Coughlin (285).

Mat Classic will be held Friday and Saturday. Action begins at 8:30 a.m. Friday, and at

9:45 a.m. Saturday. Finals are scheduled for 5 p.m. Saturday. Doors will open to the public one hour prior to competition.

With the 3A Region 4 Tournament, and other regional tournaments canceled throughout the state last weekend because of inclement weather, the WIAA was forced to go a 32-man bracket.

"To my knowledge, this is the first time ever that we have had to do this," WIAA Sports & Activities Information Director Casey Johnson said.

The tournament also will have a different format than in the past, with the six classifications split between morning and afternoon sessions.

The 3A, 2A and 1B/2B teams will compete between 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m. Friday, with the remainder of the teams hitting the mats at 2 p.m.

All classifications will compete starting at 9:45 a.m. Saturday.

"We got lucky with that format," Johnson

said. "It was going into place this year any way. This way, it will go faster because we can use more mats per round."

The draws for the Hermiston wrestlers don't mean much in the grand scheme of things. None have faced their first-round opponents before.

Dyer will face Gage Nelson of Yelm in his first match. Nelson, ranked No. 11, finished seventh at state last year at 106 pounds.

Shipley will take on Ryan Davis of Yelm. Ranked No. 4, Davis placed fifth at state late year at 126.

Franklin's first opponent is Sam Smith of Peninsula, while Wagner will face Stone Anderson of Gig Harbor. Wagner is ranked No. 12.

Cadenas, a freshman, will battle sixth-ranked Jake Flynn of Gig Harbor in his first match.

Lee, who is ranked fifth, will wrestle John Scott of Yelm in his first match. He is the only freshman ranked in the top 16 in his

weight class.

Rounding out the group is Coughlin, who is ranked 12th. He will wrestle William Christman of Gig Harbor.

While the wrestlers are raring to go, Usher said they have been monitoring road conditions in Washington and Oregon to find the safest way to get the athletes to Tacoma.

The main road to Tacoma is I-90, which was closed Tuesday after more than four feet of snow fell over the span of two days on Snoqualmie Pass. The route through Portland is no safer with I-84 reporting icy conditions.

"Hour by hour, that is our job right now," Usher said of scouring road reports. "I'm just about to get online and see what it will be to fly our guys there. That might be the safest thing to do. Some of the MCC teams are thinking of sending their guys on Wednesday. It might be the little window of time to get them through the pass."

The WIAA also is monitoring the roads in an effort to advise teams from the east side of the state of the best routes to take.

"We are talking to people from around the state," Johnson said. "People are trying to find a way to make it work."