

# Sports



Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald

Powder Valley senior Justin Ash, top, finished first in the boys second heat at the Baker Invitational cross-country meet on Friday, March 12 at Baker High School, competing for the Baker/Powder Valley team. Baker senior Sydney Keller, right won the girls second heat to lead Baker/Powder Valley to the top spot in the team standings.



## Baker girls 1st, boys 3rd at Baker Invitational cross-country meet

By Corey Kirk  
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In the middle of a mild Friday afternoon, March 12, cross-country teams from around the region gathered at Baker High School to compete on a new course.

After the points were tallied, the Baker/Powder Valley girls team had finished first in its home invitational, and the boys had placed third of four teams in the second heat, just two points behind second-place La Grande.

Powder Valley senior Justin Ash finished first in the boys second heat with a time of 16:28, and Baker senior Sydney Keller, who won the district meet and ninth at the Class 4A state meet in 2019, was the top girls runner in her heat with a time of 20:21.

"The kids are still out here, they are hardworking kids, they love the sport for a lot of reasons, so what we are really trying to do is make it as normal as possible," said Suzy Cole, who coaches the Baker/Powder Valley girls and boys teams. "Our goal is to compete, just like we would compete in the fall."

The time of year isn't the only change for cross-country runners. The Baker Invitational, which typically takes place at Quail Ridge Golf Course, was moved this year to a new course laid out around the high school, with teams divided into separate heats to comply with COVID-19 precautions that limit the number of runners on the course at one time.

The course starts, and finishes, inside Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium.

Cole said she was pleased with the new route.

"This was the first time we did a perimeter type of course," Cole said.

Baker senior Salena Bott said she liked the course.

"The course was a lot flatter, we didn't have any loops so there wasn't any repeat scenery," Bott said.

Bott and her fellow seniors, competing in their last home meet, were honored with a brief announcement, and a poster was hung up near the bleachers. After a year of not knowing if they would even have a final cross-country season, Bott was enthusiastic about the opportunity.

"It's super duper exciting that we actually get to still run together, and finish our four years of cross-country together," Bott said.

Baker opened its season Monday, March 8 at Nyssa, running in the first heat. The Baker girls placed first and the boys second.

Keller won the girls race and Ash was second in the boys race.

### Baker Invitational

In the first heat Friday at Baker High School, Burns, Four Rivers, Pine Eagle, Nyssa and Vale competed in the first heat, with Burns finishing first behind junior Spencer Johnson (18:39) and freshman Tim Banks (19:02). Baker competed in the second heat against La Grande, Union and Ontario. Ash was first across the line, and Baker placed second as a team.

In the girls heat, Keller led the way for Baker followed by juniors Emma Baeth (third overall, 21:31), Sydney Lamb (fifth, 21:58), and senior Corah Downing (sixth, 22:13) as Baker won the team race.

Cole was happy with those three times and with the effort of the entire team in both the Nyssa and Baker events.

"I'm more surprised by my other kids that were kind of trying to figure out how do I navigate COVID, the sea-

son's weird, and they really have stepped up and they ran really tough on Monday (at Nyssa). I had more PRs (personal records) today in just a short turnaround, that just says a lot about their grit," Cole said.

Bott was proud of the effort put forth by everyone on the team.

"It's always super cool seeing everyone do their best, and being proud of themselves, for how good they ran," Bott said.

### Looking ahead

Cole said the Baker girls can be competitive at the state level.

Although the Oregon School Activities Association (OSAA) will not have a state championship meet, Class 4A coaches have been discussing have a state meet to finish the season on April 10, probably at Tillamook.

"We can be competitive on the state level, we can be competitive on the district level," Cole said. "We are short on numbers but quality over quantity."

For the boys side of her program, Cole said the team has room to grow, as the roster is mainly sophomores.

Despite the strangeness of running during the late winter and spring rather than in fall, Bott said she's happy just to have the chance to compete again.

"As a team we are just really trying to have fun this year, and do our best for ourselves," Bott said.

Cole is grateful to be back to coaching.

"I'm excited to be with the kids, I'm excited how well they are adapting and working. I appreciate our community and our school district for working so hard to give us these opportunities and do what we can do," Cole said. The Baker/Powder Valley

team will travel to Harney County this Friday, March 19, to compete in the Burns Invitational. Results will be available at athletic.net.

### Baker Invitational Results

**GIRLS, HEAT 2**  
**TEAM STANDINGS**  
Baker 23, La Grande 33

**BAKER INDIVIDUALS**  
1., Sydney Keller, 20:21; 3. Emma Baeth, 21:31; 5. Sydney Lamb, 21:58; 6. Corah Downing, 22:13; 8. Salena Bott, 23:25; 13. Avril Zikgraf, 25:08

**BOYS, HEAT 2**  
**TEAM STANDINGS**  
Union 33, La Grande 41, Baker 51, Ontario 96

**BAKER INDIVIDUALS**  
1., Justin Ash, 16:28; 10. Gavin Stone, 19:19; 11. Jordan Mills, 19:38; 13. Gabriel Bott, 20:06; 16. Thaddeus Pepera, 20:56; 20. Seth Mastrude, 22:31; 26. Ryan Hansen, 29:38; 29. Dan Wachtel, 32:25

### Nyssa Invitational Results

**GIRLS, HEAT 2**  
**TEAM STANDINGS**  
Baker 26, Burns 29

**BAKER INDIVIDUALS**  
1., Sydney Keller, 21:07; 3. Emma Baeth, 22:37; 5. Sydney Lamb, 22:48; 8. Corah Downing, 24:54; 9. Salena Bott, 25:12; 13. Rebekah Shaw, 27:22;

**BOYS, HEAT 2**  
**TEAM STANDINGS**  
Enterprise 23, Baker 43, Burns 66, Nyssa 99, Four Rivers 105

**BAKER INDIVIDUALS**  
2., Justin Ash, 17:15; 7. Jordan Mills, 20:44; 9. Gavin Stone, 20:50; 12. Thaddeus Pepera, 21:37; 13. Gabriel Bott, 21:40; 18. Seth Mastrude, 22:40; 32. Dan Wachtel, 33:33

### BAKER BOYS SOCCER

## Bulldogs fall to La Grande, 6-0

By Corey Kirk  
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Baker's boys soccer team played even with the unbeaten La Grande Tigers on Friday, March 12 for almost the entire first half.

Then came the penalty kick. La Grande was awarded that kick with about seven minutes left in the first half of a scoreless match.

The Tigers converted the kick into the match's first goal, and that gave La Grande momentum that led to a 3-0 lead at halftime and, eventually, a 6-0 win.

Baker coach Victor Benites said he was impressed with how Baker (0-3) was playing against La Grande (2-0-1).

"We played really good for like 25 minutes into the first half, and then at the end they called a PK (penalty kick) against us, everything went down after that," Benites said.

In the second half, a few Baker defensive miscues led to La Grande doubling its score.

"We had a couple of mistakes there and they're close to the box, they took shots on goal, and they scored," Benites said.

Despite the result, Benites was impressed by the efforts of junior goalkeeper Silas Carter, who turned back about 14 La Grande shots.

"He had some really crazy saves in the first half and actually the second half too," Benites said. "He had 10 to 14 saves the whole game which is really good."

After watching a film of Friday's match, Benites said he identified some fundamentals, such as ball control, that the Bulldogs need to work on.

"We gotta focus on getting ball control," he said. "We got to work on that and pass the ball more and to make the good passes. It's always the first touch, and the ball bounces off your knee or whatever, you can't control it so we got to work on that."

After starting its abbreviated season with four consecutive road matches — the last was today at Four Rivers, Idaho — Baker returns to the Baker Sports Complex for its final matches.

The first is set for Thursday, March 18 against Ontario at 4 p.m. The Tigers blanked Baker 4-0 on March 2.

Benites is excited to see the boost of confidence his team will have playing on their own field.

"Any time you play at home, you play better and really harder as a team, I think it's because they know the field and everything," Benites said.

With a team dominated by freshmen and sophomores, Benites is also optimistic about the Bulldogs showing improvement as the season progresses.

"We have a lot of things that we have to work on, but I am pretty sure we will get better," Benites said.

After Thursday's match, Baker will play host to Nyssa on Saturday, March 20 at 2 p.m.

### BAKER VOLLEYBALL

## Baker pushes Vale to 5 sets

By Corey Kirk  
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Baker's volleyball team started strong against Vale and showed its resilience with a late rally, but the Bulldogs couldn't overcome the Vikings on their home court, losing a five-set match on Friday, March 12.

After a four-set loss to La Grande on March 8, Baker coach Ali Abrego said she emphasized certain fundamentals as the Bulldogs (1-5 on the season) prepared for Vale.

"We had to work on eliminating our errors; offensively we were missing a ton of serves, and just having communication errors in the back row between our libero and our DS's (defensive specialists)," Abrego said. "We focused really hard on getting into a groove as far as rotations go, and we served a lot this week in practice."

That focus paid off early at Vale, as Baker won the first set, 25-19.

In the second set neither team could hold the momentum, and the set went beyond the usual 25 points as both teams strived to take the necessary two-point advantage.

Vale ended up winning the set, 29-27, but Abrego said the tense nature of an extended set served as a lesson for her young team, with only one senior, Hailey Zikmund, on the roster.

"They never really had that opportunity," Abrego said. "Obviously when any set goes past 25, it's intensified I would say and so our younger girls really stepped up if needed."

After Vale won the third set, 25-22, Baker rallied to win the fourth set, 25-23, and force a decisive fifth set.

Abrego said her team showed major improvements from the previous match against La Grande.

"Our blocking and our tip coverage was much better than it was against La Grande, that was another big area of focus for us," Abrego said. "Obviously when the rallies become longer kids tire out, especially younger kids, so I was really proud of them being able to rally back and forth six or seven times for a given point and stay fundamentally sound."

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