

https://www.wallowa.com/sports/at-long-last-friday-night-lights-in-wallowa/article_638c69af-335d-5263-9108-8df8b2da0de5.html

At long last, Friday night lights in Wallowa

Scot Heisel
Aug 30, 2016

1 of 4



The Cougars await their turn on the field during Friday's jamboree.

Scot Heisel/Chieftain

It's always exciting for any community when the local high school football teams takes the field for the first time in front of the home crowd as fall approaches.

How many wins you think we'll get this year?

Chat

[Privacy](#) - [Terms](#)

Look how much that kid grew over the summer.

Chat

I see we have some new wrinkles in the playbook.

In Wallowa, the thrill of renewed competition came with a huge helping of community pride Friday night when the Cougars hosted football action under the lights for the first time in the school's lengthy history.

A project that began more than two years ago culminated late last week as four large poles loaded with 10 lights each were finally in place Thursday — just in time for Friday's jamboree with visiting teams Echo and Pine Eagle.

Back in early 2014, the nonprofit Ford Foundation sponsored a leadership class in Wallowa focused, in part, on building stronger communities. As part of the class, participants voted on a project they could pursue and the dream of lights at the football field took root for good.

"We're one of the last high schools in Eastern Oregon to get (lights)," said Marilyn Hulse, who attended the initial leadership class and participated in the project from the beginning.

In the past, home volleyball and football games often overlapped, making it impossible for the two teams to support one another and splitting the crowd of locals. And attending a Friday afternoon football game could be a challenge for those with 9-5 work schedules.

"We also understood that this might help the local restaurants," Hulse said Monday. "We figured people could come to town and have dinner before the game. That wasn't really possible before."

Once the decision was made to pursue the lights, two groups were formed to make it happen — one group made up primarily of members from the Ford Foundation class that led fundraising efforts and a second group to oversee the work. The work group was led by project manager Kevin Burns and head coach Matt Brockamp.

"First, we got permission from the school board," Hulse said. "Then we needed to find an electrician."

Chat

Darryl Nobles of South Fork Electric in Lostine stepped up and got an estimate for lights. That's when fundraising began in earnest.

"We knew we had to raise in the area of \$40,000," Hulse said.

Much of the financial support came from the Wildhorse Foundation and the Ford Foundation, as well as enthusiastic members of the community.

An early online crowdsourcing drive raised more than \$2,000 from the Lostine/Wallowa area.

Additional assistance came from Vemco of Enterprise, which set the lights for free, and contractor Curtis Bloom of Wallowa, who set the poles.

Though the lights are in place, the project isn't quite finished.

"Many more volunteers who helped at the field will be recognized with a sign, possibly at the field, thanking donors and workers," Hulse said.

Wallowa School District Superintendent Bret Uptmor was all smiles on the sidelines Friday night.

"It just gave the event a whole new feeling," Uptmor said Tuesday. "There's an excitement and adrenaline that's driven by an evening game. I don't know why that is exactly, but it happens. It's a once-in-a-lifetime event for this community."

Former Cougars Cole Hafer and Koby Frye, who graduated last spring, tossed a football behind the stands Friday.

Frye was asked whether he was disappointed to have missed out on the lights. His emphatic answer came before the question was even completely out.

"Yes!," Frye said. "We were thinking we might suit up and take the field."

As much as Wallowa fans would have welcomed it, that never happened. But among this year's Cougars to take the field Friday were a few freshman who now can look forward to an entire career under the home lights in Wallowa.

The Cougars host a team from Notus, Idaho at 7 p.m. Friday. The Ford Foundation Leadership class will have a hot dog dinner before the game at the Wallowa Cougar field from 5 p.m. until the start of the game. Get a hot dog, chips and a drink for \$5.