

2012 National Coach of the Year!



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Rosie Honl

On Oct. 18, *The Oregonian*, the state's largest newspaper, ran a long, front-page story that focused on volleyball at Crook County HS, located in economically depressed Prineville, Oregon, and its twinkle-eyed ball of energy for a coach, Rosie Honl, a 17-year head coach who these days spends almost as much time on fundraising as she does on fundamentals.

The next evening, a small school bus pulled into our driveway in West Linn and the Crook County Cowgirls piled out. They spent the night in sleeping bags in our basement and living room, grateful for a cost-saving measure after the long drive from Eastern Oregon, and, the next day upended eventual 6A champion Jesuit en route to second place in the West Linn Tournament.

Three weeks later, with 4A Player of the Year Makayla Lindburg contributing 17 kills and heavy-hitting Hannah Troutman adding 16, the Cowgirls swept by Astoria to win their seventh straight title and third in a row since a population decrease forced them from Class 5A to Class 4A.

When Honl moved to Prineville in 1996 to become a PE teacher and volleyball coach at Crook County, money wasn't the issue, attitude was.

"It took me three years before I got this team to win a game," Honl recalls. "They had to change their mindset. They walked in to a gym thinking of themselves as losers instead of winners."

Honl, who had been head coach at Lincoln High in Portland for four years prior to arriving in Prineville, got to work both on the fundamentals of the game and teaching her charges life skills, as Prineville led the state in teen pregnancy. She also started Rimrock Volleyball Club, which allowed talented athletes throughout Eastern Oregon the opportunity to practice volleyball skills year-round.

Honl, 62, believes that in the population-strapped town of 9,000, you have to identify the athletes early and work with them. Honl has given free lessons after school for years to anyone who needed extra work and, in her club, coaches all the 10s, 12s and 14s.

"I teach skills a certain way and they all have to do it that way," Honl explains. "Then you can correct things."



Coach Rosie is always enthusiastic about her kids

With the focus on fundamentals and Honl's boundless enthusiasm, it was only a matter of time before Crook County started to win. The first title came in 2006, the first year Oregon switched from a four-class system to one with six classes. Every year since then, the season has ended with the Cowgirls hoisting a championship trophy.

"Every year, the seniors say, 'We are not going to be the team that breaks the streak,'" Honl says. This year's theme was "Seven Up." Next year, the rising seniors are thinking about "Eight's Great."

To do that, the team's veterans know they'll need help from some youngsters. That means giving of their time to ensure the tradition of excellence continues.

"My older kids come to all the practices I run," Honl says. "These girls come and demonstrate the hitting and the setting. They say if you watch people who are doing it right you're going to get better at it."

In 2008, after Crook County had won two volleyball championships, Honl got news that hit the program hard: the school district, cash strapped, would no longer fund athletics at the school. If the team wanted to play, more than \$20,000 would have to be raised.

Honl, who had worked tirelessly to build the program, set out with the same energy to keep it alive, coming up with one fundraising plan after another. She collected bottles for recycling, sold donated firewood, washed cars, had her team clean up after local social functions, all to raise the funds to continue to simply have a team to coach. The area embraced her efforts and she's been able to field teams, championship ones at that, every year. That's why, when she asked to stay one night in our home, Lisa and I were quick to say, "Of course!"

"The community has backed us so much," Honl says. "It almost brings tears to my eyes because of all the money we've had to raise. They just support us."

"You can't replicate Rosie," says Joel Kent, the 18s coach at Rimrock. "She simply has energy and passion for the game unrivaled by others. Her coaching role model is John Wooden. When most coaches sleep, she goes over stats. When most coaches rest, she takes the time to work in the gym with individuals needing extra help. Her smile and love of life and the game is contagious. Simply put, she is a master of squeezing the potential out of every team, bringing joy and success to those she coaches."

"She's always positive on the court and she never lets us get down," adds Troutman. "She's not out just to coach us but to learn herself. She's always learning through the process of coaching."

"She is the core of the program," Lindburg acknowledges. "She has simple rules that we follow every practice and in games. Without those I don't think we could have [won seven in a row]."

"Rosie has undying energy that is contagious," Kent adds. "She focuses on form over result, attitude over ability, and joy above pressure. She is first to pass on the recognition to her players and assistants, but it is she who is truly deserving of praise."

Honl, who has won 384 matches in her 17 seasons in Prineville, was asked recently when she might retire.

"I don't know," she answered. "In the winter months it's so cold. What would I do? Go home and sit in front of the fire and watch TV? Might as well be doing this."