

Sports

BAKER BOYS SOCCER PLAYOFF MATCH



Kathy Orr / Baker City Herald

Baker’s Isael Duran battles a Marshfield player for control of the ball during the Bulldogs’ 5-1 win over the Pirates Saturday at the Baker Sports Complex. Baker’s Alex Davila, right, looks on. Baker’s season ended Wednesday with a 2-0 loss to Marist.

Baker battles but falls 2-0 to top-ranked Marist

By Jayson Jacoby
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Baker’s defensive strategy worked better against top-ranked Marist Catholic Wednesday night than pretty much any other opponent has managed against the Spartans’ boys soccer team. But it still wasn’t good enough. Baker battled throughout but the Spartans scored a single goal in each half to win the Class 4A playoff match in Eugene. The loss ended Baker’s season. “We actually played a really hard, good game,” Baker coach Victor Benites said. “We knew this team was going to be good. They’re the number one team and there’s a reason why.” Given Marist’s dominance this season — the Spartans’ record going into Wednesday’s match was 12-0-1, and they

had outscored opponents 69-5 in their 12 straight wins — Benites decided to swap one forward position for an extra defender. He was pleased with the tactic. “It was working fine,” Benites said. “They didn’t score until late in the first half.” The Bulldogs defensive strategy wasn’t the only reason Marist’s powerful offense mostly fizzled on a chilly night under the lights in Eugene. Baker goalkeeper Silas Carter turned back 25 shots. “He did really well in goal for us,” Benites said. Later in the second half the Bulldogs, with time running out on the match and their season, took a more aggressive approach on offense. It paid off with several good scoring chances, but none found the Marist net. Benites said the most frus-

trating shot was by Brylan Robb, who took a pass and almost beat the Spartans’ keeper. Had that yielded a goal, Benites said, he believes it would have given Baker momentum and potentially led to a massive upset. Nonetheless he was happy with Baker’s performance — particularly since the Bulldogs had driven about 400 miles and played just their second match of the season on an artificial turf pitch. That surface, which results in a faster-paced game than on grass, helps Marist’s already strong passing skills, Benites said. Because the ball rolls so much faster, and straighter, on turf, the Spartans moved the ball around quickly, adding to Baker’s challenge on defense. The Bulldogs finished with a 6-6-2 record.

Clippers top Blazers, hold Lillard scoreless in 4th

By Beth Harris
AP Sports Writer

LOS ANGELES — The Clippers were kings of the fourth quarter. Portland star Damian Lillard lost his crown, at least for a night anyway. Lou Williams made a go-ahead jumper with 58 seconds left, then added a 3-pointer and finished with 26 points to lift Los Angeles over the Trail Blazers 107-101 on Thursday for coach Doc Rivers’ 900th career victory. “Doc never stops going and grinding,” Kawhi Leonard said. “He never gets bored.”

Lillard and CJ McCollum led Portland with 22 points apiece, but surprisingly both got blanked in the fourth quarter. That’s usually Lillard’s time to shine, but the Clippers’ defense wasn’t having it. “Usually I can make those shots down the stretch, but they weren’t falling,” Lillard said. “They were coming out to guard me and picking up full court. Pat Beverley did a good job on defense.” Lillard missed four shots and went 0 for 3 from 3-point range, while McCollum also missed four shots. “It’s the third game that

we’ve won, in my opinion, completely because of our defense,” Rivers said. Leonard had 27 points, 13 rebounds and six turnovers after missing a nationally televised loss to Milwaukee the previous night as part of load management for his knee. “Over the last six minutes of the game, we got stops, got rebounds and made our free throws. Lou also made a big 3 for us,” Leonard said. Leonard and Williams combined to score the Clippers’ final 15 points. Leonard sealed the win with four straight free throws.

Raiders rally past Chargers

By Josh Dubow
AP Pro Football Writer

OAKLAND, Calif. — Derek Carr engineered another late winning drive. Karl Joseph delivered the sealing defensive play. It may not have come easy, but the Oakland Raiders managed to pull out another dramatic victory that has put them squarely in the AFC playoff race. Josh Jacobs scored on an 18-yard run with 1:02 remaining and the Raiders pulled out their second thriller in five days, beating the

Los Angeles Chargers 26-24 on Thursday night. “We just found a way to win. That says so much about our team,” Carr said. It was a repeat performance from Sunday when Carr’s late TD pass to Hunter Renfrow and Joseph’s pass breakup in the end zone delivered a 31-24 win over Detroit. This time the late-game heroics came after Philip Rivers threw a 6-yard pass to Austin Ekeler that gave the Chargers (4-6) a 24-20 lead with 4:02 remaining.

BAKER FOOTBALL PLAYOFF GAME PREVIEW

Bulldogs brace for Cascade challenge

■ Baker will play at Cascade on Saturday at 1 p.m.

By Jayson Jacoby
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Football is nothing if not physical, but it’s the mental aspect of the sport that Baker coach Jason Ramos is focusing on as the Bulldogs prepare for a Class 4A playoff game Saturday. Baker will travel across the state to Turner, just southeast of Salem, to take on the Cascade Cougars in a 1 p.m. kickoff. The Cougars, champions of the Oregon West Conference with a 5-0 record (7-1 overall) are not especially imposing from a size standpoint, said Ramos, who in his first year as head coach has guided the Bulldogs to a 5-3 record and second place in the three-team Greater Oregon League. “We’re bigger than they are up front,” Ramos said. But the Cougars employ a double wing offense that features plenty of misdirection with multiple backs capable of carrying the ball on any given play. Defending that scheme, Ramos said, requires that the Bulldogs stick to their assignments and not be drawn out of position by fakes. In other words, to be as ready mentally as they are physically. “We’ve got to be disciplined on defense,” Ramos said. “It’s going to be a challenge.”

Based on video of Cascade’s games he’s watched, Ramos said Cascade quarterback Jacob Hage is a good athlete, and Ethan Coffey and Blake Lewis are solid running backs. Elijah Nolen looks to be the Cougars’ main threat at receiver. Although Cascade and Baker have no common opponents this year, Ramos said the Cougars’ offensive system is similar to La Grande’s, although La Grande’s offensive players are bigger. Ramos said he’s confident that Baker’s defense can deal with Cascade’s double wing. “We feel like with our defensive scheme we’re flexible enough to handle just about anything,” he said. “I think we match up with them very well. We’ve played really good defense all year.” On paper it’s that matchup — Baker’s defense against Cascade’s offense — that stands out as a potential key. Baker has allowed an average of 15 points in its eight games, and the Bulldogs blanked both Nyssa and Ontario. Cascade, meanwhile, has scored an average of 37.6 points per game, including 63 and 64 in its last two games. On the other side of the line of scrimmage, the Cougars haven’t been as dominant defensively as Baker, at least based on numbers. The Cougars have allowed an average of 17 points, including giving up 39 points to Stayton and 29 to North Marion — both wins for Cascade. Baker surrendered 34 points in each of its two losses to league rival La Grande, which is ranked third in the state, but in each of its five wins Baker didn’t give up more than 14 points. Ramos said he’s optimistic about the Bulldogs’ ability to score points against Cascade — in part due to the health benefits of having two weeks off since their last game, Oct. 26 at La Grande. “We’re probably as healthy as we’ve been for a month,” Ramos said. Among the players who have recovered from injuries is senior quarterback Spencer Shirtcliff, who suffered a separated shoulder Sept. 27 at Ontario and missed two games and parts of two others. Ramos said Shirtcliff has “looked good” in recent practices and is slated to start under center against Cascade. “Offensively we think we’ve got a pretty good gameplan both running and throwing the ball,” Ramos said. He’s also confident should the game turn on special teams.

Baker Bulldogs

- Member of the Greater Oregon League Conference
- Head coach: Jason Ramos
- Season record: 5-3 overall, 2-2 league
- OSAA rank: 8

2019 SCHEDULE:

- Sept. 6: Baker 40, Nyssa 0
- Sept. 13: Homedale (ID) 28, Baker 7
- Sept. 20: Baker 53, Elmira 6 (at Bend)
- Sept. 27: Baker 41, Ontario 6
- Oct. 4: La Grande 34, Baker 21
- Oct. 11: Baker 30, Pe Ell/Willapa 14
- Oct. 18: Baker 47, Ontario 0
- Oct. 26: La Grande 34, Baker 0

Avg. points per game: **29.9**

Avg. points allowed: **15.3**

“As long as we play up to our potential I think the sky’s the limit.”

— Baker football coach Jason Ramos

Cascade Cougars

- Located in Turner, about 7 miles southeast of Salem
- Member of the Oregon West Conference
- Head coach: Brandon Bennett
- Season record: 7-1 overall, 5-0 league
- OSAA rank: 9

2019 SCHEDULE:

- Sept. 16: Cascade 55, Cottage Grove 6
- Sept. 13: Mazama 15, Cascade 13
- Sept. 20: Cascade 32, North Marion 29
- Sept. 27: Cascade 47, Stayton 39
- Oct. 4: Cascade 57, Sweet Home 13
- Oct. 10: Cascade 25, Sisters 21
- Oct. 18: Cascade 63, Newport 0
- Oct. 25: Cascade 64, Philomath 13

Avg. points per game: **37.6**

Avg. points allowed: **17.0**

“Baker is definitely a good football team. The numbers don’t tell you how good their defense is.”

— Cascade football coach Brandon Bennett

Mahonri Rushton has become a weapon at place kicker, booting a pair of field goals and being “close to automatic” on extra points, Ramos said. “That is part of our arsenal now,” he said. “If it’s within 35 or even 40 yards, we’re going to let him give it a go if needed.” Ramos said Caden Long’s punting has also helped Baker avoid field position problems. Ramos said the Bulldogs, who leave today for Cascade, are confident. “I think the kids believe we’re good enough to go maybe as far as we can,” he said. “As long as we play up to our potential I think the sky’s the limit. I’m really proud of the season we’ve had so far.”

Cascade’s perspective

Brandon Bennett, in his fourth season as the Cougars’ head coach, said he’s not misled by Baker’s 5-3 record. He’s well aware that the two teams that have beaten the Bulldogs — La Grande twice, and Homedale, Idaho, once — are both undefeated. “Baker is definitely a good football team,” Bennett said. “That their losses are to undefeated teams, that tells the story more than a 5-3 record. The numbers don’t tell you how good their defense is.” Bennett said he’s pleased with Cascade’s progress in adjusting to an all-new offensive system. For the previous several years the Cougars used a power-I formation that relied heavily on one running back. But this summer, after looking at his returning roster, Bennett decided to switch to the double wing to accommodate the “plethora of backs we have.” “There’s a learning curve, and we’re starting to hit our stride,” Bennett said. Although Hage, the Cascade quarterback, is a sophomore, he’s already a veteran, Bennett said. Hage started the last six games for the Cougars in 2018, leading them to four wins and a playoff berth. “He’s really taken a leadership role,” Bennett said of Hage.