

Sports

BAKER CROSS-COUNTRY AT STATE CLASS 4A MEET

Cassidy’s school-record race leads Baker boys to 5th place; Keller places 9th overall as Bulldog girls finish 6th

By Alex Castle
For the Baker City Herald

EUGENE — Baker came to Saturday’s Class 4A Cross-County State Championships at Lane Community College gunning for a trophy. Though the Bulldogs left without one in hand, following a sixth-place finish with 168 points by the girls team and a fifth-place finish with 99 points by the boys, which was one heartbreaking point shy of the fourth-place trophy, Baker validated itself as a program on the rise. “It’s exciting to be a part of a really competitive year,” Baker coach Suzy Cole said. “The hardware doesn’t mean anything as far as how much they improved and how successful they were.”



Senior Kale Cassidy was the Bulldogs’ top finisher in the boys race, placing second overall with a personal-best and school-record time of 15 minutes, 57.2 seconds. He finished nine seconds behind state champion John Peckham of Sisters. Cassidy ended the race with his right hip bloody and muddy after slipping and falling while fighting through traffic a mile in to get into the front group. Still, he saved energy in the first mile and got back to his feet to finish strong. Cassidy said the team’s goals helped push him. “I don’t think I would have done it if I wouldn’t have thought, ‘today I’ve got to do this, not just for myself but for my team,’” Cassidy said. “You can’t stop in the middle of your most important race of the season. For me, I think this is



Photo by Buell Gonzales Jr.
Baker’s Gavin Stone battles Ethan Hosang of Sisters during the Class 4A state cross-country race Saturday.

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really important just for us as a team. We’ve come in the past four years from nothing and now we’re way up there.” Cole watched Cassidy develop from a freshman who

hadn’t run cross-country, to having “really exciting” sophomore and junior years, and then battling through some difficulties this season. “He’s a very academic run-



Photo by Buell Gonzales Jr.
Salena Bott

ner, so he likes to be in control of everything,” Cole said. “And in the middle of the season he couldn’t control some things he wanted to.” But in the final weeks of the season, Cassidy found he was becoming more comfortable and confident with each race. And by Saturday, Cole could tell just watching him around the opening loop that he was in control. In the girls race, Sydney Keller paced Baker and finished ninth at 19:14.2 after outkicking Stayton’s Hope Bridge by hundredths of a second.



Keller



Photo by Buell Gonzales Jr.
John Niehaus

Keller set her personal record by 25 seconds. “I knew if I didn’t I’d regret it forever, so I just gave it whatever I had hoping it was enough,” she said of her finish. “It was so great. It’s an amazing feeling.” A mile into the race, Keller settled into the third pack from the front. With the top eight separating themselves, Cole said she knew Keller would have a chance to reach the top 10 for a spot on the podium. “You never know what’s going to happen at state,” Cole said. “Sydney is probably one of the gutsiest kids I’ve ever coached. I knew if she was in striking distance she had a really good chance of getting on the podium.” Including Cassidy and Keller, 12 of Baker’s 14 runners clocked either season- or

Baker Girls

- Sydney Keller, 9th, 19:14
- Sydney Lamb, 35th, 20:50
- Corah Downing, 36th, 20:50
- Salena Bott, 55th, 21:46
- Jayden Rice, 63rd, 22:22
- Lacey Jones, 69th, 22:51
- Rebekaw Shaw, 77th, 23:56

Baker Boys

- Kale Cassidy, 2nd, 15:57
- Jake Cuzick, 21st, 16:31
- Gavin Stone, 31st, 16:57
- Lucas Stearns, 32nd, 16:59
- John Niehaus, 39th, 17:03
- Justin Ash, 53rd, 17:26
- Seth Rushton, 57th, 17:38

personal-bests on Saturday. While the Bulldogs reached their goal of finishing in the top six on the girls side, the boys team missed out on its goal of a top four finish by one point to Marist Catholic of Eugene. The narrow margin was especially frustrating, Cole said, because the Bulldogs ran exactly how she asked them to. “We ran the perfect day and we were still one point out,” she said. “That’s disappointing just for them because I know how hard they’ve worked. For all of them to run the perfect day, it’s kind of sad.”

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BADGERS

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The margin was still 10-6 after a kill by Bingham, but then St. Paul heated up. The Buckaroos scored the next 12 points, with Wyss netting eight kills in the rally, to take an 18-10 lead. Bingham said that since the teams had met in the final a year earlier, Powder Valley had an idea of what to expect from the hard-hitting Buckaroos, but the Badgers played timid anyway. “So we knew exactly what we were going against,” she said. “I think we psyched ourselves out a little bit.” Krieger, who had five kills and 11 digs, had a kill to stop the rally, but the Badgers got no closer than seven in the set. It set a theme for the night, as a run of 14-2 broke the second set open and put the Buckaroos up 22-11, before Wyss ended the set with two more kills. An 8-0 run early in the third gave the Buckaroos an 11-3 lead. The Badgers showed fight in an effort to get back in the match. Kills by Krieger and Allen cut the margin to 13-9, and another Allen kill made it 15-10. “We were saying to swing away,” Allen said of the team’s message as it tried to rally. “We got nothing to lose, so give it our all. It’s our last game of the season, it’s the

seniors’ last game ever, so give it everything you have.” The Bucks opened up the lead to 24-12 before Davis individually sparked one final rally, with a kill and back-to-back aces to trim the margin to eight before St. Paul finished off the win. While each Badger player admitted they didn’t have their best night Saturday, Allen said the Buckaroos would have been formidable even if the Badgers were on. “St. Paul is a really good team. They would be tough to beat regardless of how we played,” she said. Davis, who had five kills and five aces, said the Badgers’ team chemistry played

an important role in its success during the season. “We came back really strong, and even better than last year, I thought,” the senior said. “We bonded really well as a team, and played really well

all the way around all season.” The team will lose Davis and Krieger to graduation, but return everyone else next fall. “We should be good next year, too,” Bingham said.



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