

# Sports

BAKER GIRLS BASKETBALL TEAM BEATS MARIST 51-48 TO WIN ITS FIRST STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

## Bulldogs make history

■ Baker holds off Marist, the defending Class 5A state champion, to win the Class 4A title and complete a 25-1 season

By Mike Weber  
For the Baker City Herald

FOREST GROVE — The Baker girls basketball team did something Saturday night that no previous Bulldogs girls squad had done.

Baker outlasted Marist 51-48 to claim the Class 4A state championship.

The historic achievement added to the team's list of accomplishments in a season that was one blemish from perfection.

Baker finished with a 25-1 record, winning the final 19 games after its lone loss, 61-46 at Burns on Dec. 15.

"We're just like one big family and I knew this team was capable of winning the title," said Mat Sand, who finished his fourth season as Baker's coach.

"We set goals and we set some other things that we wanted to achieve as the season went on. I just knew at the beginning of the season that this team was very special. As a coach, you just try to get the players to believe in you and buy into what we're (assistant coaches Shawn Berry, Amy Younger) teaching the team and they did that. They believed in themselves throughout the season and it showed with our record."

As with Baker's comeback win over Stayton in the quarterfinals Thursday, and its narrow win Friday over Philomath in the semifinals, the championship game was a battle.

Marist, which upset top-seeded Marshfield in the quarterfinals, was seeking its second straight state title. The Spartans, from Eugene, won the girls Class 5A title in 2018.

"I know that we were going to be in a fight in every game at the tournament," said Sand, who has taken the Bulldogs to the state tournament each of the past three years. "Being here the last two years and not getting anywhere, we knew that nobody would let us just walk all over them. The girls just played their hearts out, they fought hard and they played with a high energy level. The togetherness and the unity



Mike Weber / For the Baker City Herald

Rose Gwillim shoots over Marist's Maggie Stephenson during the girls Class 4A state championship Saturday night. Gwillim scored 11 points in Baker's 51-48 win.

they displayed throughout the tournament is just something special. This is just something that you dream of as a coach and it really fulfills the expectations I had this year. I love basketball, I love to teach the girls and they just did a great job."

Saturday's game, like Baker's two earlier wins, came down to the fourth quarter, which featured three ties and four lead changes.

After Sydney Younger's two free throws gave Baker a 39-37 lead with 6:28 left in the game, Marist's Madison Ficek, who led all scorers with 17 points, scored four straight points to give the Spartans a 41-39 lead with 5:21 left.

It was Marist's final lead. Jayme Ramos, who led Baker with 14 points, made two free throws to tie the score with 4:41 remaining.

Ramos' fellow senior, Rose Gwillim, then took a pass from Isabella Nemece and sliced through the lane for a layup that gave Baker the

lead for good, at 43-41, with 4:14 left.

After two misses by Marist, Gwillim passed to Ramos cutting to the basket for a layup that boosted Baker's lead to 45-41 with 3:26 left.

Ficek's jumper cut Baker's lead to 45-43 with 2:34 left, but on the other end the Gwillim-to-Ramos connection worked again, and Baker led 47-43 with 2:09 remaining.

But Marist didn't go away. Ruby Vlahov made two free throws with 1:48 to cut the lead to 2 again, at 47-45.

Baker then took advantage of its free throw shooting. Nemece made 1 of 2, and Sydney Keller made a pair to boost Baker's lead to 50-45 with 42 seconds left.

Ficek swished a three-pointer with 25 seconds left, but Gwillim made 1 of 2 free throws for the final margin. Baker shot 72 percent (16-for-22) from the line, while Marist was 4-for-8 (50 percent).

"I just can't explain how awesome it feels to win the championship," said Gwillim, who was named to the all-tournament first team. "We just had to come out and play our best basketball and we had to fight and grind it out the entire game. It feels great,

it's just unbelievable and I'll savor this accomplishment for the rest of my life. They (Marist) are a very good team. They didn't have quite as many players from the team of a year ago. We knew that they had the experience and we knew that they were going to be really good, but we liked having the challenge."

It marked the second state title for Gwillim, who played on the Monroe Dragons 2017 Class 2A state championship team before moving to Baker for her final two years of high school.

"I'm so happy and I just love all my teammates and we couldn't have won without everyone making such key contributions throughout the tournament," Gwillim said. "This is something that we've all dreamed about since the beginning of the season. It's actually been our goal for the last two years and we finally accomplished it."

Ramos, who was named the Moda Health Player of the Game, also used the word "unbelievable" to describe bringing Baker High School its first girls state basketball championship.

"It doesn't even feel like it has really happened right now," Ramos said. "For our

three seniors, we definitely went out with a bang and it was a good way to finish our basketball careers. It's just an amazing accomplishment for our team. I really can't find the words to explain how happy I am. It's just the best season ever for the Baker High girls basketball team."

Baker's other senior, Alayna Calaway, has been sidelined by an injury.

Gwillim, who also had seven rebounds and three assists, and Keller, scored early to help Baker build a 5-4 lead in the first quarter. Marist, the second place team from the Sky-Em League, had a 7-2 run to go up 11-7 at the end of the first quarter.

Baker came back in the second quarter, trimming the deficit to 11-10 on a three-

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point play by Ramos, who scored on a jumper in the lane and then sank a free throw following a Marist foul. Marist seemed to regain the momentum though with 9-3 run to build a 20-13 lead with 3:00 left in the quarter.

Baker then displayed its highly prolific offensive attack to regain the advantage. The junior trio of Anna Carter, Nemece and Sydney Younger combined on an impressive 10-0 rally to put Baker on top. Following a 20-20 deadlock, Younger fired in a three-pointer from the top of the arc with four seconds to help Baker take a 23-20 halftime lead.

"It just feels so unreal right now and I just don't know how to explain how happy I am," Nemece said.

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Jayme Ramos goes to the basket during the girls Class 4A state championship game Saturday night. Ramos led the Bulldogs with 14 points.