

Wallowa History Center

Preserving Our Past for the Future

Connecting people with the history of the Wallowas to foster vibrant rural communities for the future.

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History of Wallowa High School Sports Championships

Marilyn Hulse

Wallowa High School has a rich history of winning championships at the state level in several sports. In fact, the school is the proud owner of twenty state championships; nineteen of them are official Oregon State Athletic Association titles, and one is an assumed championship, which might be the most special of all.

First, we need a bit of history of sports at Wallowa High. The first graduating class of Wallowa High in 1910, consisted of just one student. The next year, 1911, there were three graduates. This is the year Roy Conklin came to Wallowa to be the superintendent of District 12. In some ways, Mr. Conklin could be called the “Father” of Wallowa High School. He increased the enrollment dramatically each year in his first few years. When he arrived, only academic subjects were taught. In the second year of his tenure, he began adding manual training classes, music and athletics. Before he left in 1920, he had erected Wallowa’s first gymnasium. The construction of this building was handled by the boys of the vocational class. (known as shop class today) In 1935 he returned to Wallowa to again be superintendent, which he was until his death in 1939.

Wallowa had football, basketball for boys and girls, and track and field for boys only in the early years.

The OSAA (Oregon State Athletic Association) was not formed until the 1940s to regulate the competition of sports in Oregon schools. After its formation, it began to keep records of all state championships by Oregon schools. Thus, our 19 official sports championships are recorded in their archives, and commemorated with a sign in front of the current gymnasium.

Here are the nineteen official championships:

Track and field, girls: 2003

Track and field, boys: 1957, 1969, 1970, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996

Basketball, boys: 1970, 1972, 1995

Volleyball, girls: 1997

Cross country, boys: 1969,1972

Football, boys: 1951,1952,1967,1993

Boys track and field has the distinction of winning five years in a row under coach Dale Story. The OSAA gives out gold and silver medals for the first and second places in state championships. These are usually tiny footballs, basketballs, and volleyballs for those sports, and medallions for the other sports. These are proud possessions for the recipients and many Wallowa athletes have these awards in their possession.

After listing all these honors for the school, we must mention that 20th championship. Just inside the main door of the gymnasium, off to the right, is a glass case. Inside this case is a picture of 17 men, 16 football players and their coach, James Eamen. The players were Tony Greer, Clifford Johnson, Leon Baird, Glen Plass, Sid Johnson, Daniel Warnock, Jake Silver, George Cherry, Leland Kiddle, Jack Lloyd, Floyd Haneke, Steve Billings, William Henderson, Florian Powers, Marlin Oliver, and Elmo Richman.



Football Team

Bottom row, left to right—Powers, guard and end; Baird, end and fullback; Greer (captain) and left half; C. Johnson, left tackle; Henderson, quarter. Second row, left to right—Silver, right tackle; Sid Johnson, right half; Warnock, right guard; Plass, center; Oliver, left guard; Haneke, right end. Top row, left to right—Loyd, sub. quarter; Billings, sub. end; Cherry, sub. end; Kiddle, sub. guard; Richman, a first string man who due to injuries in the La Grande game was out the rest of the season; Mr. Eaman, school superintendent and coach. Mr. Eaman has been here two years and in these two years has shown that he is able to put out championship teams.

There is also a football in the case. This is a memorial to the 1924 football team because in that year Wallowa assumed the title of state champions. There is no trophy in the case as there was not a governing body to provide one.

For the full story, we turn to the newspapers of the time. From the December 5, 1924 Wallowa Sun newspaper: "The Wallowa Football team now has a claim to the State championship according to the Oregonian newspaper. At any rate, no other team in Oregon has a better claim to that title. All that is needed is some mathematics to make the championship. Wallowa beat La Grande 12 to 0. La Grande and Pendleton tied 0 to 0. That makes Wallowa 12 better than Pendleton. Pendleton defeated The Dalles 26 to 7. That is a margin of 19. This makes Wallowa's margin over The Dalles 31 points." At this point, the Wallowa team was given the honor of Eastern Oregon champions. But there is more to come: "The Dalles won over Albany 31 to 0, giving Wallowa a lead of 62 over comparative scores.

Hillsboro defeated Albany 12 to 0 which gives Wallowa a margin of 50 over the Western Oregon claimant. Corvallis was last year's Western Oregon claimant but failed to win over Albany.”

Wallowa was only scored against one time, but the newspaper does not say which team made this only goal of the season against Wallowa. This is the rationale that made Wallowa the champion. There were some who complained that the mathematics were not sound enough to declare a champion, but Wallowa ignored this and claimed the title—avery proud moment in our schools sports history.

There is one interesting footnote to this story. When Wallowa won the state football championship in 1993, coach Terry Crenshaw reported that a very old man came to the locker room in the Portland stadium where the game was played to congratulate the team. No one remembered his name, but he stated he lived in the area north of Portland. He also stated he was a member of the 1924 championship football team. This can be no other than Leland Kiddle, who lived in the area and lived to be almost 100 years old. One other, or possibly two others, from the team were alive at the time, but they resided in Eastern Oregon. What a nice gesture of this gentleman to honor both the oldest champion Wallowa football team and the newest, the team of 1993.

Wallowa Eleven Beats Shop Team Shop Team Unable to Score on Wallowa Huskies

The game with the machine shop team was staged here Tuesday, and the [shop] team went home defeated by a score of 59 to 0. Although the Wallowa team had had only one day of practice in a week, they made an excellent showing. Wallowa received the first kickoff and started down the field for a touchdown, and about three minutes after the game [had started] the high school boys had seven points to their credit.

The Wallowa line held exceptionally well, and only a few times during the game did La Grande succeed in breaking through it. On the other hand, whenever the Wallowa backfield was called through the line, the guards and tackles always made an opening for them. Hayes and Goebel hit the line like battering rams, and some of the shop men were glad when an end run or a forward pass was called.

McClaran played a poor game, missing some forward passes and being offside.

La Grande's only show to make yardage was on passes or punts, and played offense with an open formation nearly all the time. Practically all the game was played in La Grande's territory. The shop team had one or two speedy men, but the high school team did not give them an opportunity to get away and show their racing ability. Fred Read, a former WCHS [Wallowa County High School] athlete was on the team. He did not play until the last quarter on account of a fractured rib, received in the game with Pendleton last Saturday.

Evans made a good showing at half, making several good runs and two touchdowns. Hayes, Goebel and Evens starred for Wallowa. The touchdowns made were Goebel 2, Evans 2, Hayes 2, Powers 1, Greer 1, and Johnson 1.

Prof. Botts deserves much credit for the thorough manner in which he coached the team.

– *The Wallowa Sun*
September 5, 1914

A “wallop” is about the only term that will adequately describe the reception accorded the O-W shop eleven on their visit to the camp of the Wallowa High School team for a game Tuesday. The boys brought home the minus end of a 59 to 0 score, and even at that they had nothing but good words to hand out in behalf of their worthy opponents up the branch line. The Wallowa line was simply impenetrable, and it was simply impossible for the shop men to interfere with any kind of a play the Wallowans wanted to pull on them until the yardage had been made. It was simply a case of bucking an irresistible avalanche of humanity bound on walking on everything that came in its path.

– *La Grande Observer*
November 4, 1914

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Bowman-Hicks Buys Palmer Lumber Company

The Palmer Lumber Company, which has large timber holdings in the northern part of Union and Wallowa counties, has been sold to the Bowman-Hicks Lumber Company of Kansas City. The new management took over the mill at La Grande Tuesday evening, and the manager, H.N. Ashby, has taken active charge of the plant.

Timber cruisers have passed through Wallowa this summer to estimate the timber of the 10,000 acres held by the Palmer Lumber Co. It has been understood that the company was to be sold, and that a Kansas City firm had an option on the holdings this summer. The stock of the company was not taken over by the new company. The Palmer Lumber company will liquidate, and the closing out business transactions have been started.

The selection of this section as the location of the Western activities of the Bowman-Hicks Company was made after a careful survey of the possibilities in other parts of Oregon and California, and the company expects to start extensive operations soon. The company has been active in the south during the past, and the change of location indicates the necessity of coming to the Northwest for the nation's lumber in the future. The company plans to purchase additional tracts when practicable. The operations along the Grande Ronde will continue with the same crews. The main company office will remain in Kansas City, while the La Grande office will merely take care of the local trade.

The passing of the Palmer Lumber Company follows soon after the death of its founder, George Palmer. The company was organized in 1904, and 9,000 acres were purchased near Palmer Junction. The mill at La Grande was erected in 1907. the company has had much to do with the development of this region, and with the advent of this strong Eastern firm, much additional development is anticipated.

– *The Wallowa Sun*
October 26, 1922