

Sports

BAKER BASKETBALL PLAYOFF GAME PREVIEWS

BOYS: Baker looks to avenge loss to Henley

By Jayson Jacoby
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Two months ago Baker boys basketball coach Jebron Jones walked out of the gym at Sisters following a 44-37 loss to Henley, thinking the Bulldogs should have won the game.

Saturday afternoon Baker will have its chance to avenge that 44-37 loss on Dec. 27.

The Bulldogs (15-10) will travel to Klamath Falls to take on the 4th-ranked Hornets (18-6) with a berth in the Class 4A state tournament at stake. Tipoff is set for 3 p.m.

Baker is looking to advance to the state tournament for the first time since 2007, when the Bulldogs won the state championship.

“They are a good solid team — they’re big, strong and aggressive,” Jones said of the Hornets, who have won 8 straight games and are Skyline Conference champions.

The Dec. 27 game at Sisters was close throughout.

Baker led 14-13 after one quarter, and Henley led 25-24 at halftime. The Hornets led by just 5 points entering the fourth quarter.

Jones said the Bulldogs didn’t respond as well as they should have to Henley’s physical play.

“They just beat us up,” he said.

Jones expects another tough game Saturday on the Hornets’ home floor.

“The crowd’s going to be in it, and they have momentum,” Jones said, referring to

Henley’s 8-game winning streak. “I just hope we can match that intensity.”

Jones said he’s pleased with the Bulldogs’ preparation over the past two weeks — Baker hasn’t played since Feb. 22, when the Bulldogs lost 57-50 to La Grande in the Greater Oregon League championship game.

“The kids have been practicing extremely hard,” Jones said. “I hope that translates into the game on Saturday.”

The Hornets rely heavily on seniors. In Henley’s 67-36 win over Mazama on Feb. 21, the Hornets were led by seniors Matthew Neubert, a 6-foot-4 guard who had 18 points, 6-foot-3 post Seth Howe (14 points and 12 rebounds), 6-foot-3 post Braden Lawrie (13 points) and 5-foot-11 guard Darius Hall (10 points, 5 assists).

In Henley’s win over Baker at the Sisters holiday tournament, Lawrie led the Hornets with 17 points and Hall had 11.

Baker’s Gabe Gambleton had a game-high 22 points, but no other Bulldog scored more than 5 in the Dec. 27 contest.

In addition to the head-to-head match up, Baker and Henley had two common opponents this season — Junction City and Mazama.

Baker lost to Junction City 73-61 on Dec. 13, while Henley beat Junction City 53-35 on Dec. 29.

Baker beat Mazama 48-38 on Dec. 28 (also at the Sisters tournament), and Henley swept Mazama, a league rival, 55-41 and 67-36.

GIRLS: Bulldogs are in a familiar situation

By Jayson Jacoby
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Baker girls basketball coach Mat Sand teaches all sorts of plays and tactics during practices, but it’s the one thing he can’t coach that might be the Bulldogs’ biggest advantage.

Experience.

When Baker takes the court at Baker High School Friday night at 8:30 against Gladstone, with a Class 4A state tournament bid on the line, the Bulldogs will have four players who had key roles in winning the school’s first girls state basketball title last March.

Seniors Sydney Younger, Anna Carter and Isabella Nemece, and junior Sydney Keller, combined to score 26 of Baker’s 51 points in the Bulldogs’ 51-48 win over Marist in the 2019 state championship game.

That experience, Sand said, is “invaluable.”

“It’s such a mental game, and if you have the mental edge the physical part will kind of take care of itself,” Sand said. “It’s definitely an advantage, and a confidence thing.”

Baker, which has won 14 straight games and is seeded 2nd among the 16 playoff teams, has already beaten Gladstone, the 15th seed, this season.

Baker (23-2 overall, 6-0 league) beat the Gladiators (12-12 overall, 5-5 league) 53-35 during the Gladstone holiday tournament

on Dec. 20.

The Bulldogs haven’t played since Feb. 22, when they rallied to beat La Grande 49-42. That break has helped Baker players recover from nagging injuries, Sand said.

“I think everybody’s healed up,” he said. “That’s the nice thing about having a long time off.”

Sand, who is trying to take the Bulldogs to the state tournament for the fourth straight season, said he’s been pleased with Baker’s practices this week.

“I think we’re ready,” he said. “We’re a better team than when we played (Gladstone) the first time. We’re just more of a unified team.”

Baker led almost the entire game on Dec. 20 at Gladstone, outscoring the Gladiators in every quarter.

Younger led the Bulldogs with 14 points, Hailey Zikmund added 10 and Jozie Ramos 8.

Sand said he plans to unveil some defensive and offensive plays that the Bulldogs have practiced but held back for key games.

“That’s just my strategy as a coach, to throw some stuff at them they haven’t seen,” he said.

Baker and Gladstone have two common opponents this season — Valley Catholic and Banks.

Baker beat Valley Catholic 66-34 while Gladstone lost, 51-46.

Banks beat both teams, topping Baker 41-34 and beating Gladstone 49-43.

Blazers rout Magic

By Bill Fay
Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — CJ McCollum scored 41 points and Gary Trent Jr. added 24 to help the Portland Trail Blazers run away from the Orlando Magic 130-107 on Monday night.

Hassan Whiteside had 16 points and 13 rebounds and Trevor Ariza scored 11 as the Blazers ended a 3-game losing streak by outscoring Orlando 38-19 in the final period.

Nikola Vucevic led Orlando with 30 points and 11 rebounds. Terrence Ross scored 23 points, but the Magic struggled offensively in the final period, hitting just six of 21 shots. The 130 points tied a season-high for points allowed by the Magic.

McCollum was the star for the first three quarters, but Trent, subbing for injured All-Star Damian Lillard, took over early the fourth and was the difference maker in the game. He scored 14 points in the quarter, 11 of them while McCollum was taking a much-deserved rest on the bench.

“I thought in both the first and second half, when CJ was out, Gary obviously did a really good job,” Portland coach Terry Stotts said. “I like the way we moved the ball. We had a lot of shot making. We just played a solid game from start to finish.”

Portland started the final period with an 92-88 lead, but Trent hit three straight jumpers to help kick Portland’s lead up to 103-94 when McCollum returned for the final eight minutes. Turns out, the Blazers didn’t much need him.

Ariza nailed a 3-pointer from the corner and turned

it into a four-point play after being fouled. Trent followed with a 3-pointer and the Trail Blazers had a 114-99 lead to sit on for the final five minutes.

McCollum was almost a one-man show for the first three periods, hitting five 3-pointers and scoring 32 points despite constant attention from nearly every Magic defender on the floor.

The Magic cut an 11-point halftime deficit to 82-80 on a James Ennis layup with 4:14 left in the third when McCollum essentially went one-on-five against Orlando. The Blazers guard scored nine straight points for his team and made the pass out of a double team that led to a 3-pointer by Trent that gave Portland a 92-84 lead.

“That’s not surprising,” Trent Jr. said. “That’s what CJ does day in and day out so when he comes in the game and makes it look as effortless and flawless as he does, it’s no surprise.”

Portland shot 55.7 percent for the game, including 16 of 33 on 3-point attempts.

“That was incredibly disappointing,” Magic coach Steve Clifford said. “Tonight was again, lackluster defense. If we think we are gonna outscore people and make the playoffs or be a factor, we don’t understand who we are.”

Portland got a little bit of everything in the first half, especially from McCollum, who had 23 points at halftime. The Blazers’ guard hit 8 of 12 shots, including four of five 3-pointers, despite being the focus of constant double teams.

Orlando, in the bottom five in the NBA in 3-point shooting, stayed close thanks to a rare run of five straight 3-pointers to open the second period. Ross had three of the 3-pointers and a dunk and driving layup that pulled Orlando within 49-47 with seven minutes left in the half.

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