

Sports

GREATER OREGON LEAGUE GIRLS BASKETBALL CHAMPIONSHIP GAME

Baker rallies past La Grande to win title

By Jayson Jacoby
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Hailey Zikmund gave Baker the lead, and then she made sure the Bulldogs kept it.

The Baker junior scored in the lane with 2:05 left in the game to give the Bulldogs a 41-39 lead over La Grande in a classic contest between the rivals for the Greater Oregon League championship Saturday night in the Baker gym.

Baker held on to win, 49-42.

Baker senior point guard Sydney Younger whipped a pass to Zikmund, who had gotten open in front of the basket.

But the Tigers, who were trying to end a 12-game losing streak to the Bulldogs, including two regular season GOL games earlier this year, didn't wilt despite failing to hold a lead that reached 4 points late in the third quarter.

After Younger made two free throws to boost Baker's lead to 43-39 with 1:39 left, La Grande's Ella Dunlap, who led all scorers with 21 points, made one of two free throws.

After a Baker miss, the Tigers' dynamic point guard, Camryn Collman, nailed a 15-footer to cut Baker's lead to 43-42 with 53 seconds left.

The Tigers were forced to foul, and it was Zikmund who ended up at the line with 27.4 seconds left.

She swished both shots. "I was really scared," Zikmund said with a smile after the game. "It was the first time I've been in a situation



Kathy Orr / Baker City Herald

Baker freshman post Jozie Ramos tries to get a shot up against La Grande on Saturday night

like that. I just told myself I have to make these. It was amazing. It's hard to explain."

Trailing 45-42 after Zikmund's free throws, La Grande had one last chance.

Collman's three-pointer from the top of the key missed, but the Tigers grabbed the rebound and Alexyss Chamberlain was fouled with 11.9 seconds left.

Chamberlain missed the front end of a 1-and-1 opportunity, and Baker secured the rebound after a scrum under the basket.

Dunlap was called for a technical foul for slamming the ball to the court, and Younger made both foul shots.

Baker retained possession after the technical, and Younger was fouled and again made two free throws. She was a perfect 8 for 8 from the line — all in the fourth quarter — and led Baker with 14 points.

Baker coach Mat Sand said he expected nothing less than a stout challenge from La Grande after the teams' two previous meetings, which

"I was really scared. I just told myself I have to make these. It was amazing."

— Baker's Hailey Zikmund, who made two key free throws with 27.4 seconds left Saturday night

Baker won 42-35 and 46-36.

"La Grande's definitely a good team — we know that," Sand said. "I told the girls that every game from here on out is going to be just like that one."

After Collman's 3-pointer with three seconds left in the first half cut Baker's lead to 22-21 at the break, the teams swapped the lead six times in the third quarter before Dunlap scored 5 straight points to give the Tigers their largest advantage, 31-27, with 2:06 left in the third quarter.

Baker struggled to prevent entry passes to Dunlap, and once the 5-foot-11 junior post had the ball in the key, she usually either scored or drew a foul.

Dunlap was 5 for 8 from the free throw line.

"She was tough tonight," Sand said of Dunlap. "She's very skilled."

But Baker, the defending Class 4A state champion and riding a 13-game winning streak, responded to La Grande's run.

Sydney Keller drove the lane and scored, and Zikmund

hit a 3-pointer with 12 seconds left in the third quarter to give Baker the lead back at 32-31.

Collman made one of two free throws with 3.6 seconds left to tie the score at 32 entering the final period.

Baker suffered a key loss when Keller was called for a charge, her fifth foul, with 4:43 left.

The junior guard is a vital part of Baker's swarming defense.

After Keller fouled out, Dunlap scored inside to give La Grande a 35-33 lead.

The next few minutes were a duel between Younger and Dunlap.

Younger made a layin to tie the score at 35. Dunlap followed with a basket to regain the lead for La Grande.

Younger made two free throws to forge another tie, but again Dunlap responded, this time with a rebound basket, and La Grande led 39-37 with 3:12 left.

Baker freshman post Jozie Ramos, who had 12 points despite being hampered by a sore back, scored inside with 2:41 left to tie the score for the last time and set the stage for Zikmund's heroics.

Sand said Baker's response to the 4-point deficit in the third quarter was what he expected.

"One thing I have learned about our team is that you can't coach experience," he

said. "It's invaluable. Basketball is a game of momentum swings and you just have to survive those."

The game also illustrated the mantra that Sand preaches to his players.

"Free throws win games, and we proved it again tonight," he said.

Baker made 11 of 16 free throws in the fourth quarter.

Sand said he was impressed with Ramos' ability to play through pain in a game that, like Baker's two previous contests against La Grande, was intense and physical, especially in the lane.

"What a trooper," Sand said of Ramos. "That says a lot about her."

Baker's experience and mental fortitude also showed after Keller fouled out with the score tied at 33.

"What I've learned about this team this year is that they don't give up ever," Sand said. "Beating a team three times is a big accomplishment for these girls."

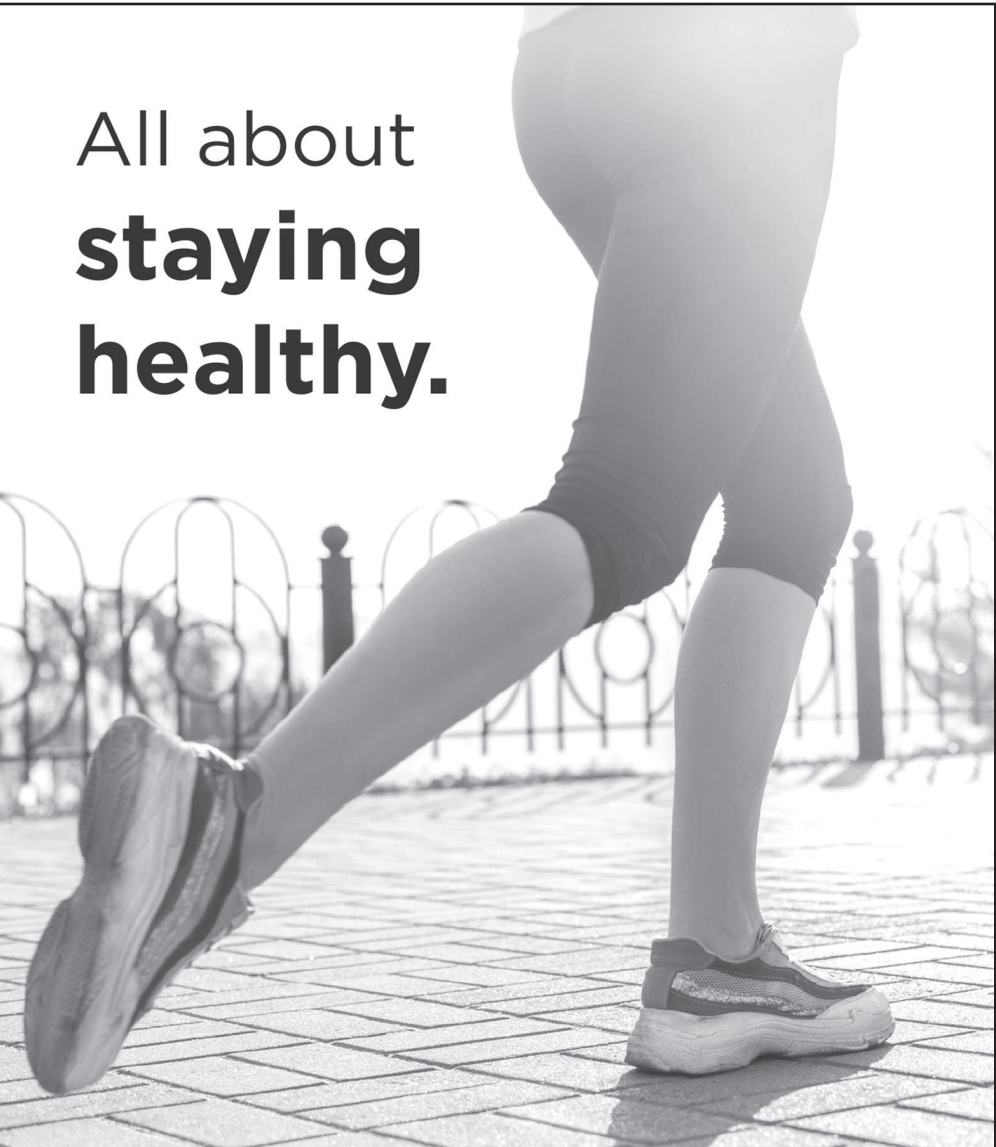
He credited Baker's defense with spurring the comeback.

After Dunlap's rebound basket gave La Grande its final lead with 3:22 left, she only scored one more point.

"Our defense was really good — it always starts with defense," Sand said.

Zikmund agreed.

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