

**WPBL**

The logo for WPBL is rendered in large, bold, red letters with a slight 3D effect. The letters are filled with a gradient of red and orange, and contain silhouettes of cowboys on horseback against a background of rolling hills and a sunset sky.

**2029 MEDIA GUIDE**

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# 2028 SEASON REVIEW

The 8th season of WPBL baseball turned out to be one of its best yet and will no doubt be remembered for years to come. The Mainland division saw stiff competition from start to finish, as 4 teams battled until the end for the final playoff spot. The expected contenders continued to play top tier baseball, as Pocatello, Lake Tahoe, and Kennewick each pushed deep into the playoffs. Meanwhile, some other teams began to show new signs of life and hope this coming spring starts a sort of changing of the guard in the WPBL. Teams like Astoria, Coeur d'Alene, and Crescent City all showed signs of improvement, and with their young talent could soon find themselves fighting for titles.

Records were challenged and set as WPBL players continue to show why they are some of the best in the western United States. Gumball Washington challenged for the single season batting record, finishing second all-time in what became his first MVP season. On the pitching side, three different players broke the single season strikeout record (Bryan Daniels, 125; Ben Costa, 133; Jesus Farelo, 141). A tight three-man race for Pitcher of the Year resulted in former 5<sup>th</sup> round pick Taylor Simkins winning his first award.

Finally, the playoffs featured tight wild-card series going 6 and 7 games. Walla Walla achieved their first ever playoff series win, while Kennewick won another Game 7 and handed Bandon a disappointing trip home. But

in the end, the two best teams met in the championship, as Pocatello and Lake Tahoe met for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time. Despite a strong start by Pocatello, Lake Tahoe prevailed to win their 3<sup>rd</sup> WPBL Championship. While Tom Saylor walked home with the Championship MVP Award, most agree that the Mustangs would never have had a chance to win without the most dominant pitching performance the league has ever seen. A perfect game, the WPBL's first ever, in Game 5 by Danny Schumacher has become the most iconic moment in the short history of the WPBL. The game 5 win spurred a 3-1 comeback from the Mustangs to win their third WPBL Championship, tying Pocatello for the all-time record.

It was an incredible 2028 season that will no doubt only be surpassed by this upcoming one,

as the WPBL inches closer to its 10-Year Anniversary.

# NIGHTMARE IN MESA

## The tale of a Surviving Pitcher

In an exclusive interview with Squirt Davis, Edwin Serna opens up about the horrifying reality of being a pitcher for the Mesa Beach Bums in the 2022 season.

*"I was terrified. Every time I stepped on the mound, I had no idea what was going to happen. All I knew is that I had to be out there again, for another day, another inning, another batter," - Edwin Serna.*

### For the Love of the Game

Navigating the realm of minor league baseball, even within well-established leagues, is a formidable challenge. Amidst questionable accommodations and modest stipends, players find solace in the prospect that their efforts may one day culminate in earning a living by playing the sport they love. Whether viewed as romantic devotion or a manifestation of Stockholm Syndrome, most players agree that the relentless grind is ultimately what makes it all worthwhile. Edwin Serna was no different.

Selected by the Elko Truckers as the 336th overall pick in the 2021 inaugural draft of the Western Pioneers Baseball League, Edwin embarked on this journey with minimal expectations. Hailing from the Dominican Republic and devoid of any college baseball offers, the opportunity to play professional baseball, even in a newly formed league, represented the realization of a long-standing dream.

Reflecting on his unexpected journey, Edwin remarks: "I had already given up on the idea of playing ball until a cousin of mine caught wind of the WPBL and decided to compile a draft application and some of my highlight reels. I didn't know any teams were even looking at those applications until I received a call from a Nevada area code. In the blink of an eye, I found myself flying to the West Coast for spring training."

As early spring unfolded, Edwin was prepared to endure the grind and pay his dues on his way to the big leagues.

### **Winnemucca's Dream**

Edwin promptly impressed key figures within the Elko organization, earning a spot in the bullpen of the AAA Winnemucca Railers. Despite delivering several underwhelming performances that placed him among the team's lower-tier relievers, Edwin was afforded a degree of trust and patience uncommon within most baseball circles. Concluding the 2021 season with an ERA of 8.07 over 29 innings pitched, his statistics left much to be desired.

Edwin's perspective on his full season tenure in Winnemucca is candid: "To be honest, it took me by surprise. Every time Mike walked past (referring to Mike Del Castillo, the Railers' manager at the time), I half-expected him to tell me to pack my bags and leave. I think even he was surprised to not receive a phone call after some of the outings I had. After a while, we just attributed this to Elko wanting some stability for us to play our best. Pretty naïve, in retrospect."

## **Mesa's Nightmare**

Elko took a more conventional approach in 2022, appointing Edwin to its A affiliate in Mesa, despite boasting a respectable 0.73 ERA and a Hawaiian Winter League championship. As Edwin joined the team in Mesa, a mere six pitchers populated the roster. Initially, he assumed that some buses got delayed and that the rest of the team was on its way. However, as the opening series unfolded, the anticipated reinforcements failed to materialize. Josh Hamik, the team's manager, reassured them that the necessary arrangements for the upcoming series were already in place. But days turned into weeks, and the initial somewhat comical scarcity of pitchers turned into a haunting reality for those in Mesa.

As weeks progressed, Edwin found himself taking the mound in every game. Even when his name wasn't featured on the starting lineup, he knew he would have to come in as a reliever. Painkillers and ice baths became as routine as eating and sleeping.

*"My concerns initially were about the pain and the eventual loss of any feeling in my hand and fingers. Things got worse when I started having recurring nightmares, and it wasn't long before I began experiencing panic attacks in the bullpen and on the mound." Edwin Serna*

Witnesses in the stands recall a distressing but recurring scene: Edwin, standing on the mound, tears glistening on his face, looking back at the clubhouse. Josh stared back at him, signaling to "man up and get on with it." The emotional and physical toll of shouldering the team's burden was visible with every pitch.

An emotional Edwin recalls a particular night that drove him over the edge:

*"It was my third start in a row against Raton. I couldn't feel the ball. I gave up 7 runs in the first, 4 in the second, and then 2 runs in every inning until I got pulled in the 7th inning. Walking down the steps, I heard Josh tell the trainers to get the ice bath ready because I was starting again tomorrow. I broke down and had to be carried by some teammates, none of whom were pitchers, of course, because they would probably have dropped me. That same night I packed all of my bags using my non-throwing hand. I was ready to go, but I couldn't leave because my car was a stick shift, and I couldn't change gears."*

Despite the recurring horrific scenes, it wasn't until the season was almost over that the WPBL took note of what was happening in Mesa. Through complaints and concerns from other players



and owners, then-Commissioner Bo F. Bunyan (RIP) reluctantly agreed to send league representatives to evaluate the situation. However, by then, the damage had already been done.

Throughout 55 games, with a dismal 2-53 record, Edwin was the constant on the field for Mesa. He pitched 104.1 innings, allowing 336 hits and accumulating a staggering 24.76 ERA, resulting in 37 losses and zero wins. Remarkably, Edwin didn't miss a single game due to injury.

As news reached the WPBL's offices, league sources shared accounts of extremely heated conversations between Commissioner Bo and Elko's management, with some even confirmed that Trucker's manager, Allan Ruby, was heard saying, "I didn't even know we had a team in Mesa."

## The Aftermath

Elko's ownership and Commissioner Bo discreetly reached a settlement which sources say included multiple John Deere tractors and a hot air balloon in hopes of silencing any potential stories. In exchange, Elko agreed to immediately address the situation in Mesa, signing anyone who could put on their pants the right way to a minor league deal and sending Edwin to Winnemucca to complete the season.

Following the completion of the season, Commissioner Bo initiated the winter meetings by acknowledging the horrifying scenes that unfolded in A ball. He committed to ensuring that no

other players would ever have to endure the same situation. A week later, a special office dedicated to minor league conditions oversight was formed – internally known as the MESA Patrol.

As for Edwin, after refusing to participate in the 2023 Spring Training, he was granted a second chance through a trade with the Atoms organization. However, despite his best efforts, which saw him play well and progress from A in Raton all the way to AAA in Napa in three years, the dream was cut short. The eventual toll was too much to bear, leading Edwin to retire from professional baseball at age 24 after a tumultuous and exhausting five-year career.

Now 28 years old, Edwin has found a new purpose in life. He started the "No More Baseball in Mesa" foundation, aiming to guide Mesa's youth away from the sport of baseball and towards more typical teen behaviors like looting and loitering.

*"Openly discussing what happened in Mesa allowed me to come to terms with my past and help others avoid the same situation. Every kid I'm able to take away from Mesa baseball is another kid that won't have to endure the things I have, and that makes it all worth it," says Edwin Serna.*

As for his opinion on who's to blame for the pain and suffering, his answer is clear:

*"I don't want to look back and point fingers at all the people who saw what was happening and did nothing, because it would be only one finger, and it would be pointed at Allan Ruby, the Elko Truckers GM."*

Edwin is not alone in the experiences he shared during his nightmarish situation in Mesa, but he's the only one who had the courage to speak up. Other victims like Goober McGraw and Seth Blackbird are still paying their dues and pursuing the dream of making it to the big leagues (Bisbee Cooper Queens, A, and Free Agent respectively). Others like Phi Gorecki, Coeur D'Alene Striking Miners Reliever, have finally made it and are fighting to stay on top. None have responded to interview inquiries, fearing for their future in the sport.

Josh Hamik, Mesa's manager during the incidents, remained with the Beach Bums for another two seasons before getting the opportunity with the Farmers' AAA affiliate, the Willapa Bay Black Bears. A move that left many wondering what else the Farmers' organization is willing to overlook for a win. Josh has refused our interview requests for this piece.

Lastly, as for Allan Ruby, Trucker's General Manager overseeing the entire minor league system during the Mesa fiasco, life seems pretty good. After eight seasons and one title with the Truckers organization, Allan seems immune to any wrongdoing taking place in and around the team, including a spate of lawn mower accidents and his refusal to pay for any of his players' landscaping, despite John Deere being the Truckers' main sponsor.

In response to comments during a phone interview, Elko's GM Allan Ruby dismissed the past and focused on the future: "*Obviously, there were a lot of miscommunications between myself and our Single-A club that I take complete responsibility for. Those young men should not have been put in that position. That manager should not have been put in that position. I've spoken with Edwin a lot*

*and I think we have come to an understanding. I don't expect him to forgive me completely, and I would never ask him to do that. But we've sat down and discussed it man to man, and I am comfortable with where we stand. If I could go back and change things, would I?" Absolutely! But the past is the past and we learn from our mistakes. All I can focus on now is the 2029 Elko Truckers and their affiliates."*

For Edwin and other minor-leaguers out there, we can only hope so, Allan.

# DEFINING A DYNASTY

## Examining the Two Team Race to Become the Best in WPBL History

746 wins, 7 Division Titles, 3 MVPs, 4 Pitchers of the Year, 2 GMs of the Year, 19 Gold Gloves, 24 Silver Sluggers, over 40 All Star Selections, and 6 WPBL Championships. Since the WPBLs inception nine years ago, the Lake Tahoe Mustangs and Pocatello Old Timers have dominated the field. Lake Tahoe came out of the gate fast, winning the first ever WPBL championship despite being heavy underdogs to the first great Elko team. Then after a short rebuild they found their way back in 2024 and have been the second most winningest franchise since then. Pocatello is the one constant in an ever-changing league. Four times they have crested the 50-win milestone,

and never once had a losing season. They are on a run of 8 consecutive playoff appearances, never once missing the postseason, and it is a streak that doesn't seem to be ending anytime soon. In the early morning hours of August 26, 2028, it appeared as though Pocatello was going to pull ahead and establish themselves as the dominant WPBL dynasty of the 2020s. The Old-Timers held a 3-1 series lead in the WPBL Championship after winning a thrilling Game 4 in the 15<sup>th</sup> inning on a Fernando "King Kong" Jimenez walk off home run. Pocatello was well on their way to what would be their 4th championship. But then Danny "Frosty" Schumacher put together the best single game

performance west of the Mississippi in baseball history. A 7-strikeout perfect game put life back into the Mustangs and they went on to complete the 3-1 series comeback and tie Pocatello with three championships a piece. Now the question arises again: In this rivalry of giants, who is the best dynasty in the WPBL? And possibly an even bigger question, is this two-team dominance even healthy for a growing league?

When comparing the two franchises, the most logical place to start is head-to-head and see how the best have fared against their counterparts. Except in this case, that doesn't exactly tell us much. Through 90 games against each other the record is exactly 45-45. Lake Tahoe is 34-35 against Pocatello in the regular season and 11-10 against them in the post season. The run differential in those games played is only 378-374 in favor of the

Mustangs. A mere four runs difference between two of the best teams in the league over almost 100 games. In total postseason series, Lake Tahoe holds a 2-1 advantage, but all three series have been decided in a Game 7. It's hard to find a better, more even matchup in the WPBL than Lake Tahoe vs Pocatello.

Against all other teams, Pocatello has a clear advantage. With 392 wins and a .604 winning percentage, no one else in the league is close to touching the Old Timers numbers. Lake Tahoe is still respectable (3<sup>rd</sup> in total wins and winning percentage), but they are held back heavily by the 2022-2023 stretch during which the Mustangs missed the playoffs and won less than 35 games each season. The Old Timers are a machine in the regular season, and their great top end talent plus elite depth has become a proven strategy to survive an

81-game season and show up ready for the playoffs.

In terms of team composition, both teams have been built fairly similarly. Both have MVP caliber players from the inaugural draft that have been with their team since the beginning (Tahoe: TJ Ketchum; Pocatello: Chris Ponder, Bryan Daniels), both have superstars signed as late arriving free agents from independent leagues (Tahoe: Victor Patterson; Pocatello: Fernando Jimenez), and both have made blockbuster trades to bring in additional star power to extend their runs (Tahoe: Joey Hoffmann, Jeremy Wolfe; Pocatello: Alejandro Sanchez, Adam Hembree). The biggest difference may be in terms of drafting, where Lake Tahoe has pulled in an incredible 31.4 WAR from homegrown players vs Pocatello with only 19.4 WAR. Lake Tahoe of course is helped tremendously in this statistic by

receiving the #3 overall pick in the 2022 and 2023 drafts which they used on Danny Schumacher and Gregg Herfurth who have combined put up 20 WAR on their own. The Mustangs have established their identity as a pitching first team, with the best starting rotation top to bottom, and supplemented it with a few good hitters. Pocatello on the other hand, while there is no doubt Bryan Daniels is a future first ballot Hall of Famer, has always struck more fear with their lineup than on the mound. The heart of the order with Sanchez-Ponder-Jimenez is elite and has been the WPBLs own Murderers Row through the second half of the decade.

Both teams have two more seasons to close out the decade strong and cement their place as The WPBL Dynasty of the 2020s. Both should be in the championship hunt through 2030, although after that the predictions

become a little bit muddier. The Lake Tahoe lineup is aging quickly, and once TJ Ketchum's contract runs out in 2031, there are a lot of questions about who is left. The Mustangs may have to make some tough decisions on whether to break up their star pitching rotation and look at rebuilding. Pocatello's stars are aging as well, but the organization's management has done a great job with managing a decent farm system while keeping a championship caliber WPBL squad. With the 7th best minor league system, including high end prospects like Honk Sanderson and Vernon Lummis, there is a chance Pocatello could merely reload and continue their dominance into the 2030's.

Finally, the dominance of these two teams leads to a much larger question, one that is surely dominating the minds of fans and GMs alike: Is this dominance and dynasty building

by Lake Tahoe and Pocatello healthy for the WPBL? 75% of the WPBL Championships have been won by one of these two teams, and while every team has made the playoffs at least once, only five teams have made the postseason more than twice. The parity between the haves and the have nots continues to grow each season. Due to their sustained winning, the ticket sales and profits of the Mustangs and Old Timers are among the top in the league, and the financial advantage just snowballs into further winning for the two franchises.

How much longer are Pocatello and Lake Tahoe capable of continuing their supremacy over the rest of the WPBL? One thing is for sure, the only people capable of stopping them are the rest of the WPBL organizations.



# TEAM PREVIEWS

# ASTORIA

2028 Record: 34-47 (5<sup>th</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 41-40 (3<sup>rd</sup>)



Is this the season when the Fighting Chinooks finally turn the page and go from rebuilding to competing? The top draft picks of the past few seasons dot Astoria's roster and they have the talent to win. The Coastal is a difficult division, but if the young players continue to develop then Astoria could be playing baseball in August for only the second time in their history.

## Player To Watch – Daniel Horse-Johnson

Easily overlooked compared to other Chinook top prospects like Joram and Muldoon, Horse-Johnson debuted last season with an OPS of .744, 1.8 WAR, and an All-Star Game Appearance. He could become a key piece if Astoria makes a playoff push.

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Chris Wolfe (R)  
1B – Josh Richardson  
2B – Mario Yepiz  
3B – Luis Villagomez  
SS – Bobby England (R)  
LF – Daniel Horse-Johnson  
CF – Luis Herrera  
RF – Joram van der Wal  
DH – Hercules Muldoon  
SP – Gabe Castenada  
SP – Mark Vela  
SP – Larry Pizza  
CP – Matt Hennecke

# BANDON

2028 Record: 40-41 (3<sup>rd</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 40-41 (4<sup>th</sup>)

No one has suffered more postseason disappointment in WPBL history than the Barons. Despite looking like one of the strongest teams in the league for the past three seasons and boasting a lineup filled with impact players, Bandon has yet to win the WPBL Championship. While not quite old, many around the league are beginning to question how long Bandon's championship window can remain open.

## Player To Watch – Luis Diaz

The Bandon pitcher has quietly become one of the best starting pitchers in the league. With the departure of long-time ace Jim Thorp, the Barons need Diaz to step up and turn his stuff from good to great.



## PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Keith Rehmert  
1B – Dana Krynski  
2B – Sandy Gonzalez  
3B – Geoff Healy  
SS – Mitch Jones  
LF – Jaden Richardson  
CF – Brock O. Lee  
RF – Antonio Caamano  
DH – Colby Stillman  
SP – Luis Diaz  
SP – Tim Scudder  
SP – Jesus Farelo  
CP – Sean Rahm

# COEUR D'ALENE

2028 Record: 40-41 (4<sup>th</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 37-44 (6<sup>th</sup>)



Coeur d'Alene has already established themselves into a fine baseball club, hovering right at the .500 mark over the past two seasons. While the expansion team has been pieced together with free agents and mercenaries through its short existence, young prospects should begin arriving. While the Striking Miners don't have the talent to compete with Pocatello for the division championship, a wild card spot would be a respectable season.

## Player To Watch – Todd Bourdreaux

The Miners have yet to have a star player to truly call their own and excite the home crowd. Bourdreaux could become that face of the franchise they need. The #8 overall pick in 2026 and first draft pick in Miner history, "Cricket" is ready to make some noise.

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Andy King  
1B – Pat Weirich  
2B – Angel Guardado  
3B – Mike Schneider  
SS – Taylor Fuller  
LF – Jamie Knechtges  
CF – Raul Medina  
RF – Jim Boston  
DH – Kevin Shepherd (R)  
SP – Nate Young  
SP – Todd Bourdreaux (R)  
SP – Antoine Roussel  
CP – Nate Schaefer

# CRESCENT CITY

2028 Record: 37-44 (4<sup>th</sup>)

2029 Record: 38-43 (5<sup>th</sup>)



After two rough seasons with less than 30 wins in 2026 and 2027, the Kodiaks have started to recover and hope to improve upon last season's 37-win year. Rising youngsters such as Daron Walsh, Choo Choo Baloo, and Jeff June are good counterparts to the more experienced stars like Ruben Morales and Chris Mistretta. At the start of the decade Crescent City looked like one of the main players in the league and they hope to get back to that prominence soon.

## Player To Watch – Daron “Hot Dog King” Walsh

The 24-year-old third basemen was a second-round selection in 2025, and despite a rough rookie year in 2027, he has rebounded to look like one of the better starting 3B in the league. Last season's .771 OPS was good for 4<sup>th</sup> best among 3B.

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Josh Colon (R)  
1B – Shean Theus  
2B – Frank Vitela  
3B – Daron Walsh  
SS – Jeff June (R)  
LF – Vladimir Cake (R)  
CF – Choo Choo Baloo  
RF – Ruben Morales  
DH – Chris Mistretta  
SP – Ben Costa  
SP – Frank Hall  
SP – Trevor Bauer  
CP – Bam Boozled

# ELKO

2028 Record: 41-40 (3<sup>rd</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 42-39 (2<sup>nd</sup>)



After executing a perfect rebuild strategy after 2023, the Truckers have made 4 straight playoff appearances and won a WPBL Championship. Now as the team gets older, it's hard to figure out what the ownership wants out of the next few seasons. Signing former MVP Joey Hoffmann is a great move that signals they want to win now, but trading away budding star Gabe Castenada says the opposite. A weak Mainland Division should allow them to make the playoffs, but can they pull it all together for one more championship ride?

## Player To Watch – Randy Barbeque

The former #1 overall pick looked to be a revelation early in his career, but he hasn't put together an all-star season since 2026. Can Barbeque return to his old ways?

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Justin Hamburger  
1B – Randy Barbeque  
2B – Ryan Bournias  
3B – Jeff Pistone (R)  
SS – Sterling Snell  
LF – Mike Stefanovic  
CF – Joey Hoffmann  
RF – Gary Johnson  
DH – Ashton Hamby  
SP – Han-soo Shin (R)  
SP – Bill Sykes  
SP – Matt Dutton  
CP – Alejandro Ferrer

# GILLETTE

2028 Record: 36-45 (6<sup>th</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 38-43 (5<sup>th</sup>)



Gillette has maintained a lot of consistency in their lineup over their first three seasons as an expansion team; Five of their starting players were members of the original 2026 team. After upsetting Pocatello in the playoffs in Year 1, the Bison have yet to return to form and are hoping this can finally be the season. The Mainland Division wild card spots are wide open for the taking if Gillette can get hot at the right time.

## Player To Watch – Nick Crespo

Crespo was originally taken by Gillette in the first expansion draft and has been a solid outfielder for them for 3 seasons now. Only 28 years old and just reaching his prime, Crespo will be looking to have a big season after missing 43 games last year due to injury.

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Kevin Cucumber  
1B – Sam Gross  
2B – Dustin Whiteford  
3B – Ed Silva  
SS – Yen-nien An  
LF – Marcos Ortiz  
CF – Ricardo Suarez  
RF – Nick Crespo  
DH – John Hassell  
SP – Fernando Moran  
SP – Sean Worth  
SP – Peter Paul Tyleneol (R)  
CP – Manny Naranjo

# GREAT FALLS



2028 Record: 39-42 (5<sup>th</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 40-41 (4<sup>th</sup>)

The Black Eagles are loaded with young talent that could explode in the 2029 season. Last year's rookie of the year Aaron Jury looks like he is ready to make himself a household name, while their starting rotation of Hall, Jamboree, and Carmona has the potential to be the second best in the league. One area Great Falls could be lacking is mid-level talent. After the top young players, there is a steep drop off and the lack of depth could hurt them through a long summer.

## Player To Watch – Aaron Jury

The top draft pick in 2026 draft and 2028 Rookie of the Year has the talent to take home even more hardware next season. He slashed .286/.353/.477 in 2028 but only hit 6 home runs. If his power develops further and he can hit 10-15 homers, watch out.

## PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Dennis Post  
1B – Mike Cervantes  
2B – Pat Poole  
3B – Fernando Jaramillo  
SS – Randy Derringer (R)  
LF – Jim Coburn  
CF – Jeremy Meaney (R)  
RF – Aaron Jury  
DH – Sam Dodson  
SP – Matt Hall  
SP – Manny Jamboree  
SP – David Carmona  
CP – Masato Nakatani



# KENNEWICK TRI-CITY

2028 Record: 47-34 (2<sup>nd</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 48-33 (1<sup>st</sup>)

Kennewick has developed a reputation as one of the best teams in the league, making the playoffs in 5 of the past 6 seasons, but they have only been able to return one championship over that stretch. Management has done a great job bringing in star players to supplement the home-grown talent (Wolverton, Ben Bush), and continued that trend this season trading for perennial batting champion Brian Sicard. Sicard's playstyle fits in well with the Atoms scheme of strong pitching and contact hitting. No doubt Kennewick will be playing baseball in August, but can they stand up against Pocatello or Tahoe on the way to a championship?

## Player To Watch – John Wolverton

36 years old now but still playing like he is 26, how much longer can Wolverton keep up this ridiculous pace? The WPBL All-Time Home Run leader is only six home runs away from claiming Kennewick's all-time home run record as well despite only arriving two seasons ago. Wolverton gives the Atoms a strong piece in the middle of the lineup, and they need him to succeed if they want to win a championship.



## PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Andy Barger  
1B – Ben Bush  
2B – Bobby Whelan  
3B – Rafael Trujillo  
SS – Tetsuya Honda  
LF – Mike DuBois  
CF – John Birdsall  
RF – John Wolverton  
DH – Brian Sicard  
SP – Taylor Simkins  
SP – Joe Watkins  
SP – Mike Puopolo  
CP – Javier Torres

# LAKE TAHOE

2028 Record: 49-32 (1<sup>st</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 45-36 (2<sup>nd</sup>)



Fresh off another WPBL Championship, Lake Tahoe took some losses this offseason that will make it difficult to repeat. Losing former MVP Joey Hoffmann to free agency was a big loss to an offense that is really only league average. Combined with losing all star 2B Ruben Galavis to extended recovery from an ACL tear suffered last July, the Mustangs will have to rely even further on their stellar pitching staff.

## Player To Watch – Bonifazio Lopez

Lopez was perhaps the Mustangs biggest pickup this offseason and will have big shoes to fill to help an aging offense. He is coming off the best two years of his career which he spent in Coeur d’Alene and hopes to continue it as he helps lead Lake Tahoe towards hopefully their 4<sup>th</sup> WPBL Championship.

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Bailey Harman  
1B – Bryan Elbert  
2B – Josh Hall  
3B – Paul Youse  
SS – Mario Gamino  
LF – T.J. Ketchum  
CF – Jarred Goldstein  
RF – Bonifazio Lopez  
DH – Dustin Duley  
SP – Gregg Herfurth  
SP – Victor Patterson  
SP – Danny Schumacher  
CP – Jeremy Wolfe

# POCATELLO

2028 Record: 50-31 (1<sup>st</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 52-29 (1<sup>st</sup>)

Not much can be written about the Old Timers that hasn't been said before. They continue to win at a rate nearly unmatched in the WPBL and their current run is one that possibly will never be replicated. The main cast returns this season, with Figueroa filling in at third base being the only notable exception. It's difficult to find a weak spot in this Pocatello lineup that could lead to their downfall, it's very solid from top to bottom. Perhaps the only thing standing in their way is their own hubris, or did they learn that lesson following last season's Championship defeat?

## Player To Watch – Dale Cherokee

Cherokee was disappointed he didn't get more recognition for his stellar rookie year after finishing with 10 home runs and 48 RBI. If he replicates that performance he could be looking at his first all star selection, and possibly be the front runner to be the next great Pocatello slugger.



## PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Kyle Kulzer  
1B – Dale Cherokee  
2B – Noel Trentadue  
3B – Richard Figueroa  
SS – Fernando Jimenez  
LF – Chris Ponder  
CF – Chris Powers  
RF – Alejandro Sanchez  
DH – Luis Gonzalez  
SP – Bryan Daniels  
SP – Moises Batista  
SP – Adam Hembree  
CP – Scott Carlson

# VICTORIA

2028 Record: 31-50 (6<sup>th</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 30-51 (6<sup>th</sup>)



Under new ownership in 2029, the Victoria Geese are prepared to start the long rebuilding road and are merely happy to stay competitive this season. All Star RF Jim Whammer returns and could possibly be joined at some point by strong prospects currently in the minors such as LeRoy Walters and Logan Kellenberger. All eyes are on the new Victoria GM to see how he manages the organization, and to see if he possibly could provide some fresh competition in the seasons to come.

## Player To Watch – Scott Rufus

Joining as a free agent from an independent league this offseason, the Connecticut native has the talent to make a splash in his first WPBL season. Victoria will be hoping to keep ticket sales up during this down season, and Rufus could be a key piece to that.

### PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Carlos Medina  
1B – Parker Holland  
2B – Tootsie Jackson  
3B – Jesus Bello  
SS – Jay Codella (R)  
LF – Scott Rufus (R)  
CF – Tom Saylor  
RF – Jim Whammer  
DH – Boat Shumpert  
SP – Ken Williams  
SP – Manny Gaona  
SP – Gustavo Pacheco  
CP – Rey Jaramillo

# WALLA WALLA

2028 Record: 42-39 (2<sup>nd</sup>)

Projected 2029 Record: 41-40 (3<sup>rd</sup>)



Spirits are high in Walla Walla as they are coming off their first playoff series win and see loads of young players making their debut this spring. Team Capitan and defending MVP Gumball Washington is excited about all of the fresh faces showing up to spring training, knowing it was just a few short seasons ago that he was the wide-eyed 21-year-old just trying to get noticed. The pitching staff leaves a lot to be desired, but the Farmers front office doesn't see this as a "Win Now" season and is content to watch who steps up to the plate this season.

## Player To Watch – Steve Korth

One of the WPBL early prospects, Korth showed that he was more of a late bloomer as he has put together two of his best seasons in 2027 and 2028. Now changing positions and moving to 3B, will the switch hurt Koeth's performance at the plate or is he still prepared to be the RBI man that drives in Washington?

## PROJECTED LINEUP

C – Ken Canelli  
1B – Luca Smitherines (R)  
2B – J.J. Smith  
3B – Steve Korth  
SS – Jake Wendt  
LF – Gumball Washington  
CF – Billy Peanut (R)  
RF – Tim Sistrunk  
DH – Dale Honda (R)  
SP – Juan Hinojosa (R)  
SP – Chris Rybak  
SP – Miguel Lamas  
CP – John Bumiller

# HAZARD AHEAD

## WPBL Teams Compared to Road Signs

*Hello Readers,*

*Richard Salas here. As I'm sure you noticed, I was absent throughout the 2028 WPBL season. I missed this wonderful league so much but was presented an opportunity I just couldn't refuse. When I am not a baseball journalist, I am a motorcycle enthusiast. I was approached by none other than Ewan McGregor to do a YouTube/blogging series on a motorcycle road trip across the USA/North America and then South America. Although I couldn't write for the WPBL last year, I listed/watched games when I could and followed the league as best as I can. I am happy to announce we have wrapped filming and I am back for 2029! On this trip, I spent a lot of time riding along, seeing road signs. That is what inspired the theme of this preseason round up, the team's status in the league denoted in a street sign.*



### **Elko Truckers No U-Turn Sign:**

Elko limped into the playoffs last season, then had a less than impressive showing against the upstart Walla Walla Farmers.

They shipped off leadoff man extraordinaire Brian Sicard to Kennewick in an effort to go younger. They had a solid deal on the table to move Joe Watts to Walla Walla.

Then Joe Watts vetoed the trade, which the front office had no say in. With their hands forced, they doubled down, and signed 34-year-old Joey Hoffman to a very lucrative 6 year deal. They traded away Gabe Casteneda in an effort to restock draft capital and hope to replace him with 30-year-old, WPBL newcomer Han-soo Shin. They have earned the **No U-Turn Sign** because there really is no going back after the Hoffman deal. They're still gunning for the top of the mountain, but they better do it fast, otherwise they'll be driving straight off a cliff before they know it. They did snag an above average catcher who's only 27 years old in Justin Hamburger, but it cost one of the highest potential young catchers in the league in Clint Harrod.



### **Astoria: Watch Downhill Speed**

As with most offseasons, the story of Astoria isn't a huge free agency splash, but the more gradual emergence of their superior farm system. Joram (he's first name basis good) is a bonafide star you can build a team around. Daniel Horse-Johnson and Hercules Muldoon are both capable of putting together all-star seasons now while still having MVP potential. Trading back for Gabe Casteneda gives them a still young player with ace potential, and Vance Picon is a very serviceable end of rotation guy. Their season will most likely hinge on the development of others in their rotation, specifically Pete Funk, who still looks like he might be a year away from being the type of pitcher Astoria hopes he will be. With the Chinooks, it's not as much about if their time will come, but when. Once they hit their stride, they will be a force in the WPBL that will be hard to stop, hence the Watch Downhill Speed sign. Mark Vela proved himself a good closer last year, can he be elite this

year? Does Luis Herrera have a year 3 superstar leap in him? The answers to these questions will determine just how fast Astoria is going down this hill.



## Lake Tahoe: Green Light

Most teams would be hard pressed to remain a contender after losing contributors like Joey Hoffman and Tom Saylor. Tahoe is not like most teams. The reigning champs are very good and still boast an unmatched starting rotation. Schumacher's perfect game is undoubtedly the biggest playoff moment in WPBL history. After their latest title, they spared no expense in replacing important rotation players. As hard as it is to replace a guy like Hoffman, RF Bonifazio Lopez and 3B Dustin Duley aren't bad consolation prizes. With that said, the story remains the same, their starting pitching is lights out, and as long as they make the playoffs and have their Starting Rotation healthy, they feel like they are unbeatable.



## Pocatello: Left Turn Yield Green Light

After the heartbreaking loss in the finals, the Old-Timers find themselves in a position they've come to expect title contention. With that said, could this be the year they experience a drop-off? Doesn't seem like it, but the thought alone puts them in this category. I think the winning ways in Pocatello will culminate in another playoff appearance this year, especially in a weaker mainland division. Either way, their lineup boasts competence up and down, spearheaded by 2B Noel



Trentadue. It's been a blast watching Noel grow from a nice young piece for the Old Timers, to one of the stars of the show. It is a shame newly acquired SP Chris Phillips, who was expected in the starting rotation this year, was injured in spring training and will miss the year. Their year could depend on how Pocatello shores up their starting rotation. The Pocatello GM has showed a high level of savviness in building the dynasty, and the thinking around the league is he would bring that same level of savviness in entering a rebuild, if it were to come to that, which once again seems unlikely.



## Victoria: Gravel Road Ahead

Victoria, under new management, has a bumpy road ahead. The upside is the management knows it and has already begun to instill a new approach. The positives? RF Jim Whammer is still only 26 years old and should be a good bet to appear in his third all-star game. They've seemed to land an absolute steal in Scott Rufus, who came over from the Pecos League, on a very reasonable deal. Although he is expected to contribute in some fashion this year, he should be able to really prove his worth in years 2 and 3 of his deal. It seems likely they will trade at least 1 of SPs Ken Williams/Manny Gaona by the deadline. Victoria has quietly built a competent lineup with limited funds, bringing in solid players CF Tom Saylor and 3B Jesus Bello on team friendly, low risk deals. Time will tell where this team will be after 2029(is relocation in their future?), but Victoria will put out a respectable product at the major levels, and has some exciting things happening in the

minors, none more so than 23-year-old RF Leroy Walters who has dominated in AA the last 3 years,



## Walla Walla: Caution Light

Walla Walla is coming off their best year in recent memory and first playoff appearance since 2022. Gumball Washington is an MVP. Could they be in the playoffs in back-to-back years for the first time in team history?

With that said, is there enough to be considered a true title contender? Only time will tell, but they seem a little off true title contention, hence the yellow light designation. It will be exciting to see 23-year-old SP Juan Hinojosa for the entire year at the major league level. They have tried their best to add solid veterans, only to have no trade clauses enacted both times. Those players may regret that decision, as Walla Walla has felt like a new organization since their rebrand, and they have the city buzzing. 2B JJ Smith could be a major addition to this lineup if he can stay healthy. The starting rotation is decent, with a lot falling on Juan becoming the ace the organization imagines he can be. Their bullpen is serviceable as it stands but could also be a place they aim to improve at the deadline if they find themselves in playoff position again.



## Crescent City: Windy Road Ahead

The Kodiaks last made the playoffs in 2025. In 2026 and 2027, the talent level just wasn't there, and expectations weren't high from ownership's or fan's perspective. Last year, things felt a lot different. Although they finished with only 37 wins, they truly felt like a better team, and some basic stats agreed with that (run differential in particular). They seemed to be on the wrong side of most 1 run games, and that is something they will need to address this year if they hope to be better and reach the playoffs again. CCK gets the windy road sign due to them being a team in the middle, and no matter which direction they go, it will have its share of twists both ways. They have moved on from Jesus Farelo, dealing him to division rival Bandon. They will be counting on SP Ben Costa to be their ace, and he has the tools to do so. No big free agency moves, but they extended a trio of promising young players in CF Choo Choo Baloo, the aforementioned SP Ben Costa and CL Bam Boozled.



## Coeur d'Alene: Under Construction

The Miners, still trying to find their place in a talented WPBL, look to have solidified their direction: Tear it down. They are very obviously attempting to gain an extreme amount of draft/prospect capital with an eye on the future. The trades of C Justin Hamburger and SP Jorge Santana represent that. Most of their exciting prospects look 2-3 years away at least, but CDA management doesn't seem to think that is a bad thing. Although they find themselves face

to face with a tough rebuild, it seems their vision is clear. When it comes time to grade the success of the season, it will have less to do with their place in the standings, and more to do with the return they can extract from veterans such as CL Kunihide Tanaka and SP Nate Young. It's worth keeping an eye on 2028 pick (5th round) CF Aaron Dilullo. He appears to be pro ready, with room to improve. If he can limit strikeouts, his development could be a good storyline for CDA in 2029.



## Gillette: Steep Incline

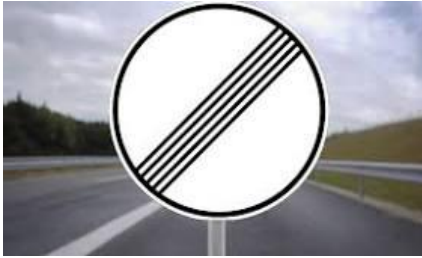
Being an expansion team is hard, but Gillette has proven themselves a scrappy bunch and their GM has an eye for talent. Since sneaking into the playoffs in their first year (2026), they have missed the last 2 years. They may not look the part of a playoff team on paper, but the fact they reside in the weaker Mainland division means they always have a chance. Gillette seems to have an uncanny ability to pluck what looks like average guys on other teams and have them put together solid years for the club. There are rumors the culture in Gillette is top notch, and as an outsider, it sure seems that way. Last year, SP Fernando Moran had a career year. Could new acquisition, 34 year old 1B Sam Gross, follow suit? The big question is what will happen with LF Marcus Ortiz, undoubtedly the heart and soul of the club, entering the last year of his contract. At 29 years old, will the Bison invest in him or move him at the deadline?



## Great Falls: Stop Sign

We all know about reigning ROY Aaron Jury, who is captivating young fans and is one of the top jersey sellers in all the league. It is time for Great Falls to stop, take stock of the rest of their assets, and figure out their plan moving forward. Outside of Jury, the Black Eagles don't have many other bats to turn too. With a generational talent like Jury, who is still very young at just 24 years old, do they ride out 2029 with hopes of internal development within their system to have them ready for 2030(Prospects like LF Jayden Anderson and CF Gerbil

Jorgenson)? OR do they leverage their deep farm system to surround Jury with more WPBL talent now? Oddly enough, the answer to that question might depend on the performance of their trio of homegrown pitching talent, Matt Hall, Manny Jamboree, and JJ Brown. If all perform to their potential this year, Great Falls may be accelerating a lot faster from this stop sign than even they anticipated.



## **Bandon: No Speed Limit (Autobahn)**

Bandon has experienced the most sustained heartbreak in the WPBL, coming close to their first title again and again to no avail. As they chase their fourth straight playoff appearance, they appear ready to push more and more chips towards the middle until they get that goal, which seems the right course of action. On the precipice of championship glory, they should do so with reckless abandon and hence earn the No speed limit sign. SP Luiz Diaz agreed to a 4 year contract extension with the Barons. They brought in a guy with incredible spin rates on both the curveball and sinker in Tim Scudder. The brought in SP Jesus Farelo in a trade, who, despite looking like age is getting to him, experienced a huge bounce back year in 2028 where he struck out 141 batters in just 131 IP. Their lineup has absolutely no weak link, their starting rotation has been shored up, and their bullpen still has surefire HOF Sean Rahm along with a bevy of great setup guys. These guys should be title favorites, but my professional opinion is that 2 way start Colby Stillman remains the most pivotal player. As he goes, so does the Barons. If he can match his 2026 year on the mound, the Barons may find themselves in elusive company by year's end, champions.



## Kennewick: Caution Light

The Atoms are good year in and year out, but only boast one championship, which causes most pundits to put them half a tier below powerhouses Pocatello and Lake Tahoe. Looking at their regular season success really shows how good they have been, year over year. In 8 years, they have only 2 losing seasons and only missed the playoffs 3 times. If they make the playoffs this year, as many expect, that will make it 4 appearances in a row. Its hard to bet against them, as Superstar John Wolverton is still on the team. Last year, at the age of 35, he put together an MVP caliber season. He didn't win what would have been his 4th MVP, but as a media member myself, feel very strongly voter fatigue may have played a part. Wolverton will be 36 this year, but he has shown very little signs of slowing down. He is in a class of his own in the WPBL, and his performance this year could have people saying his name with other stars who still dominated late in their careers, such as LeBron James and Tom Brady. Sicard should slot in seamlessly into their lineup, and his uncanny ability to get on base will align perfectly with Wolverton's ability to get people home. The Atoms might actually have so much talent that Pete Freedom may have to actually fight for playing time, which is crazy considering his monster year in 2026. Their starting lineup is decent, but very dependent on Simkins becoming a bonafide #1 starter. Really, the only thing keeping the Atoms out of the green light conversation is their division. Tahoe and Bandon are so formidable, it makes it seem Kennewick will have to get Wolverton some help if they want to be true title contenders.



# 2029 PREDICTIONS

TEAM	2029 PROJECTION	2028 RECORD	DIFFERENTIAL
<b>COASTAL DIVISION</b>			
Kennewick Tri-City	48-33	47-34	+1
Lake Tahoe	45-36	49-32	-4
Astoria	41-40	34-47	+7
Bandon	40-41	40-41	0
Crescent City	38-43	37-44	+1
Victoria	30-51	31-50	-1
<b>MAINLAND DIVISION</b>			
Pocatello	52-29	50-31	+2
Elko	42-39	41-40	+1
Walla Walla	41-40	42-39	-1
Great Falls	40-41	39-42	+1
Gillette	38-43	36-45	+2
Coeur d'Alene	37-44	40-41	-3

# PROJECTED AWARD WINNERS

## MVP – Joram van der Wal – Astoria

The most anticipated prospect in WPBL history made his debut in 2026 at only 21 years old, but each season since then his stock has only continued to rise. Now 24 years old and with tons of pro experience under his belt, this is the year “Crazy Legs” takes the leap from good to great. After injury troubles in 2027, last year was the first that Joram played a full 81 games, and he impressed slashing .286/.375/.563 and putting up 3.5 WAR. While he plays below league average defense, his bat more than makes up for it, and the slugger could be looking at setting multiple records in the future. While there are many young ballplayers who could put up strong competition this year (Washington, Jury, or even Joram’s own teammate Horse-Johnson), Joram has the past pro experience that should lead to a huge season. If Joram can maintain a .290 average while leading the league in home runs, that should be more than enough to bring home the award.

## **Pitcher of the Year – Danny Schumacher – Lake Tahoe**

Out of the Mustangs 3-Ace rotation, Schumacher is the odd man out as the only one without a pitcher of the year award. While he has come close, finishing 3<sup>rd</sup> in 2024, 2025, and 2028; he has never quite done enough to solidify himself as the best pitcher in the league. Last season he led the WPBL in ERA (2.14) and WHIP (0.92) in 118 innings, but that still wasn't enough to win any hardware. He gave voters a taste of what is to come this season by pitching the league's first perfect game in Game 5 of the WPBL Championship Series. The 2022 3<sup>rd</sup> overall pick is coming into his sixth season with a chip on his shoulder, and ready to prove to the league that he deserves to have his name listed among the greats in the WPBL.

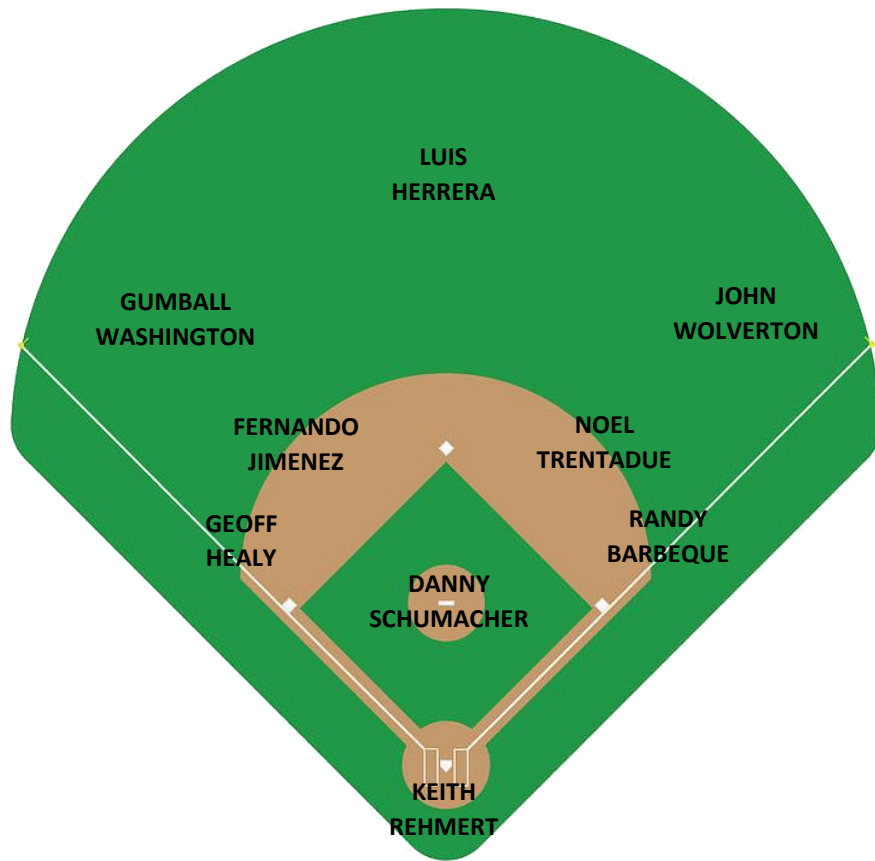
## **Rookie of the Year – Juan Hinojosa – Walla Walla**

The #7 overall prospect in the WPBL had a taste of the big leagues at the end of last season and surprised everyone with the quality of his outings. Juan Hinojosa made two regular season starts at the end of July, finishing with a 1.35 ERA and a 1-1 record. The Walla Walla organization was so impressed he was added to the postseason roster, where he made three more impressive starts. He won two games in the Wild Card Series against Elko, including the Game 6 series clincher. He finished with a 2-1 record, a 1.89 ERA, and a 1.16 WHIP in August. In what overall looks to be a weaker rookie class debuting this summer, Hinojosa has the pedigree and experience to turn in a top-class rookie year.

## Reliever of the Year – Jeremy Wolfe or Sean Rahm – Lake Tahoe & Bandon

At this point, there is no reason to pick anyone else to take home the Reliever of the Year Award. Wolfe and Rahm have combined to win 4 consecutive and 6 total Top Reliever awards in the 8 years of the WPBL existence. Both play for good teams that will afford them plenty of save opportunities, both possess elite stuff, and world class poise. Those three main factors are what makes a great relief pitcher, and barring injury I have no doubt one of the two will walk home with the award at the end of the season. Wolfe and Rahm are beginning to get up in age, as Rahm will turn 35 during the season and Wolfe is already 34 years old, but neither have shown any signs of slowing down. Both will go down in WPBL history as two of the best to ever shut down games. If you are looking for a dark horse contender who could upset Wolfe and Rahms streak, possibly Crescent City closer Bam Boozled has a shut. Only 26 years old and entering his prime, Boozled has career bests in K/9 and ERA last season. If the right circumstances come together, he has the potential to take the torch from Rahm and Wolfe.

**PRESEASON**



**ALL-WPBL  
TEAM**

# 2029 WPBL CHAMPION PREDICTION



# 2029 RICHARD SALAS EXCELLENCE IN MEDIA AWARD



The WPBL Writers Association is proud to announce the winner of the 2029 Richard Salas Excellence in Media Award. Given out biennially and named after Elko Beat Writer Richard Salas for his great contributions to the WPBL, this award is given to the media member who best exemplifies expert journalism, fantastic storytelling, deep statistical analysis, and everything else that makes the WPBL Media one of the best in the Western United States.

This year, we are happy to present the award to the Pocatello Media Team of Buster Spork and Mitch Isosceles. In 2028, when the rest of the WPBL Media was struggling to publish the media guide due to extenuating circumstances, Spork and Isosceles took it upon themselves to write the entire thing. Spork put aside his typical heavy biases to produce great journalism and Isosceles, although a newcomer, showed that he has what it takes to be a great writer. Without them, a long fairing tradition would have fallen to the wayside. Congratulations to Buster and Mitch and thank you for everything the Pocatello Media Team contributes.

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