

Sports

BAKER GIRLS SOCCER

Baker no match for La Grande

By **Corey Kirk**
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Baker's girls soccer team, playing for the second straight day with a minimum number of players, was no match for the unbeaten La Grande Tigers, losing 10-1 Wednesday, March 10, at the Baker Sports Complex.

As was the case Tuesday at Riverside, the Bulldogs (1-2 for the season) had only 11 players, meaning all 11 had to play the entire 80-minute match.

"Two games, back-to-back, no subs on either, they were absolutely gassed," Baker assistant coach Christine Teegarden said.

During the first half Wednesday, the Tigers, who didn't allow a goal in their first three matches, stifled Baker's offense.

Meanwhile the Tigers tested Baker's defense consistently, putting up six goals.

Despite the score, Baker head coach Eric Layton said he was proud of his team's effort.

"Knowing that they played a big game yesterday, and that was short notice, knowing that happened I thought they played really well," Layton said. "We knew today was going to be a struggle because La Grande is good, it's kind of hard to keep that energy going."

La Grande won its first three matches, against Four Rivers, Idaho, Pendleton and Ontario, by a combined score of 19-0.

Layton said his main focus in talking with his team at



Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald

Baker's Brooklyn Jaca, right, dribbles against the defense of La Grande's Rosie Aguilera during a girls soccer match on Wednesday, March 10, at the Baker Sports Complex.

halftime was to help them maintain their perspective, to remember that they're a young team taking on a much more experienced La Grande squad, with nine seniors on its roster.

The Tigers advanced to the Class 4A playoffs in 2019.

Baker has no seniors.

Layton said that during his halftime talk he was "reminding them that they are mostly sophomores. Reminding them we have had two weeks of practice,

some of which were indoors. I think perspective is really healthy."

As the second half began, Baker had a newfound confidence offensively and was able to keep the ball on La Grande's side of the pitch.

Although La Grande scored the first goal of the half to increase its lead to 7-0, Baker got on the board 16 minutes into the half when freshman Daphne Thomas scored. It was the first goal La Grande has

given up this season.

Teegarden said she was happy to see the burst of energy this goal gave to the Bulldogs.

"We keep telling them that we are seeing these good things and that they are that capable, but until they see that goal scored, then the energy pops up," Teegarden said.

La Grande then scored three straight goals to end the match 10 minutes early with a 10-1 lead.

Looking forward, knowing that he has such a young team, Layton chooses to take the abbreviated season day by day and not let the frustration of losses get in the way of teaching.

"We just have to take the games for what they are, a learning experience, and go forward," Layton said. "We are proud of their work and in every situation they've been in they have had few subs and they've been an underdog. People should know the hard work they are putting in."

Baker returns to Greater Oregon League play Monday, March 15, when the Bulldogs travel to Ontario for a 3 p.m. PDT match.



Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald

Baker's goalkeeper Neah Thomas, left, leaps to try to block a shot by La Grande's Abigail Jorgenson during a match Wednesday, March 10, at the Baker Sports Complex.

Booker leads Suns past Blazers

By **Anne M. Peterson**
AP Sports Writer

Devin Booker returned from the knee injury that kept him out of the All-Star Game to score 35 points and the Phoenix Suns beat the Portland Trail Blazers 127-121 on Thursday night for

their fifth straight victory.

Chris Paul added 19 points for Phoenix, and Mikal Bridges scored 16 of his 18 points in the first half. Second in the NBA behind the Utah Jazz, the Suns have won 17 of their last 20 games.

It was Booker's 100th

career game with 30 or more points. Paul, who didn't think Booker would play Thursday night, called it "smooth."

Phoenix outscored the Blazers 37-27 in the final period.

"I think we had some good energy going into the fourth

quarter," Booker said. "We were really animated in the huddle right before the fourth quarter. I was saying 'This is winning time, time to lock in.' That's what we did."

Damian Lillard had 30 points for Portland, and Enes Kanter added 16 points and

11 rebounds. They had won three in a row.

The Suns trailed by 11 points in the third quarter, but pulled to 96-95 early in the fourth on Abdel Nader's 3-pointer. Cameron Payne followed up with a 3 of his own to put Phoenix in front.

Happy to be back in the BHS bleachers

One year ago, in my first week as the Baker City Herald's sports editor, I helped cover the Class

1A state basketball tournaments at Baker High School.

In the span of four days I went to over 12 games, sitting in crowded bleachers, watching each game unfold.

Fast forward 52 weeks — and a global pandemic — later, and I was back in the BHS gym to cover a Baker volleyball match. I knew about the drastic changes I would see. Masks. Athletes and volunteers distanced. But I was surprised by how much one other difference affected me — the eerie silence of the stands, with no spectators cheering.

The absence of fan noise is something professional athletes have been dealing with for months. When the NFL returned back in August, the approach varied depending on the stadium. Some opened with limited fan capacity, some played recorded fan noise through their sound systems. Regardless, it didn't feel even close to seasons past.

"The atmosphere from the time we came out of the tunnel was unlike anything any of us have felt," New England Patriots cornerback Jason McCourty told NBC's Peter King. "You can't really envision what an NFL game is like without fans. This felt more like a high school scrimmage. Maybe you travel somewhere for a scrimmage, and your parents come, but no other fans."

In Baker County, and elsewhere in Oregon, we're seeing high school athletes back in competition for the first time in a year.

Although not yet a parent, I can relate to the athletes who are fortunate enough to have their parents watching them this month on local fields and courts.

I remember meeting a dad at one of the 1A tournament games in 2020. He couldn't have been more proud as he talked about his son, a junior, how much he, the dad, loved basketball but even more how much he enjoyed never missing one of his son's games. What he shared with me that day is a story that could be told from so many parents' perspective, in Baker City and elsewhere.

I fully support allowing a limited number of fans, mainly parents, to attend games as we try to get through the pandemic. In the meantime, other fans can still watch events, most of which, at the middle school and high school level, are being shown live on various online platforms.

The return of sports for the kids is a welcome sight. It is vital for students to have a chance to participate in sports, for the physical benefits but also because it's great for their mental health.

For me, being able to walk into Baker High School or to the Sports Complex, covering these events and telling stories that are bigger than the sports themselves, I am beaming with excitement.

Eventually, I know, there will be a moment when it truly feels normal again, when I'm among a crowd of parents, students and other fans, trying to collect my own thoughts during the wildest moments of the game and struggling due to the cacophony from the crowd. I know that moment might still be months away. But one thing is certain — fans are imperative at the high school level, and I just didn't realize the magnitude of their absence until sports finally returned after nearly a year of being away.

Corey Kirk is sports editor for the Baker City Herald.



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