

Sports shorts

Duke still a runaway No. 1 in AP Top 25

For the third straight week Duke is the runaway No. 1 in The Associated Press' Top 25, and for the first time in 16 years Minnesota is in the top 10. The Blue Devils (12-0) received all but two first-place votes from the 65-member media panel on Monday. The next five teams — Michigan, Arizona, Louisville, Indiana and Kansas — held their places from last week. Syracuse, Ohio State, Minnesota and Gonzaga rounded out the top 10. Michigan (13-0) was No. 1 on two ballots for the second straight week. Minnesota is in the top 10 for the first time since it was third in the final poll of 1996-97. New Mexico, which won at undefeated Cincinnati, returns to the rankings at No. 20 after being out for one week. The Lobos replace UNLV, which dropped out from 20th after losing at North Carolina.

NHL lockout: Union makes new proposal

NEW YORK (AP) — The NHL and the players' association will start the new year right where they ended the old one — at the bargaining table. The sides got together Monday for the first time since Dec. 13, and the union brought along a counterproposal in response to the 288-page contract offer the NHL presented on Thursday. There were some discussions between the negotiators inside the league's midtown Manhattan headquarters and some time spent apart in internal caucuses. "This discussion was for us to respond and for them to ask questions and us to explain a number of the points we made," union executive director Donald Fehr said. "We covered the range of subjects that their document included." After several hours passed, the NHL said it would be going over the players' new contract offer on Monday night and would get back to the union in the morning. Commissioner Gary Bettman said he expected negotiations would restart Tuesday afternoon.

"The media, the false fans, you all got what you all wanted. The majority of you all wanted him out. As players we wanted him in. I guess the fans — the false fans — out-ruled us."

— Devin Hester
Chicago Bears returner after the team made Lovie Smith one of the seven NFL head coaches fired on Monday.
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THIS DATE IN SPORTS
1934 — Columbia upsets Stanford 7-0 in the Rose Bowl when Al Barabasc scores in the third quarter on a 17-yard hidden-ball play.
Contact us at 541-966-0838 or sports@eastoregonian.com

TOP SPORTS STORIES OF 2012

PHS softball tops EO's best of 2012



Buckaroos win 1st state softball title on 2nd straight trip to finals

1 By AJ MAZZOLINI
East Oregonian
Behind a pitcher, batter and coach recognized by Class 5A coaches as the best at their level, the Pendleton Buckaroos softball team rolled to its first state softball championship in June. The Bucks, who finished 23-7 and outscored their five post-season opponents 40-3, beat Silverton 6-1 at the Oregon State Softball Complex in Corvallis on June 2. It was the school's first state title since the boys' basket-

ball team won one in 1939. Pendleton also made the state championship final in 2011, losing to West Albany. All three Pendleton graduates from this team have moved on to play collegiate sports. Class 5A pitcher of the year Kristen Crawford will throw for Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham this spring while her Bucks teammate Jory Spencer will also be on the Saints' softball field. Spencer was also part of the Mt. Hood CC volleyball team this fall. Graduate Courtney Schumacher-Sweek played for Pendleton's Blue Mountain Community Col-

lege team that ran the table for an NWAACC volleyball championship in November (see Page 2B for more). Now senior Rayne Spencer, sister to Jory, will join the college-sports ranks at Concordia University in Portland. She signed her letter of intent to play softball at the NAIA school in December. The Bucks will return the heart of their lineup — which includes sophomore third baseman Darien Lindsey, last year's 5A co-player of the year — for a repeat run this spring. Six starters back should help alleviate some of the stress in the search for Pendleton's pitching heir.

"Obviously, in the circle will be our biggest change," said coach Tim Cary, 5A's top coach last season. "We don't know who will be in the circle this year and that's a real key. ... Kristen shouldered most of the load for us last year." Crawford finished with 183 1/3 innings pitched, or more than 90 percent of Pendleton's innings. The Bucks will also be without assistant coach Steve Cary, who passed away this fall in Pendleton at age 65. Steve had served in an assistant role to his son, Tim, since 2007.

See TOP STORIES/2B

- (1) Pendleton softball players celebrate the school's first Class 5A state championship in June.
(2) BMCC volleyball won its second NWAACC title in the past three seasons in November.
(3) The Heppner Mustangs won the Class 2A softball state title in June, the school's first.
(4) Condon/Wheeler volunteer track coach Melissa Bowerman was dismissed from the team in May.

EO file photos



HERMISTON

Baker comes out on top of Dawgfight

Hermiston boys fall amid unclaimed opportunities

By SCOTT RYAN
East Oregonian Publishing Co.

The opportunities were there, but in continuing with the story of their current season, the Hermiston High School basketball team seized too few of them. The Bulldogs fell on Monday to visiting Baker 73-59 in their last game of 2012. Hermiston slacked defensively, committing a slew of fouls and getting out-rebounded on the glass by a more physical Baker team. "We went through the motions tonight, which I thought was a winnable game," Hermiston coach Adam Strom said. "No disrespect to Baker, they played solid. They did what they had to do to win the game." Hermiston (1-10) came out confident in the first quarter, executing sets and capitalizing on opportunities in the

paint. After the first, Hermiston had taken a 18-17 lead, behind eight points and five rebounds from junior Eric Espain. Espain, along with fellow juniors C.J. Flores and Ramon Contreras all were in double figures on the day for Hermiston, scoring 11, 13 and 12 points, respectively. In the second, however, Baker kept the pace offensively, and the Bulldogs started to slip, missing shots and turning the ball over. The Dawgs managed just nine second-quarter points, and Baker took a 36-27 lead into the break. "I think basically we got better movement offensively (in the second)," Baker coach Joel Richardson said. "We got the ball to our scorers hands, and we tightened up the reins a little bit defensively. But I thought that when they went small we went big, and we pounded it inside." Junior Jake Grammon was the catalyst for Baker's inside presence. Grammon ripped down 13 rebounds and scored

Basketball

Baker 73

Hermiston 59

13 points off a bevy of low-post moves. "I think the difference definitely was them winning the war on the boards, and them winning second chance opportunities, and getting pretty decisive defensive rebounds," Strom said. "They were quick to the ball to rebound as well as finish on the opposite end. In the midst of that I thought the 50/50 plays, the hustle plays all went their way. I just addressed the guys three or four games back, I can honestly say we played hard and played with a lot of energy. Defensively we were pretty solid, and tonight was two steps backwards for us." Baker senior Dillon Blankenship led all scorers with 27 points and 15 free-throw attempts, of which he made seven. Jake Flyg struggled in his first game back, scoring six points on 2-of-14 shooting for Hermiston. The Dawgs host South Salem on Wednesday.

PENDLETON

Timbers to visit Round-Up City

MLS club to hold free youth clinic, meet-and-greet

East Oregonian

Members of Major League Soccer's Portland Timbers will be in Pendleton on Sunday to meet fans in the community and conduct a free youth soccer clinic. The visit is part of the club's second-annual "Dribble Oregon", presented by Timbers founding partner JELD-WEN Windows & Doors. Forward Brent Richards, defender Ryan Kawulok and mascot Timber Joey will be in Pendleton on Sunday at the youth clinic, which will be held from 2-5 p.m. at Round-Up Athletic Club for children ages 5-13. The clinic will be led by Timbers youth/academy staff. Registration for the clinic is online at Portlandtimbers.com. Older fans will get a chance to rub elbows with the Timbers at a meet-and-greet at Wildfire Sports Bar at Wildhorse Resort & Casino from 7-9 p.m. All events are free.



See TIMBERS/2B

TOP STORIES: Titles and scandal help round out year’s Top 5

Continued From 1B

Blue Mountain rolls to NWAACC volleyball title

2 After putting together the most dominant sports season in Blue Mountain Community College history in any sport, the Timberwolves capped off their volleyball season in November with back-to-back victories over Spokane Community College to clinch their second NWAACC championship in three seasons.

Blue Mountain, which finished at a mind-boggling 43-4, won all five NWAACC tournament games at Mt. Hood Community College in Gresham before the clincher, a straight-set victory over Spokane 25-18, 25-17, 25-12 on Nov. 18.

Of the Timberwolves’ four losses, two came by forfeit because of BMCC violations and two came against the College of Southern Idaho, the 2012 NJCAA national champions.

BMCC loses seven sophomores from last fall’s roster, including NWAACC player of the year Robyn Schirmer, but coach Dave Baty said his team will still be plenty of fun to watch in 2013.

“The more success that our program has had since 2008, the easier it is to recruit kids,” said Baty, who also won the NWAACC’s top coach award. “We’ve been able to really enjoy the fruits of these kinds of seasons since we’ve really got things going.”

Schirmer and fellow sophomore Kassi Howarth, a right-side hitter, will continue their volleyball careers at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande next season.

Heppner Mustangs win first softball state title

3 The afternoon before Pendleton won its first softball state title, the Heppner Mustangs triumphantly did the same. The Class 2A Mustangs finished a 23-4 season by beating Glendale 4-2 on June 1 at the Oregon State Softball Complex in Corvallis.

Heppner’s run to the top came after the Mustangs had held the No. 1 ranking, per the OSAA, for much of the second half of the season. Yet it still doesn’t seem real, said coach Petra Payne, who helped start the school’s softball program 15 years ago.

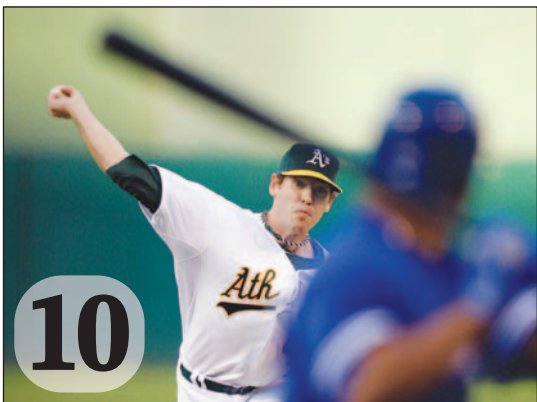
“Sometimes I have to go back and watch the video or read the articles to make sure that it was,” she said. The girls are still proud. The community still congratulates the girls on their accomplishments.”

Heppner only lost two girls to graduation, first baseman Natalie Rauch and third baseman Cassi Day. The latter, a Special District 5 first-teamer, will play softball for South Mountain Community College near Phoenix, Ariz., this spring while Rauch is out of the sports world, studying at Eastern Oregon University.

Heppner returns senior Baily Bennett, a second-team All-American selection by www.MaxPreps.com on its small school list. Bennett, a pitcher, blew through the 2A ranks last spring with a 0.44 ERA.

Condon/Wheeler track coach asked to step down

4 Two weeks after Melissa Bowerman, a volunteer assistant track coach for the Condon/Wheeler Knights, took a team member to the Condon High School prom in April, the Condon and Fossil school districts dismissed her from the program. An investigation in June by Gilliam County Sheriff Gary Bettencourt, who received a complaint from a prom chaperone, found no evidence



(5) Weston-McEwen’s baseball team was a state runner-up, the third deep state run for the 2012 class. (6) Hermiston coach Tom Bequette died in March, just days before the start of the softball season. (7) Pendleton’s Tommy Lane smashed the school’s home run and RBI records on the baseball field. (8) Cowboy Trevor Brazile won the Pendleton Round-Up all-around title on his way to the NFR. (9) Hermiston’s Jose Macias, Eduardo Juarez and Alejandro Cisneros finished 3-4-5 at the state. (10) Former Pendleton pitcher Dan Straily made his major league debut with the Oakland Athletics.

EO file photos

that Bowerman, 41, broke any law or had any criminal intentions.

In August, the contract of her husband, Jon Bowerman, 74, the son of Nike co-founder Bill Bowerman, was not renewed.

Jon Bowerman was allowed to re-apply for the head coaching opening this fall and after only two applicants were interviewed, Condon athletic director Jan Zarate said the position was offered to the former coach in December. But when Melissa was not allowed to accompany her husband back to the program as a volunteer, the Bowermans declined.

As of the New Year, the coaching pair has decided to walk away from the program they helped build. The couple were influential in helping Condon High obtain a state-of-the-art track made of recycled athletic shoes, which was dedicated April 28. In four years under the Bowermans’ watch, the program grew from six athletes to more than 30.

The Knights girls’ track team won their first Class 1A state championship in May — just weeks after Melissa’s dismissal.

Weston-McEwen boys star in multiple sports

5 The Weston-McEwen baseball team wrapped up as successful a year of boys’ athletics as any school could hope for, just narrowly missing out on a state baseball title in June.

Weston-McEwen finished second in the Class 2A baseball playoffs, falling to Kennedy 10-4 at Volcanoes Stadium in Keizer on June 1. The TigerScots were 22-5.

The deep playoff run followed a pair of equally impressive performances for the Weston-McEwen class of 2012 boys. In March, the TigerScots made the quarterfinals of the state basketball tournament in Pendleton. A loss to Vernonia on March 3 at the Pendleton Convention Center locked the Athenians into a sixth-place finish.

Just months before, Weston-McEwen football advanced to the semifinals of the state bracket before losing to Scio on Nov. 26, 2011.

“Those seniors left a winning tradition and a lot of those younger guys were able to be part of those successful teams,” said T.J. Haguewood, head baseball and assistant football coach at Weston-McEwen.

Of the graduated class, only Dallas Reich is continuing his sports career. Reich now plays basketball at Walla Walla Community College.

Hermiston softball loses coach Tom Bequette

6 Less than one week before the Hermiston Bulldogs’ softball season opener, head coach Tom Bequette, 53, died at Kadlec Medical Center in Richland, Wash. The Bulldogs still played — and

won — both sides of a double-header on March 16 under interim coach Saul Castro. Hermiston would finish second in the Columbia River Conference with a 15-10 record before a first-round playoff loss to Liberty in May.

“‘It was a little difficult,” Castro said. “Even though he wasn’t here with us, he was, you know in spirit.”

Among the five graduated seniors from the 2012 squad, three will be playing softball collegiately. Infielder Gracie Flyg is at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande, catcher Courtney Howard is at George Fox University in Newburg and first baseman Cheyanne Lawson is playing at Walla Walla Community College.

Hermiston filled the head coaching vacancy in August by bringing in Kylee Nichols, the former first-year coach for McMinnville High. Castro’s softball future is still undetermined, though he has discussed coaching a traveling summer team with Jessica Bequette Fitch, Tom’s daughter.

Tommy Lane breaks Bucks’ baseball records

7 By the time first baseman Tommy Lane graduates from Pendleton this spring, he may be one of the most decorated sluggers in Eastern Oregon baseball history. His resume is already impressive.

As a junior last spring, Lane set Buckaroos single-season marks for home runs (11) and runs batted in (52) while hitting for a .477 average. He helped Pendleton to a 22-6 record and a No. 1 seed in the Class 5A state baseball postseason. The Bucks were upset 9-7 by eventual state champs Wilson at home on May 25, though.

Lane’s power on the diamond has already payed off with a Division I baseball scholarship to St. Mary’s College in Moraga, Calif. Lane signed his letter of intent to the Gaels of the West Coast Conference in November.

Now a senior, Lane is spending the baseball offseason staying in shape by playing varsity basketball for the Bucks.

Trevor Brazile wins all-around at Round-Up

8 Three months before the “King of Cowboys” Trevor Brazile won his 10th all-around title at the Wrangler National Finals Rodeo in Las Vegas, the winningest cowboy in rodeo history was doing the same at the Pendleton Round-Up.

Brazile, of Decatur, Texas, won the all-around championship in Pendleton on Sept. 15, the final day of the 102nd Round-Up. Brazile, 35, took home \$20,204 while in Eastern Oregon.

Brazile placed third in the tie-down and fourth in the team roping average with partner Patrick Smith.

In December, Brazile became a 17-time world champion by winning his seventh straight all-around gold buckle. With a \$50,00 payday at the NFR, Brazile extended his season-earnings record to \$1,505,697 and his career mark to nearly \$4.6 million.

Three Dawgs in Top 5 at state cross country meet

9 At the OSAA 5A State Championship cross country meet on Nov. 3, the Hermiston Bulldog boys placed three runners in the top five as both teams finished third in the team totals.

Junior Alejandro Cisneros was third, senior Eduardo Juarez was fourth and Jose Macias was fifth. The boys’ team was top heavy, though, as the next highest placer came in 24th.

Senior Maggie Coleman took fifth for the girls while Katie Markwick was seventh.

Coleman’s college athletics path is still undetermined while she decides between pursuing cross country or soccer at the next level. Juarez is leaning toward attending Lane Community College, Hermiston coach Jake Puzey said, the site of the Oregon state cross country championship.

Pendleton native Straily called up to big leagues

10 After lighting up the Oakland Athletics minor league baseball system, pitcher and Pendleton native Dan Straily made his major league debut in Oakland on Aug. 3 against the Toronto Blue Jays.

Straily, now 24, would earn a no-decision in that game after six innings pitched and one run allowed. He’d make two stints with the big league club.

Straily, who played baseball in Pendleton before transferring to Thurston High in Springfield his junior year, finished the season with seven starts, 32 strikeouts and a 3.89 ERA. He was 2-1 in MLB games.

Straily struck out 222 between minor and major league games and is expected to compete for a rotation spot for Oakland next year.

TIMBERS: Third season opens in March

Continued From 1B

Also while in the area, the Timbers will participate in a tree planting with Friends of Trees.

Dribble Oregon will stop at six communities across Oregon and southwest Washington during January, and is coming to Pendleton for the first time.

“As the presenting sponsor of Dribble Oregon, JELD-WEN is very excited about the expanded campaign and new destinations Medford, Astoria, Pendleton and Vancouver, that will welcome the Portland Timbers on the six-stop tour,” said Bill Hueffner, Director of Development & Professional Relations for JELD-WEN. “It’s a full day of fun-filled events and we are proud to help bring the Portland Timbers to a community near you.”

Dribble Oregon will lead the Timbers up to the start of preseason training camp on Jan. 19 as the club begins preparation for a third MLS season. The Timbers play host to the New York Red Bulls in their 2013 season opener Sunday, March 3, at JELD-WEN Field.

Reid among seven NFL coaches sacked in firing frenzy

The Associated Press

Quite a day for NFL sacks.

Seven coaches and five general managers were fired Monday in a flurry of pink slips that were delivered the day after the regular-season ended.

There could be more, but so far the sent-packing scorecard looks like this:

Andy Reid in Philadelphia, Lovie Smith in Chicago, and Ken Whisenhunt in Arizona, all coaches who took teams to the Super Bowl, Norv Turner in San Diego, Pat Shurmur in Cleveland, Romeo Crennel in Kansas City and Chan Gailey in Buffalo.

Three teams made it a clean sweep, saying goodbye to the GM along with the coach — San Diego, Cleveland, Arizona. General managers also were fired in Jacksonville and in New York, where Rex Ryan held onto his coaching job with the Jets despite a losing record.

Reid was the longest tenured of the coaches, removed after 14 seasons and a Super Bowl appearance in 2005 — a loss to New England.

Smith spent nine seasons with

the Bears, leading them to the 2007 Super Bowl — a loss to the Indianapolis Colts.

Turner has now been fired as head coach by three teams. San Diego won the AFC West from 2006-09, but didn’t make the post-season the last three years.

“Both Norv and A.J. are consummate NFL professionals, and they understand that in this league, the bottom-line is winning,” Chargers President Dean Spanos said in a statement.

Whisenhunt was fired after six seasons, including taking the Cardinals to a Super Bowl loss to Pittsburgh after the 2008 season. He had more wins than any other coach in Cardinals history, going 45-51, and has one year worth about \$5.5 million left on his contract. GM Rod Graves had been with Arizona for 16 years, nine in his current position. A 5-11 record after a 4-0 start cost him and Whisenhunt their jobs.

Gailey was dumped after three seasons with the Bills; Shurmur after two; and Crennel had one full season with the Chiefs.



Reid took over a 3-13 Eagles team in 1999, drafted Donovan McNabb with the No. 2 overall pick and quickly turned the franchise into a title contender.

He led them to a run of four straight NFC championship games, a streak that ended with a trip to the NFL title game. But the team hasn’t won a playoff game since 2008 and after last season’s 8-8 finish, owner Jeffrey Lurie said he was looking for improvement this year. Instead, it was even worse. The Eagles finished 4-12.

“When you have a season like that, it’s embarrassing. It’s personally crushing to me and it’s terrible,” Lurie said at a news conference. He said he respects Reid and plans to stay friends with him, “but, it is time for the Eagles to move in a new direction.”

Shurmur went 9-23 in his two seasons with the Browns, who will embark on yet another offseason of change — the only constant in more than a decade of futility. Cleveland has lost at least 11 games in each of the past five seasons and made the playoffs just

once since returning to the NFL as an expansion team in 1999.

“Ultimately our objective is to put together an organization that will be the best at everything we do,” Browns CEO Joe Banner said. “On the field, our only goal is trying to win championships.”

Crennel took over with three games left in the 2011 season after GM Scott Pioli fired Todd Haley. Kansas City will have the No. 1 pick in the NFL draft as a result of having one of the worst seasons in its 53-year history. The only other time the Chiefs finished 2-14 was 2008, the year before Pioli was hired.

“I am embarrassed by the poor product we gave our fans this season, and I believe we have no choice but to move the franchise in a different direction,” Chiefs chairman Clark Hunt said in a statement.

Gailey, the former Dallas Cowboys coach, compiled a 16-32 record in his three seasons in Buffalo, never doing better than 6-10.

“This will probably be, and I say probably, but I think it will be the first place that’s ever fired me that I’ll pull for,” Gailey said.