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An inside look at the Jail Blazers

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

Portland Trail Blazers fans can get an inside look at the team Wednesday, June 5, from a man who has witnessed the good, the bad and the ugly of the team for the better part of three decades.

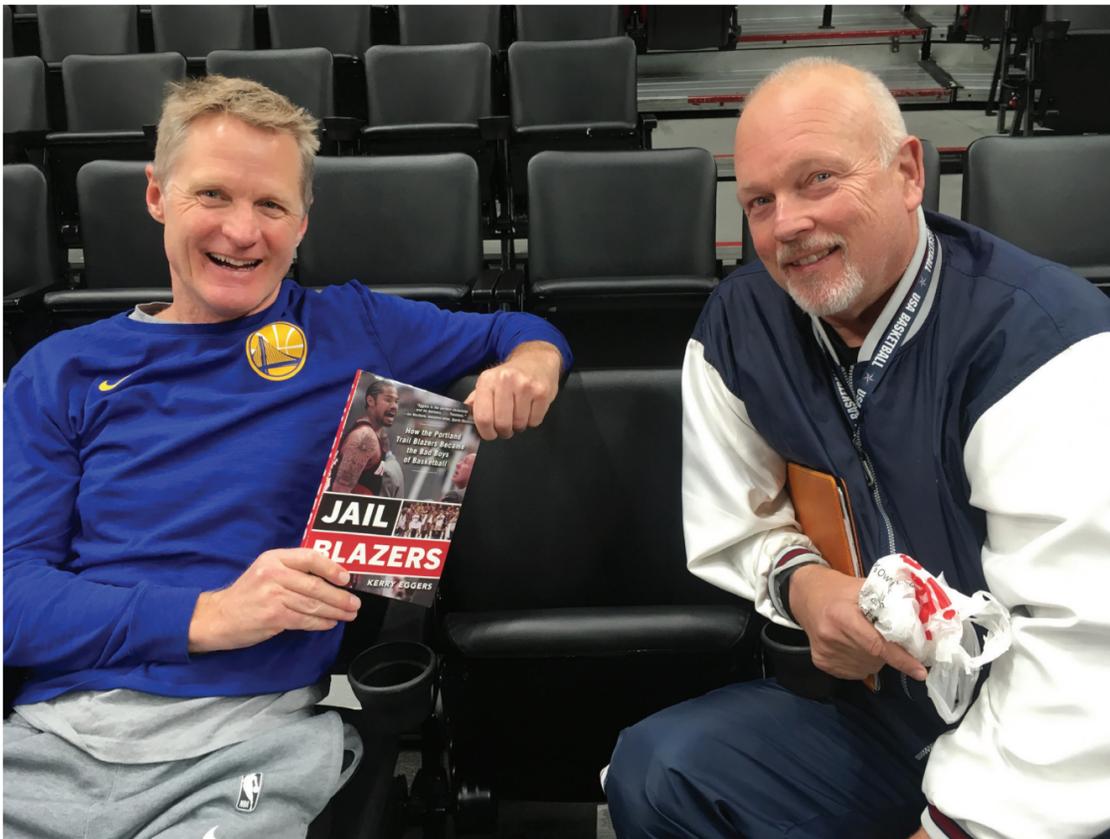
Kerry Eggers, of the *Portland Tribune*, will have a meet and greet at Sundown Grill and Bar-B-Q in Pendleton, starting at 5:30 p.m.

A social hour will be followed by Eggers talking about his new book "Jail Blazers: How the Portland Trail Blazers Became the Bad Boys of Basketball" and a discussion about this year's team, which reached the Western Conference Finals for the first time since 2000.

Eggers' book takes readers into the world of the Blazers from 1995 to 2005, where drugs, infidelity, attitude and run-ins with the law were a regular part of the Portland sports scene.

Eggers said it took him nearly a year to write the book, which includes interviews with roughly 70 people — 25 players, all the head coaches during the time, referees, broadcasters and guys who worked the police beat.

"There were a wide variety of opinions during that time," Eggers said. "This is a very balanced look at a very interesting time. They were nationally known. They had success and controversy. I reached out to every significant person in that era. I did not get to talk



Author Kerry Eggers, right, presents former Portland Trail Blazer and now Golden State coach Steve Kerr, with a copy of "Jail Blazers: How the Portland Trail Blazers Became the Bad Boys of Basketball."

Photo courtesy of Kerry Eggers

to some players. Some did not want to talk, and some could not be reached."

Included in that group were former Portland general manager Bob Whitsitt, and players J.R. Rider and Rasheed Wallace.

The book, which came out Nov. 27, 2018, is more than 500 pages. With Chapter 8 being Armageddon, Almost Every Week, it makes you want to skip a

page or two.

Reviews from fellow authors have been more than positive.

"One of the great cult teams in NBA history deserves its own book (and, for that matter, movie). Eggers is the perfect chronicler and he delivers with (pardon the pun) this blunt retelling," writes Jon Wertheim, executive editor of *Sports Illustrated*.

"It's nice that I have gotten endorsements from other great writers," Eggers said. "I appreciate that."

An inside look

Beat writers for teams get a unique perspective into the lives of players and inner workings of the team, whether it be high school, college or pro. When it comes to exposing the dark side of a team, Eggers said

it really isn't that hard.

"I have been covering them for 30 years," he said. "You have to play it down the middle and be impartial. It's a job. You have to maintain a professional distance. But that doesn't mean you don't make relationships. It was a story that needed to be told."

During the height of the Jail Blazer era, the team's attendance went from a

once proud 14,000 down to 8,000.

Issues with players like Rod Strickland, Donte Wingfield, Jermaine O'Neal, Gary Trent, Rider, Wallace and Cliff Robinson, among others, drove fans away.

"The Blazers lost a lot of respect, and it showed at the box office," Eggers said. "That's when (owner) Paul Allen went in a different direction and fired Bob Whitsitt. Paul lived with it for so long because they won games. He allowed that. Bob spent Paul's money and never got to the NBA Finals, and put up with the other stuff. It was a change for the better."

While doing research for the book, former Blazer Steve Kerr (2001-02), now head coach of Golden State, said the team did not like the term Jail Blazers.

"Kerr said it was exaggerated," Eggers said.

Coming home

Eggers still has family and friends in Pendleton, making this week's visit appropriate.

His father, John Eggers, was an all-state basketball player at Pendleton High School. His cousin Tim Hawkins lives locally, and longtime local sports enthusiast Dean Fouquette is a close friend.

"I get back occasionally," Eggers said. "I talked to Dean about this, and he has been arranging everything. We'll talk about the book and this year's team. It should be a fun night."

SIGNING



Staff photo by Annie Fowler

Hermiston midfielder Emilio Leal signed a letter of intent on Wednesday to play soccer for Walla Walla Community College.

Dawgs' Leal headed to WWCC for soccer

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

The hardest worker on the field. A versatile player.

Hermiston soccer coach Rich Harshberger was quick to point out Emilio Leal's best qualities after the talented midfielder signed his letter of intent last week to play for Walla Walla Community College.

"It's a double bonus of talent and hard work," Harshberger said. "He's willing to put in the hard work in the offseason, which helps."

Leal, 18, follows in the footsteps of former Hermiston players, like Freddy Rodriguez and Antonio Campos, in suiting up for the Warriors.

"Freddy said I should go there," Leal said. "He said it's a really good program and I can work on my soccer IQ."

Harshberger said at last count he will have two players at WWCC and five at Blue Mountain when the college soccer season rolls

around this fall.

"That is part of our family plans, to go watch as many of our players play," he said. "When Walla Walla and Blue Mountain play, we can see six or so all at once."

Leal, a Mid-Columbia Conference first-team selection, led the Bulldogs with six goals and seven assists this season.

When Hermiston joined the MCC, the soccer players had to wait 18 months between seasons, but in the end, Leal said it played in his favor.

"August 1, it's back to the grind," he said. "There isn't much of a break."

Another bonus of joining the MCC, according to Leal, is the level of competition, which will translate to the college game.

"It's a lot more aggressive and there is more speed," Leal said. "There was not a slow game. It was fast-paced every game. The goalkeepers are at a higher level in Washington. We didn't know what we were getting into. I just had to

play my game and do the best I can."

With his small size, Leal said he would get pushed around and was an easy target at times, but he learned to use his strengths.

"This year, people noticed I was fast," he said. "I didn't realize I was that explosive. I wish I was taller to win more headers, I really had to jump for some of those."

When Walla Walla plays Blue Mountain in NWAC East action, Leal could face Hermiston teammate Juan Carlos Navarrete in the Timberwolves' goal.

"He was my protector back there," Leal said. "He's already throwing a little shade. We will let the score talk."

Leal, who will be the first in his family to go to college, plans to major in agriculture/business. He plans to put that knowledge to use as a rancher.

He already owns 16 head of cattle. He breeds them, sells them, and eats them.

"I like steak," he said.

Coleman earns Benny Award for wrestling

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston native Bob Coleman earned Oregon State University's Most Inspirational Award for wrestling during the Benny Awards on Wednesday night.

Coleman won a Pac-12 title at 184 pounds and advanced to the NCAA Wrestling Championships. He finished the season with a 17-16 record.

Coleman, a junior, also

earned his first Pac-12 Wrestling All-Academic selection in March.

The 2016 graduate of Hermiston High School is an agricultural business management major carrying a 3.06 GPA.



Coleman

MCC golf honors

Hermiston's Garrett McClannahan and Madison McClannahan were selected to the Mid-Columbia Conference honorable teams.

Garrett, a senior, advanced to the 3A state

tournament at Indian Summer Country Club in Lacey, Washington. He shot an 87 in the first round to make the cut. He then shot an 80 on the second day to finish with a 167 and tied for 45th place.

Madison, a sophomore, earned a trip to the girls 3A state tournament at Hawks Prairie Golf Course in Lacey. She shot a 109 in the first round, missing the cut.

Angela Park of Southridge was named the girls Player of the Year, while Carter Sheets of Richland earned the honor for the boys.

SOFTBALL

Dawgs place 6 on all-conference team

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

The Hermiston softball team made a good impression during its first year in the Mid-Columbia Conference.

The Bulldogs were the MCC's No. 3 seed to the District 8 tournament, but they played their best ball down the stretch to earn a trip to the 3A state tournament. They finished the season 15-10.

The Hermiston players were rewarded for their play by the conference coaches, with six earning all-conference honors.

Shortstop Sydney Stefani and utility player Bailee Noland were selected to the first team, while third baseman Grace Studer and out-

fielder Daisy Maddox were named to the second team. Second baseman Ashley Cameron and outfielder Sam Atilano were honorable selections.

All but Stefani, who has signed to play at Idaho State, will return next season.

Stefani, a senior, hit .486 in the lead-off position. She had 36 hits, including 23 singles, nine doubles, two triples and two home runs. She scored 30 runs.

Noland, who pitched and caught during the season, hit .575. The junior led the Bulldogs with 46 hits, including 31 singles, five doubles and nine

home runs. She had a team-high 35 RBIs and scored 30 runs. She only struck out nine times in 80 at-bats. Defensively, she had two

errors.

In the circle, Noland pitched 88 innings and posted a 10-5 record. She had a 4.057 ERA and struck out 56.

Studer, just a sophomore, hit .362 with 10 doubles and 22 RBIs.

Maddox, a junior, had a .375 batting average, with two home runs, 14 RBIs and 14 runs scored.

A junior, Cameron led the team with 31 runs scored and 12 hit-by-pitch free passes to first base. She hit .393 with 16 RBIs and five doubles.

Atilano, a junior, hit .324 with 10 RBIs and 17 runs scored. Defensively, she had one error.

Chiawana senior Annalisa McKinney was named Player of the Year, while Richland's Casey Emery was named Coach of the Year after leading the Bombers to a 16-0 regular-season record.