

Badgers take OOL tourney title; Bobcats win BMC tourney

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Powder Valley Badgers may be down one of their best players as they head into the state playoffs.

That didn't hinder them, however, from claiming the Old Oregon League tournament title.

The Badgers, the No. 1 team in the OSAA 1A rankings, swept Wallowa in the semifinals of the OOL tournament, 25-20, 25-20, 25-19, and topped Joseph in four sets in the championship match, 25-19, 24-26, 25-18, 25-16.

"It was a big adjustment after losing one of our strong players, but the girls came and (said), 'We can read-just,'" head coach Marji Lind said of her Badgers, who are without junior middle blocker Belle Blair for the duration of the season after an ankle injury last week. "All the girls have stepped up two levels to come together."

The Badgers were able to string big runs together throughout the season, and did so again to finish the tournament, ending the final match on an 8-3 run. Kills by Keanna Bingham and Trinity Nesser helped Powder Valley push its lead to 21-13 in the fourth set against Joseph. Kills by Josi Krieger and Autumn Davis offset a trio of kills by Joseph's Sabrina Albee and helped the Badgers reach match point, and Krieger sealed the match and tournament title with another kill.

"We're a pretty versatile team," setter Brooke Allen said. "We were determined to come together and make it happen, even without Belle, because we wanted it so bad."

Lind said serving was vital for the Badgers in both their matches on Saturday.

"The girls can really hit spots when they need to (on serves)," she said. "Communication is great. We worked on our defense. Both those teams (Wallowa and Joseph) have great defense. They can over the floor well. And the girls worked hard at having a vision of the court."

Powder Valley heads into the playoffs as the most dominant team in 1A with a record of 31-1 and an 83-9 margin in sets won versus sets lost.

After a first-round bye, The Badgers will host a second-round playoff game Saturday, looking to return to the state tournament after taking second a year ago.

Allen said the Badgers still believe they can reach their ultimate goal, even if they don't have Blair for the postseason.

"Our goals haven't changed. We're still going for the state title," she said.



Keanna Bingham (2) and Autumn Davis reach up for a block during Powder Valley's semifinal match against Wallowa Saturday. The Badgers won the OOL district title.

The Eagles, who had won 10 of 11 matches prior to the championship match, clinched the No. 2 seed from the OOL into the state playoffs, and will host Prairie City in a first-round contest Wednesday night.

"I'm very proud of all the girls," Joseph head coach Jill Hite said. "They continued to play each point against both teams and were able to make adjustments on the fly."

Joseph (16-13 overall) reached the title match and earned a state playoff berth by outlasting upstart Elgin in the semifinals earlier Saturday, 25-22, 26-24, 25-17.

While the match ended as a sweep, the Huskies had opportunities to win each of the first two sets. Elgin led the first set, 22-19, before Joseph ended it on a 6-0 run. The Huskies rallied from behind to pull even at 24-24 in the second set before Joseph grabbed the final two points. The Eagles pulled away in the third set.

Wallowa (21-8) earned the third and final playoff berth from the OOL, and will travel to South Wasco County for a first-round match Wednesday night.

The Cougars rebounded from their loss to Powder Valley and got by Elgin (11-14) in four sets in the third-place match, 25-11, 23-25, 25-17, 25-22, to clinch the final state playoff berth and end the Huskies' season.

Both teams, however, almost didn't make it to the semifinals, let alone the third-place match, as they had to both survive what were arguably the top two contests of the day early Saturday in elimination matches. Wallowa rallied from two sets down to defeat Cove in five sets, 17-25, 18-25, 25-16, 25-15, 15-4.



Shelby Sannar sets a ball for Elgin, which took fourth place at the OOL district tournament in La Grande.

The Cougars never trailed in the final set against Cove, and ended it on a 10-1 run. An ace by Bailey Hafer and a kill by Hailey Brockamp took Wallowa to match point, and the Cougars finished the win on a Cove error.

On the day, Shanna Rae Tillery led with 36 kills.

Elgin, meanwhile, had grabbed an early two-set lead against Imbler, watched the Panthers rally, then survived to win its own five-set thriller, 25-18, 25-19, 16-25, 20-25, 15-12.

The Huskies took the lead for good in the final set, 10-8, on back-to-back Shelby Sannar aces. Jayden Palmer had a key kill for a 13-11 lead, and Kaelin Evans finished the match with a kill.

Elgin head coach Tiana Murphey was pleased with her team's progress during the season and effort in the tournament.

"They fought hard against Imbler and wanted to win more than anything. It was tough to lose to Joseph and Wallowa but we're proud of a fourth-place finish regardless."

Tymra Anderson led Elgin on the day with 13 kills and give aces, and Gracie Evans had 44 digs.

The loss by Imbler (11-14) brought an end to its season in heartbreaking fashion.

"Tough way to end the season, but I am proud of our team for fighting back to win sets three and four and force set five," Imbler head coach Jennifer Teeter said.



Madelyn Nelson serves for Joseph, which took second place at the OOL district tournament in La Grande.



Shanna Rae Tillery attempts a kill for Wallowa, which finished third at the OOL district tournament in La Grande.

"We are looking forward to next year, and hope to build on this seasons growth and improvement."

Aspen Smith had 18 kills and 11 digs for Imbler. Anika McDonald had 30 digs and Rylee Deal had 40 assists and 12 digs.

Cove (13-9) also sees its season come to an end.

"(Our) seniors Austin Kendall, Ellianna Hines-Dunlap, Riley Overton and Breanna Harvey all stepped up and worked hard and performed well in a well-fought match," Cove head coach Brett Moore said. "They played well and will be missed."

BOBCATS FINISH PERFECT BMC SEASON

The Union Bobcats put an emphatic stamp on their

perfect Blue Mountain Conference season, sweeping Stanfield for the third time in the championship match Saturday night in Union, 25-14, 25-7, 25-21.

The win capped a dominant league slate for Union, which won all 12 regular-season BMC matches and the championship match. Union wasn't often tested in BMC play, sweeping nine of its 13 opponents and only getting pushed to the fifth set in a match twice.

Union will host a state playoff game next Saturday against an opponent yet to be determined. The Bobcats will learn who their opponent is Tuesday night when the OSAA 2A rankings freeze.



La Grande defensive back Blaine Shaw (3) intercepts a pass intended for Baker tight end Spencer Smith (32). The La Grande Tigers defeated the Baker Bulldogs 34-0 at Eastern Oregon University in La Grande Saturday afternoon.

TIGERS

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weren't flowing as well to the ball, and we kept getting better and better."

The outburst of offense capped a half in which neither team was able to do much. La Grande had just 98 yards of offense — 88 of it on the ground, and 82 of that from Reed. Baker struggled even more, gaining just 88 yards, and getting 60 of that through the air.

"The defense really stepped up today, and we showed it on the scoreboard putting up the zero," Shaw said.

La Grande's rushing attack finally took off in the second half — particularly in the fourth quarter — to put the game on ice. Reed and Robinson scored on runs of 5 and 25 yards, respectively, five minutes apart for the final margin. Robinson had 97 of his 98 yards rushing after the break, which offset an afternoon that saw him throw for just 37 yards on four completions.

As a team, La Grande rushed for 242 yards.

Baker never did get its offense going in the second half, finishing with just 139 total yards.

"Our defense (has) been working really

hard, not just the last week but the last two weeks," McIlmoil said. "There are a couple things that coach Walcott wanted to tighten up, and he's been doing a phenomenal job all year. There are a few changes that he made, and those changes paid off"

Spencer Shirtcliff had 102 of those yards through the air for Baker. However, the quarterback was just 8-for-23 passing and was picked off twice. The Tigers also held running back Gauge Bloomer in check, as he rushed the ball 19 times for just 38 yards. Riley Flanagan had three catches for 58 yards.

"Offensively we just couldn't get anything going," Baker head coach Jason Ramos said. "We struggled. We had opportunities, but we made too many mistakes, costly penalties, interceptions, turnovers."

The Tigers (8-0 overall, 4-0 GOL) await the completion of next weekend's state play-in games to see who they play first. The Tigers finished No. 3 in the OSAA rankings, meaning they achieved another one of their goals — the ability to host two playoff games if they win in the first round.

"We wanted two home playoff games," Reed said. "We wanted to do the best we could do to get that, and that's what we did."

