SPOKE TALK

RCR ROUTT COUNTY RIDERS IMBA

The challenges of bike commuting

So, put down your coffee and take a seat.

I think mountain biking is ridiculous.

Biking uphill is unmitigated torture, and downhill seems like a fast, awkward way to get myself killed in nature.

Still sitting? Good: I don't care about powder days, either. I'd rather grab the nearest cat and book and sit by a fire in a sweater.

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This isn't to say I don't love our outdoor sports culture — I truly do, and I appreciate it. Steamboat trails are as pretty as they are because people care a whole lot about riding, biking, cruising and generally spending time in nature, supported by organizations like Routt County Riders and the Trail Maintenance Endowment Fund.

Though one trait I might share with many of you athletic go-getters is that I'm incapable of turning down a good dare. I'll try anything twice. If you dare me to run a half-marathon, I'm going to do it. I have no idea how, but I'll do it. How many miles is that again?

Softball? I know nothing about it, but, hey, can I borrow your mitt?

Want to bike 2,019 commuter miles in 2019?

And so here I am, a very unassuming daily bike commuter with nearly 1,400 miles clocked since April.

Here are three things that have surprised me about biking daily:

■ **I actually like it,** and it's not just about how unspeakably cool I feel now that I can ride no-handed. Sure, it takes a little longer to get somewhere, but I feel less restricted on my bike. I get more time in my day to myself, and my therapist said the symmetry of using both sides of the body rhythmically and equally, as with biking, is good for physical and mental health.

■ **I've improved my time management skills.** Knowing it takes 16 minutes to get to work via Lincoln Avenue or 18 minutes via the Yampa River Core Trail has added an element of planning and regimen that

RYAN, 14

FILE PHOTO

An orange haze set over the Hayden High School football field at the 2018 season opener against Justice. The Tigers are set to play Justice this Saturday for their 2019 season opener.

Tigers ready for season

Hayden High School football set to face Justice on Saturday

TIGERS
Hayden High School

Shelby Reardon
Steamboat Pilot & Today

HAYDEN — While most 8-man football teams started the high school season last Friday, Hayden High School stayed home.

The Tigers will open the season Saturday, on the road at Justice and boy, are they ready.

"They're eager to get going. They've had enough practice," head coach Matt Linsacum said. "They're just ready to see where they're at and where they stand."

In his second year at the helm, Linsacum is coaching a young team headed by a few key seniors. The team will rely on the handful of experienced upperclassmen to lead the team, while the younger players step up and learn as quickly as possible.

Despite graduating, last year's seniors are still helping by way of the legacy they left behind.

"I think our seniors left a big impact as far as work ethic and mentality and understanding that there is a lot that goes into it," Linsacum said. "I hope that carries over into this team."

The team lost Daylon Frentress and Justin Fry, who each earned an All-Conference nod. Also gone is Patrick Hunter, who earned an All-Conference honorable mention.

Last year, Hayden went 3-6, going 1-5 against conference opponents. Linsacum hopes a better Northwest region record is in the future.

"I think it's a building year for us. Four seniors kills us," Linsacum said. "We lost six last year and have a couple not returning."

Austin Day did not step back onto the gridiron this fall, leaving the Tigers to replace a 6 foot, 2 inches, 240-pound center and nose guard.

"It is what it is, and we just have to adjust," Linsacum said.

The Tigers start the season against Justice, which they defeated 52-26 in the opener last fall, but senior quarterback Reese Kern is already looking ahead to Oct. 18 when Hayden hosts West Grand.

In order to succeed against such a team, Hayden has to step up and focus on a few things.

"We need to stay up, not keep our head down and get mad after a single play," Kern said.

"Be physical," senior running back Hunter Planansky added.

The Mustangs could be the toughest team Hayden faces this season, as they're ranked No. 4 in the CHSAA preseason poll. Rangely, which hosts Hayden on Oct. 11, is ranked No.9 in the same poll.

Junior receiver Liam Fentress and junior linebacker Wyatt Murphy are also

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HAYDEN FOOTBALL SCHEDULE

- **Saturday:** at Justice, 1 p.m.
- **Sept. 13:** vs. Simla, 7 p.m.
- **Sept. 20:** at Gilpin, 7 p.m.
- **Sept. 27:** vs. Plateau Valley, 7 p.m.
- **Oct. 4:** at Vail Christian, 7 p.m.
- **Oct. 11:** at Rangely, 7 p.m.
- **Oct. 18:** vs. West Grand, 7 p.m.
- **Oct. 26:** at Denver Christian, 1 p.m.
- **Nov. 1:** vs. Soroco, 7 p.m.

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SPORTS

Broncos, Empower agree to 21-year deal

Arnie Stapleton
Associated Press

ENGLEWOOD — The Denver Broncos have partnered with Empower Retirement on a 21-year deal to name their stadium "Empower Field at Mile High."

The Metropolitan Football Stadium District will meet later this week to sign off on the agreement that runs through 2039 and ends a three-year span without a title sponsor for the stadium that opened in 2001.

"It was worth the wait because we found absolutely the best partner," Broncos president and CEO Joe Ellis told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Ed Murphy, president and CEO of Colorado-based Empower Retirement, the nation's second-largest retirement plan provider, said temporary signage will be in place at the stadium for the Broncos' home opener against the Chicago Bears in Week 2.

"We're excited, we're pumped up for Sept. 15," Murphy said. "Obviously we're pumped up for the Raider game, too" on Monday night in Oakland. "But once everybody comes home and they see the temporary signage, they'll probably think it's permanent because it's going to be classy."

Murphy, whose company is based in Greenwood Village, a few miles from Broncos headquarters, said the signage would be multicolored featuring an orange mountain backdrop .

A person with knowledge of the deal told the AP it is similar to the team's previous naming rights contract, which averaged $6 million a year. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because financial details weren't revealed by either party.

"The district deal will become public and it will reveal what their naming rights agreement calls for in terms of revenues delivered to them. Ours is different. Ours is private," Ellis said. "But, look, it's a significant investment over a 21-year period that's going to significantly help us in maintaining and improving this stadium over the long life of the contract."

The Broncos' stadium was originally called Invesco Field at Mile High. In 2011, Invesco transferred the naming rights to Sports Authority, which signed a 25-year agreement worth $150 million that was supposed to run through 2036. Sports Authority went bankrupt in 2016, however, and the Broncos purchased the remainder of the contract, allowing them to gain control of seeking a new corporate partner.

The Broncos, meanwhile, made all the payments for maintenance and upgrades to the stadium and last year temporarily renamed their home "Broncos Field at Mile High."

Ellis said Empower, which has partnered with the Broncos since 2015 and runs the team's retirement accounts, broached the subject of a stadium naming rights deal a few months ago. "So, we went into the hurry-up offense," Ellis said.

Despite its previous naming rights deals with Invesco and Sports Authority, fans often referred to the Broncos' home simply as Mile High, an homage to the original Mile High Stadium, a baseball-football venue built in 1948.

Sports marketing experts had speculated that the Mile High moniker was an impediment to finding a new naming rights partner, but Murphy said it was actually an enticement for Empower because it's part of the civic fabric in Denver.

"It was never a consideration to remove 'Mile High,'" said Murphy.

Empower was created in 2014 through the merger of three retirement companies and also has sponsorship contracts with the New England Patriots and Kansas City Chiefs in addition to Major League Soccer's New England Revolution.

Ellis called it a big plus to have a national naming rights partner that's also a hometown company.

"I would think in any naming rights deal that should be your No. 1 objective because you're in it together, you're in the same community, you're pulling for each other," Ellis said.

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returning this year and are expected to do big things. While Dylan Fentress was the go-to quarterback last fall, Kern has seen plenty of snaps over the last three years. Linsacum is confident he can run the offense.

Kern and Planansky said when it comes to leadership, they're fairly quiet and lead by example but hope to become loud and make an impression on the field.

"We're pretty good to be honest," Kern said of the offense. "Our mesh is nice. We got everything down, but we're still waiting for game time."

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RYAN

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I didn't know I needed in my life. I'll still try to cram in that critical extra 75 seconds of sleep in the morning, but I'm much better at mapping my day out knowing how rigid travel times will be on bike.

■ **Drivers are, mostly, wonderfully respectful.** Maybe I pay too much attention to a certain Facebook group that has many, many bones to pick with road cyclists, so I was nervous about getting honked at, edged off the road or worse. But, other than the occasional coal roller (why though? Just … why?), drivers are courteous and patient by moving over as much as is safe to give me some room or letting me in to turn or cross.

I have a new appreciation and respect for biking in all its forms, the drivers that make it safer and the folks that support me, especially those fine folks at Steamboat Springs Police Department that got me through that rookie digger back in May when I came in too hot on a scoria-covered street corner.

I'm excited to see how I bag the last 619 miles of my commuter challenge before the snow flies, though I'll leave the technical stuff to you gearheads.

Unless you dare me.

Norma Ruth Ryan is a city of Steamboat employee and avid bike commuter.