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HEPPNER

BOUND BY THE GAME



Heppner Colts offensive coach Adam Doherty consoles fifth-grader Drew Coe after he fumbled the ball during their game against Umatilla last week in Heppner.

Coach knows how to deal with adversity

Story by AJ Mazzolini Photos by E.J. Harris
East Oregonian

Adam Doherty follows the play in front of him, not just with his eyes but also with his body. The 33-year-old coach for the Heppner Colts roams the sidelines looking more animated than anyone in the stands at Les Payne Field. His hands escape the fold in his lap and shoot into the twilight-lit Heppner sky, framing the blue knit cap on his head. The shining yellow Mustang logo on his forehead matches the image on the breast of his blue sweatshirt.

He leans forward to inspect his football team, scouring for the details lost on most eyes.

A running back for the Colts, Heppner's grade-school football squad, had taken the handoff and found no room in the middle of the field. A horde of Umatilla tacklers, Heppner's opponent on the late-season October night, swallowed the small Colt whole in the backfield.

"We stopped running! We can't stop running!" Doherty shouts over the referee's whistle before beginning to mutter to himself. "We gotta keep running."

For the Heppner Colts on this night of football, running isn't much of an option.

But for Adam Doherty, it hasn't been for 17 years.

Wheelchair-bound, Doherty was paralyzed from the waist down at age 16.

Athletics ran the scene for many growing up in Heppner during the 1980s and 90s. For the Doherty family, sports seasons changed along with the leaves on the trees. For an adolescent Adam Doherty, one of three siblings, football ruled the falls, basketball took over when the snow came and golf carried him through springs and summers.

Heppner High football and golf coach Greg Grant described Doherty as a true three-sport athlete as he broke into the high school ranks in 1995. The freshman started at quarterback on the junior varsity football team and even earned some playing time with the older boys.

"He was one of those kids that just got it, he understood it," said Grant, now coaching in his 23rd year with the Mustangs. "He was really heading to having a nice athletic career."

But that changed.

On July 11, 1996, Doherty climbed into a vehicle with four other classmates and headed into the hills southeast of Heppner.

The extended-cab Chevy pickup truck followed the slithering Willow Creek Road into the Umatilla National Forest where the pathway becomes a series of Forest Service roads.

While traveling on NF-053, the road banked one direction. The truck went another.

The passengers, all intoxicated, were thrown from the vehicle while the drunk driver remained inside the cab. Doherty lay sprawled at the site of the accident, unable to move his legs. While another boy went for help, the closest home in the area more than 10 miles back up the road, Doherty refused to move. He knew something was wrong.

"I knew in an accident like that, you don't move," he said. "I was young and when you're in an accident like that, I had to grow up a lot earlier than most."

The severity of the crash for Doherty and the others, whose injuries included a broken arm and head trauma that would result in an extended coma, were too much for Pioneer Memorial Hospital in Heppner. An air ambulance took Doherty to Portland.

"What I preach to them is dealing with adversity. Your highs are always going to be there. Don't let your lows be that low. You've got to have a short memory. There's always going to be another play."

— Adam Doherty
Heppner Colts football coach



Coach Adam Doherty talks with Heppner Colts' quarterback Keegan Gibbs, a sixth grader, during a timeout in their game against Umatilla.

PENDLETON

Workforce housing construction delayed

By CHRIS RIZER
East Oregonian

The developer for a workforce housing subdivision in Pendleton has delayed construction from late October until January 2013.

Jivanjee Circosta Architecture will break ground after finalizing utility plans and securing a loan with its banker, who is on vacation until mid-November. Developer Saj Jivanjee expects to complete the first phase of the three-year project to develop land off Tutuilla Road by August or September.

The developer can lay foundations for the first 22 housing units after installing public services including sewer, water and electric lines, said city engineer Tim Simons. They have to complete a final utilities draft and submit it to City Manager Robb Corbett before breaking ground on utilities.

"It's just lots of little pieces that are

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HERMISTON

Appeal lost in Nookie's suit

By ANNA WILLARD
East Oregonian

Mitch Myers and Deborah Westwood, co-owners of Nookie's Bistro and Spirits in Hermiston, lost an appeal after their suit against the city and police department was thrown out of a lower court.

The panel of three judges in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the case's 2011 dismissal by District Court Judge Anna J. Brown.

Neither Myers nor Westwood returned calls for comment from the *East Oregonian* by press time.

The original lawsuit, filed in 2009, requested approximately \$1.5 million in damages. It accused the city of Hermiston and former Chief of Police Dan Coulombe of using the police department to intentionally interfere with Nookie's business and malicious prosecution.

In the original complaint, plaintiffs alleged that police officers harassed them, exaggerated police reports and reported incidents unrelated to the bar.

According to a memorandum filed

See LAWSUIT /6A

OHSU scientists make embryos from one man, two women

By MALCOLM RITTER
AP Science Writer

Scientists in Oregon have created embryos with genes from one man and two women, using a provocative technique that could someday be used to prevent babies from inheriting certain rare incurable diseases.

The researchers at Oregon Health & Sciences University said they are not using the embryos to produce children, and it is not clear when or even if this technique will be put to use. But it has already stirred a debate over its risks and ethics in Britain, where scientists did similar work a few years ago.

The British experiments, reported in 2008, led to headlines about the possi-

See EMBRYOS /6A



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Coach Adam Doherty goes over a play with his offense during warmups before the Colts' game against Umatilla recently in Heppner.

COACH: 'You can ruin a kid or you can make a great athlete'

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The diagnosis was a fracture to the spine between the T10 and T11 vertebrae, right above waist level.

Doherty would never walk again.

To Doherty, a Farm Service Agency worker in Heppner when not on the football field, his background doesn't make him a cautionary tale and his time back on the sports field doesn't mean he is a role model. He's more interested in teaching proper football technique than preaching life lessons.

When you're around 4th, 5th and 6th graders, that task can be difficult. The kids have a hard time masking their curiosity as to why Coach is always in a chair. So Doherty is direct in his conversation on lifelong consequences.

But he always brings it back to the field.

"What I preach to them is dealing with adversity," said Doherty, spinning a football in his hands before the game against Umatilla. "Your highs are always going to be there. Don't let your lows be that low. You've got to have a short memory. There's always going to be another play."

That's an amazing attitude to have and one that works perfectly when coaching young players, said Mike Doherty, Adam's father and a fellow Colts coach. Adam runs the games, calling the offensive plays and scheming from the sideline. He's the leader, Mike said.

"He is the head coach. I'm amazed, every year he knows every kid by his first name right away," said Mike, harkening back to Adam's days as a basketball coach for elementary-aged players as well as his four years of Colts football experience. "The kids really respond to him. He doesn't talk down to them like an adult talking to a kid. He talks to them like a person, like a friend talking to another friend."

Adam agreed that sitting in his wheelchair can make it easier to relate to the boys, to interact with and understand them on their level. But as for taking the head coaching designation? That's an honor he said belongs to dad, who spent eight years as a Colts coach before sitting out a few seasons. This fall was the first time the pair shared the Colts' sideline.

Football can be a tough game to teach to a large group, especially when the group averages about 10 years old, Adam said. Having several assistant coaches around becomes even more crucial for him since he can't show his players how to execute even the most regular tasks of a football game. The other adults at Colts practice can do that, but Doherty sets up the offense and the boys look to him first when it comes to moving the ball down the field.

"I've got to be really technical with them but not long-winded," he said. "These are little guys. Their attention span's not what I'd like it to be. So I try any method of communication possible.

"Right here is where we want to lay the foundation. I dumb it down. ... You can ruin a kid or you can make a great athlete of a kid here."

That's a philosophy that Heppner football has been counting on for the past two decades. The high school program elbowed its way into the dynasty category

under Coach Grant, with a spot in the postseason almost reserved each season. Just around the time Doherty would have been suiting up as an upperclassman for the Mustangs, Heppner began its run of 81 consecutive league victories in the Blue Mountain Conference.

The streak ran from 1998 until last season.

One of Grant's main goals when he took over the Mustang program was starting Heppner's youth on the game as early as possible. At Class 2A, small school football success is built around numbers. If all 30 members of this season's Colts team would stick around to play high school ball, Heppner could be unstoppable again.

A 100-percent retention rate is improbable, but ingraining a love for the sport in as many as possible becomes the next best target to shoot for.

"We try to start kids with the right frame of mind, we try to be vertically aligned," said Grant, who added that it's no accident the offense run by the pee-wee ranks mirrors his varsity scheme, dominated by runs up the middle designed to demoralize defenses. "The top knows the bottom and the bottom knows the top. Just like (Doherty) is on my sideline for games and I try to be on his."

The sun has retired from its hold above the field in Heppner on that mid-October evening and the artificial rays from the stadium lighting do nothing to replace the lost warmth. As the temperature plummets toward freezing, the Colts' chances against Umatilla seem to follow. A 22-0 deficit weighs on the boys at half-time as they gather in the end zone for some new game planning.

Doherty strenuously wheels through the grass to his huddle, a task that can become almost as draining by the end of a game as trying to capture the attention of 30 elementary-aged boys. But he's got it now. The players shed their hulking helmets and with them the blow-pop shapes their tiny bodies take on the field. The boys surround their coach.

Hold the line, stay home, don't worry about that straying linebacker, he says. But more importantly, "Let's finish off this second half like Heppner football!" Doherty begins to yell.

His players abandon their kneeling positions and raise their helmets, engulfing Doherty like a sapling among full-grown trees.

The cheering group runs to take positions along the goal line for halftime warm-ups, preparing for another difficult two quarters. Behind the fierceness of their facemasks, almost every Heppner Colt wears a smile.

Coach Doherty is smiling, too.

"The smiles and the laughs, it's the little things," Doherty explains. "The little things, to see a kid start out unsure of himself and grow to this point. As a coach at this level, I love to see that growth of a kid into an athlete."

And if they love the games the way he still does, maybe someday soon a few of them will don the Heppner Mustangs' varsity uniforms. The way he never could.

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