

Sports

BAKER BOYS BASKETBALL

Baker's rally falls short at La Grande

By Ronald Bond

The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — La Grande sophomore guard Devin Bell said the Tigers boys basketball team is essentially beginning a new season as it looks to right the ship following a 1-10 start.

They certainly started it the right way — even if the outcome was in doubt in the final moments.

"We were 1-10, and then we come out and start league off with a win, and I think it's just a start to a new season. I think it's going to be a great season," Bell said.

Bell led the Tigers with 17 points Friday, and La Grande opened Greater Oregon League play with a 56-52 home win over Baker in a game that saw the Bulldogs rally from 18 points down in the fourth quarter.

The Tigers were the aggressors much of the night, and for the first three quarters they played their best basketball of the season. Bell led a barrage from 3-point range with five triples as La Grande connected on eight 3s on the night. The Tigers, who never trailed, took their largest lead just 20 seconds into the fourth quarter at 47-29 on a layup by Brady Hutchins.

"Obviously against your rival you want to come out and play your best basketball, (and) tonight we did for the first three quarters," La Grande coach Mark Carollo said. "We were really on, we shot the ball well, defensively we kept guys in front of us, (and) we took care of the ball."

Then what seemed like a certain victory nearly got



Ronald Bond / The (La Grande) Observer

Baker's Caden Long shoots against La Grande's Zach Wiggins, left, and Justin Jenner on Friday.

away from the Tigers.

The Bulldogs scored seven points in less than a minute, getting within 47-36 on a field goal by Gabe Gambleton. The Tigers briefly restored order to push the lead back to 15 on Cristian Mendoza's floater, but another Gambleton jumper and a 3-point play by Caden Long cut the margin to 51-41 with 4:30 to play. Gambleton's pullup jumper made it a six-point game with 2:57 to go, and Baker was down only three points, at 53-50, on a Riley Flanagan layup with 57 seconds remaining.

"I just told the kids that

we need to play a little bit harder," Baker coach Jebron Jones said of the message to his team to get the Bulldogs back in the game. "I think they stepped up to the challenge in the fourth quarter, but basketball is four quarters, and we didn't do our job the first three."

The Bulldogs got within 54-52 on another lay-in by Long, and they had a shot at the lead with about 15 seconds to play, but Jamison Rigueiro's open 3-pointer was long, and La Grande's Kaleb Myer — who had just missed the front end of a 1-and-1 to leave the

door open — connected on the game-sealing free throws with 8.9 seconds to go.

"I was a little bit nervous, but I've made so many free throws, and I was confident it would go in," Myer said.

The tight finish was unexpected after La Grande had dominated most of the night. The Tigers raced out to a 13-3 first-quarter lead on a Justin Jenner 3-pointer. Bell caught fire in the second quarter with three 3-pointers, including an important trey with about 15 seconds to play in the half that stopped a Baker rally and gave the Tigers a 29-24 lead at the break.

"They played harder than we did (through the first three quarters)," Jones said of the Tigers. "(They) outlasted us, wanted it more, and then by the fourth quarter, it was too little too late."

"You gotta give them credit for sticking in there, battling all the way through," Carollo said of Baker. "I knew they weren't going to just lay over, and we got tight. We got tense (but) at the end of the day we were still able to finish."

Jenner and Myer joined Bell in double figures with 13 and 12 points, respectively, to help La Grande end a seven-game losing streak.

Long, who had 10 of his team-high 16 points in the fourth quarter for Baker, also had 13 rebounds, four assists and three steals. Gambleton added 14 points, and Flanagan had 12 points and 11 rebounds. Baker outrebounded La Grande by a sizable 38-27 margin, but committed 21 turnovers while La Grande finished with just eight.

PINE EAGLE BASKETBALL

Spartans edge Imbler

HALFWAY — The Pine Eagle girls basketball team rallied with a pair of late free throws to beat Imbler 36-35 Friday.

Girls

• Pine Eagle 36, Imbler 35: Two free throws by Pine Eagle in the final seconds Friday prevented the Panthers from getting their first win of the season in an Old Oregon League contest.

Imbler led most of the night, but Pine Eagle grabbed the lead in the fourth and the teams went back and forth until the Spartans won it on the late free throws.

Maddie Morgan scored 11 points to lead the Spartans. Karmen Molina and Sammy Pollock each added nine points.

Pine Eagle (5-4 overall, 1-1 OOL) hosts Powder Valley Saturday.

Boys

• Imbler 45, Pine Eagle 40: The Panthers rallied from an early 16-4 deficit Friday to earn a hard-fought road win to open Old Oregon League play.

Imbler cut the margin to 24-22 by halftime, then took over the lead, 36-30, after three quarters and held on.

Four different players — Ethan Brown, Caleb Brown, Caleb Thompson and Clay Gray — had eight points apiece for the Spartans (4-5 overall, 1-1 OOL), who host Powder Valley Saturday.

POWDER VALLEY BASKETBALL

Badgers rout Cove

NORTH POWDER — The Powder Valley Badgers swept boys and girls games against Cove Saturday.

Boys

• Powder Valley 95, Cove 32: The Badgers fell just short of the century mark Saturday as they opened Old Oregon League play with a rout of Cove.

Reece Dixon led four players in double figures for Powder Valley, which had 12 players score, with 18 points. Clay Martin added 15 points, Dominick Grende had 11 points and Moziss Nesser scored 10 points.

Powder Valley (9-3 overall, 1-0 OOL) hosts Imbler Tuesday.

Girls

• Powder Valley 37, Cove 28: Belle Blair had 14 points and 11 rebounds Saturday in her first game of the season, and the Badgers opened Old Oregon League play with a home win over the Leopards.

Dallee Jo Bingham added 10 points and Keanna Bingham had eight for Powder Valley.

The Badgers' boys and girls home games against Nixyaawii Friday were canceled due to road conditions. A makeup date has not yet been determined.



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