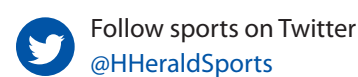


HeraldSports



Hermiston has 5 earn MCC cross-country honors

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

Hermiston junior Amanda Nygard was named to the Mid-Columbia Conference cross-country first team, while teammate Cydney Sanchez was named to the honorable mention team.

Runners must compete in both MCC regular-season meets to be considered for the first and second teams. Sanchez did not run in the first race because of an injury.

Sanchez, a sophomore, who placed 30th at the 3A state meet last month, ran a personal best 19 min-



Nygard



Sanchez



Anderson

Geraldine Correa of Kennewick, and Natalie Ruzauskas of Richland were named Runners of the Year, while Kennewick's Josh Eerkes was named Coach of the Year.

Sanchez and Nygard will return next season, along with the rest of the girls team.

"We are not losing anyone," Hermiston coach Troy Blackburn said. "We will have another solid year of training, and good freshmen coming in. We talked about the future, and they are super focused."

On the boys team, Hermiston senior Greg Anderson was named to the second team, while sophomores Logan Springstead and Jackson Shaver were named to the honorable mention team.

"I was excited for Logan and Jackson, who snuck in there," Blackburn said. "It was well deserved; they worked hard."

Anderson turned in a personal best of 16:44.9 at the Oregon City Invitational. He finished 29th at the MCC/GSL District 8 Championships, missing out on a trip to state.

"Greg has complained that if he was in our old league, he would

have qualified for state, and maybe our team," Blackburn said. "The MCC is harder, but our kids are getting faster."

Springstead's PR this season was 17:34.4 at the Oregon City Invitational, while Shaver had a 17:21 at the MCC/GSL District 8 Championships, placing 31st.

Kamiakin senior Stanford Smith and sophomore Isaac Teeples were named Runners of the Year, while Kamiakin's Matt Rexus was named Coach of the Year.

Teeples won the 3A state individual title, and the Braves won the team title.

Former Dawggs help C of I to perfect season, playoffs

By ANNIE FOWLER
STAFF WRITER

If you would have told Keegan Crafton five years ago that he'd be playing college football at this point in his life, he'd have laughed you right off the basketball court.

The 6-foot-5 Crafton was a standout basketball player and golfer for Hermiston High School, but only played football his senior year when the Bulldogs won the 2014 state title.

Now, Crafton and former Hermiston teammate Landon Clark-Gammell are seniors at College of Idaho, and have helped the Yotes to a 10-0 record, the Frontier Conference title, and a spot in the NAIA playoffs.



Crafton



Clark-Gammell

"It's like the same exact team," Crafton said of comparing the 2014 Hermiston team to College of Idaho. "It's crazy how similar the feeling is. I'll never forget this my whole life. The coaches are telling us to be ready, to bring the juice and let them know who the Yotes are. It's crazy the memories that come back."

Fifth-ranked College of Idaho beat No. 16 Ottawa (9-2) on Saturday in the first round of the NAIA playoffs at Simplot Stadium. It was the first time the teams have played one another.

"Ottawa has a really good running back, and their O-line goes three bills across the board," said Clark-Gammell, who plays defensive end for the Yotes before the game. "I think they will have a lot to handle with our defense."

Crafton feels the Spirit may not be up to the task of stopping the Yotes' offense.

"They give up 170 rushing yards a game," he said. "I don't think they are looking for a physical game, but that's how we play. We will not roll over. We will punch them in the mouth the whole game."

College of Idaho, which has won 16 games in a row dating to last season, turned in its first perfect regular season since 1953 last year, and are 5-0 at home this season.

"We are super pumped to get a home game," said Clark-Gammell who, like Crafton, is a 2015 Hermiston grad. "Who knows, we might get two. Our crowd is crazy. We average about 4,000 fans a game. The people go absolutely insane."

Built to play football

Clark-Gammell, 23, has played football since Grid Kids. Now at 6-2, 230 pounds, he starts for the Yotes at defensive end. He said the team prides itself on its defense, which gives up an average of 17 points per game, while scoring 37.

"We've got a veteran group on defense," Clark-Gammell said. "We pride ourselves on stopping the run, which opens up some blitzes. Every game, we give up less than 100 yards rushing (83.3 yards)."

Though Clark-Gammell has had a standout senior season, it wasn't always smooth sailing.

"I came to College of Idaho right out of high school," he said. "I had too



Photo courtesy of Inside the Lines Photography
College of Idaho tight end Keegan Crafton (88) is the Yotes' second-leading receiver with 24 catches for 373 yards and four touchdowns.



Photo courtesy of Inside the Lines Photography
College of Idaho defensive end Landon Clark-Gammell (42) closes in on Southern Oregon quarterback Wyatt Hutchinson during their Sept. 14 game in Caldwell, Idaho.

big a head coming in. I thought I was better than what I was. We won a state title and I played in the Shrine Game, but there are a lot of those guys here. I had a talk with (Mark) Hodges (former Hermiston coach). My junior year, I got some special teams time, and then I was seeing time on the pass rush."

His persistence and hard work paid off.

"This year, I have started every game, and have been a captain a couple of times," Clark-Gammell said.

"It's nice to see myself start as a scrub, to where I am now. I'm ecstatic that I stuck it out."

Clark-Gammell has 13 solo tackles, 28 assists, and 6.5 quarterback sacks this season, along with two forced fumbles, and five quarterback hurries. The Yotes are the NAIA leader in sacks with 38.

"(David) Faeteete was the hardest coach I ever had," Clark-Gammell said of his former high school defensive line coach. "Now I appreciate it." And, he appreciates the opportunity

to play.

"People don't give NAIA or D-II or D-III much of a look," Clark-Gammell said. "We have guys who can play. People don't give us much credit. A lot of guys fall through the cracks, and they end up here."

At home on the court

Like Clark-Gammell, Crafton played youth football, but once he got to high school, he put his efforts into basketball, until his senior year.

"If I could go back, I would have played (football) from my freshman year on," Crafton said. "The spring before my senior year, coach Hodges took the time to show me how to play. He made me who I am today."

It just took Crafton a while to get there.

After playing football his senior year, Crafton turned his attention back to basketball, earning first-team all-league honors. He then signed a letter of intent to play basketball at Wenatchee Valley College.

"I was playing quite a bit at Wenatchee, but I knew I didn't have the skills to play at a higher level," Crafton said. "I had talked to Landon, and he said they would be needing a tight end in a year. I took a chance and went down."

The move did not go as smoothly as Crafton had hoped. He played behind all-conference tight end Marcus Lenhardt and felt ill-prepared for the college level.

"I thought I would never play," Crafton said. "When I got here, I didn't know what a Cover 1 defense was. I was intimidated. My first year, I got yelled at a lot because I didn't know the playbook. I never thought I'd play, so it wasn't a big deal. It was."

Once Crafton started putting his efforts into the game, it paid dividends.

"Marcus was a senior and he was good," Crafton said. "I watched him run routes. He helped me; that guy made me into the player I am today. I'm glad I found this place."

Crafton, 23, is the second-leading receiver for the Yotes this year, hauling in 24 passes for 373 yards and four touchdowns.

"I have contributed all three years I have played," he said. "There's only been one game where I haven't had a catch. A lot of games, I am getting double covered. If we need a first down on third-and-10, it's very seldom that I don't convert."

The 6-5, 235-pound Crafton, and Connor Richardson (23-336, 4 TDs) may get a little more work thrown their way in the playoffs after leading receiver Hunter Juarez (41-811, 7 TDs) broke his foot.

"We were the three amigos," Crafton said. "Now we are down to two amigos."

Crafton's size has gotten him a little interest from a few NFL teams, and with offensive lineman Josh Brown (6-7, 305) drawing an NFL crowd, Crafton said he's shaken a few hands.

"I've gotten a little recognition from scouts from the Falcons, Browns, Lions and 49ers," he said. "I hope so bad they send someone out and they want me. Being 6-5, I don't see why I can't get a shot."

Until that day comes, Crafton and Clark-Gammell will focus their efforts on the game at hand.