

CLASS 1A GIRLS STATE CHAMPIONSHIP GAME



Ronald Bond/The (La Grande) Observer

Powder Valley's Megan Bingham goes to the basket in Saturday's championship game.

Badgers claim 2nd

By Ronald Bond
The (La Grande) Observer

The difference in the 1A girls basketball state title game was simple: shots were falling for the St. Paul Buckaroos and not for the Powder Valley Badgers.

St. Paul shot 50 percent in the first half to build a double-digit lead, and 43 percent for the game, to top Powder Valley 49-32 Saturday night at Baker High School.

"We just couldn't get anything to drop, especially early," Powder Valley coach Allen Bingham said. "We had really good looks — things that normally drop down — and they just didn't. We dug ourselves a hole."

The Badgers had several shots bound away, rim off or even rattle out during a first half that saw them shoot just 21 percent. Powder Valley, in fact, went more than half of the first quarter without scoring until Logan Nedrow's steal and layup got the Badgers on the board. Belle Blair's 3-point play moments later knotted the score at 5-5, and Megan Bingham beat the first-quarter buzzer with a 3-pointer to keep the Badgers within 9-8.

But the Buckaroos heated

up in the second quarter, using a 14-2 run to take control of the game. Erin Counts and Karlee Southerland hit back-to-back 3-pointers for a 17-9 lead, and two Counts free throws put St. Paul ahead 25-11 late in the second. The Buckaroos shot 64 percent in the period.

The Badgers cut the gap to 27-15 at halftime, and three times inched as close as 10 points in the third, the last on a Bingham 3-pointer to get to 32-22. A 9-0 Buckaroos' run, though, boosted by 3s from Counts and Isabelle Wyss, extended the margin to 41-22 early in the fourth and put the game out of reach.

"I think we were a little nervous," said Megan Bingham, who along with Blair scored 10 points to lead the Badgers. "It was an exciting environment. I think we were ready to play, but it just wasn't falling tonight."

Counts scored 14 points to lead St. Paul, which wrapped up a perfect 30-0 season. Wyss had 13 points and 10 rebounds, and Emma Connor scored 10 points.

While disappointed about the title game setback, Badgers' players and coaches

said they were proud of the effort to reach the championship game, which was the first time the program reached the finals since winning it all in 2006.

"This doesn't happen very often that you're in the title game, even if you get beat," Allen Bingham said. "I told them there aren't very many second place trophies or first place trophies. (We're) pretty fortunate to have the opportunity to do it."

The run to the final came in a season that, at the start, many believed could have been a down year after the team lost four seniors from last year's squad that finished third in the state.

"No one really thought we were going to get this far," Blair said, adding later that it was "a big thing" to be playing in the championship. "Second in state is pretty good. I'm happy with it," she said.

It was the second time in four months St. Paul and Powder Valley met in a championship, with the teams also facing off in volleyball in November, a title match also won by the Buckaroos.

Megan Bingham said, though, said the expectations during volleyball were different — and higher — than in basketball.

"In volleyball we were expecting ourselves to get that far," she said. "We knew that we were good and that we could go super far, but in basketball we lost four or five huge players, and we were like, 'this year is going to be a rebuilding year, we're not going to be as good.' I think toward the end of the year we surprised ourselves. We were glad we made it this far."

The team's growth, particularly on the defensive side, was one of the keys to making the unexpected deep run and a 26-4 final record — 25-0, in fact, in games where the Badgers allowed 40 points or less.

"I thought we could be a good competitive team and have a chance to make a run, but to get to the title game (considering) the competition that is around the state (means) we developed as a team really well," Allen Bingham said. "They bought into that defense and just won us a lot of basketball games."

POWDER VALLEY (32)
B Blair 4 203 10, M Bingham 4 0-3 10, Nedrow 2 0-3 4, E Orr 2 0-0 4, Krieger 1 0-0 2, S Blair 1 0-0 2, Cole 0 0-0 0, Davis 0 0-0 0, S Orr 0 0-0 0, K Bingham 0 0-0 0, Leggett 0 0-0 0, Seikman 0 0-0 0. Totals 14 2-9 32.
ST. PAUL (49)
Counts 4 4-4 14, Wyss 4 4-7 13, Connor 4 2-2 10, Hernandez 2 1-2 5, Southerland 1 0-0 3, Tuck 1 0-0 2, Vela 1 0-0 2, Nicklaus 0 0-0 0, Vargas-Ayala 0 0-0 0, Gonzalez 0 0-0 0, Diaz 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 11-15 49.
Powder Valley 8 7 7 10 — 32
St. Paul 9 18 12 10 — 49

Three-point baskets — M. Bingham 2, Counts 2, Southerland, Wyss. **Fouled out** — Nedrow. **Total fouls** — Powder Valley 16, St. Paul 10. **Technical** — none.

CLASS 4A GIRLS BASKETBALL PLAYOFFS



S. John Collins / Baker City Herald

Sydney Younger and her Baker High School teammates come a step closer to the state title by beating Seaside Saturday afternoon.

Baker girls rout Seaside, returning to state tourney

By Gerry Steele
gsteele@bakercityherald.com

and Jayson Jacoby
jjacoby@bakercityherald.com

Seaside challenged Baker for approximately two minutes Saturday in their Class 4A state girls basketball game in the Baker gym.

The game was tied 4-4 about two minutes in before Baker, thanks in part to a stifling full-court press, broke it open.

Baker finished the first quarter on a 15-1 run on the way to a 67-31 win.

The victory earned Baker a third straight trip to the state tournament.

Baker (22-1) will play Stayton Thursday at 1:30 p.m. in a quarterfinal game at Forest Grove High School.

With Saturday's game tied 4-4, Baker's swarming defense and balanced offense took over.

Rose Gwillim led the way with five points. Jayme Ramos and Sydney Younger each added four, and Isabella Nemeec two.

Baker led 19-5 after one quarter, and 31-16 at halftime.

The Bulldogs' press yielded multiple

steals in the backcourt, leading to easy baskets.

"Defense is always the key to a successful program and the girls have bought into that," Baker coach Mat Sand said.

As if Baker wasn't dominating enough, the Bulldogs erupted for a 24-8 run in the third quarter. The pressure defense continued to cause major problems for the Seagulls.

"That really takes the wind out of (the opponent's) sails," Sand said. "The girls hit on all cylinders. It's really fun to watch."

Younger led the way with eight points, and Ramos six.

Younger led three Bulldogs in double figures with 18 points. Ramos added 17 and Gwillim 15.

SEASIDE (31)
McFadden, Goin, Zagata 1 0-0 2, Blodgett 3 0-0 8, Kiser 4 1-2 10, Angulo-Joli, Doney, Van Dusen, Taylor 3 5-7 11, Garhofer, Turner, Douglas. Totals 11 6-9 31.
BAKER (67)
Elms, Keller 3 0-0 6, Younger 8 0-0 18, Ramos 7 2-3 17, Carter 0 2-2 2, Calaway, Nemeec 3 0-0 7, Benson 1 0-0 2, Gwillim 5 5-7 15. Totals 27 9-12 67.
Seaside 5 11 8 7 — 31
Baker 19 12 24 12 — 67
Three-point baskets — Blodgett 2, Kiser, Younger 2, Ramos, Nemeec. **Fouled out** — none. **Total fouls** — Seaside 10, Baker 8. **Technical** — none.

Bulldogs bank on experience for breakthrough at state

Sydney Younger knows what it's like to play at the Class 4A girls state basketball tournament.

Younger doesn't know what it's like not to play in that event, in fact.

The Baker junior is one of a core group of Bulldogs who are preparing for their third straight trip to the tournament, and their expectations are high.

Baker lost its first game at the state tournament in both 2017 and 2018.

Younger said she believes this year's squad will benefit from its previous experience in the tournament.

"I think it's extremely valuable because we know what to expect now," Younger said. "We know how to get ready. We've been there."

Her coach agrees.

Mat Sand, who is in his fourth year as the Bulldogs' head coach, said Younger and other veteran players, including fellow starters Rose Gwillim and Jayme Ramos, both seniors, have grown not

only as players but as leaders.

"That's something that's hard to teach, but this year we're really excelling in that category," Sand said. "The girls are actually coaching out on the floor, and that's not something we've had before."

Sand also believes this year's team is extremely close-knit.

"They genuinely like each other," he said. "I'm not saying last year's team didn't, but this is a different dynamic."

Younger echoes her coach's thoughts. "I feel closer with everyone," she said. "I'm really excited."

Sand said Baker's success this year — the Bulldogs' only loss was to Burns — has been rewarded as Baker is the second seed in the state tournament.

Last year, as the fourth seed, Baker's first-round opponent was Banks, which was playing just 15 minutes from home.

"I think we have a good draw this year," Sand said.

— Jayson Jacoby

Shrove Tuesday

Annual Pancake Feed

Tuesday, March 5 • 5:00 to 7:00 PM

All you can eat Pancakes with
Ham, Applesauce, Coffee, Tea and Milk

Public Invited!

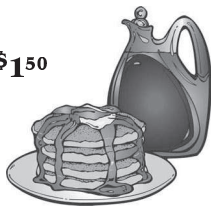
Adults: \$5.00 • Children: \$1.50

Family: \$12.00

St. Stephen's
Episcopal Church

First & Church Streets

A local tradition for more than 60 years



Thatcher's ACE Hardware & La Grande ACE Hardware

SALE
\$12.99

Kaytee® Songbird Blend Wild Food
14 lb 81068



Heath™ Suet, 11-1/4 oz.
Assorted flavors. 8294530, 8294548,
8294555, 8294563



SALE
69¢ EA

Now through March 31st

Thatcher's Ace Hardware

2200 Resort St, Baker City • 541-523-3371

La Grande Ace Hardware

2212 Island Ave, La Grande • 541-605-0152

Monday-Friday 7-6 • Saturday 8-6 • Sunday 9-5

photos for illustration only