

Sports

BAKER VOLLEYBALL

Bulldogs wrap up season with two wins

By **Corey Kirk**
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On a night that started with a ceremony honoring their two seniors, the Baker volleyball team won a thrilling five-set match against the Vale Vikings in the Baker gym.

Baker followed the win on Friday, April 2 with a three-set sweep at Nyssa on Saturday to finish its season with a 5-7 record. Baker's match originally scheduled for Monday, April 5 at Burns was canceled.

Prior to the Vale match, the Bulldogs' final home match, Baker celebrated seniors Hayden Paulsen and Hailey Zikmund.

Both felt the emotion of the moment — particularly the unusual nature of a season moved from fall to spring and shortened due to the pandemic.

"I was really happy how many of the fans got to see us," Zikmund said. "With COVID-19 happening I was really happy we got a season and we got to play."

With just two days to recover from back-to-back matches earlier in the week, the Bulldogs focused on communication, coach Ali Abrego said.



Corey Kirk/Baker City Herald

Baker's Makenzie Flanagan, far right, bumps the ball over the net during the Bulldogs' five-set win over the Vale Vikings on Friday, April 2 at the Baker gym. Teammates Hailey Zikmund, lower left, and Jozie Ramos, background, waited for a possible return from Vale's Kailey McGourty, No. 3.

"It's really hard to win if you don't talk to each other and if you don't trust each other," Abrego said.

It was no surprise that Class 3A Vale posed a tough challenge. The Vikings nipped Baker in a five-set match at Vale on March 12.

"They're definitely a good team to play, they have a lot of technique but I definitely felt like we had it this time,"

Paulsen said Friday night.

The Bulldogs started strong, dominating most of the first set and winning 25-18.

"We didn't let our emotions get the best of us," Abrego said. "Senior Night is always a tougher night for kids, especially for the seniors' last game. We knew that Vale was going to be a rough one."

Vale rebounded to win the second set, 25-16.

In the third set the teams traded point after point, eventually reaching a 15-15 tie.

Baker then forged ahead and took the set, 25-22.

But again the Vikings responded, winning the fourth set, 25-16, to force a decisive fifth set.

Abrego employed the phrase "this is our house" to motivate the Bulldogs for the final set.

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— Baker senior Hailey Zikmund

"Our team is phenomenal, we have a lot of young girls and they have so much technique and they are amazing volleyball players."

— Baker senior Hayden Paulsen

"We are a family, and we have to protect our house," Abrego said. "Feeding off of that, we win on our own home court, they don't get to come in and take that from us."

The final set, as might have been expected given the two teams' history this season, was close, with neither team leading by more than two points.

But Baker was able to hold off the Vikings, 16-14.

"I felt the energy in our team," Zikmund said. "We were struggling a bit and kind of got into a hole, and we really came together and I like that."

With the win secured, tears glistened in Paulsen's eyes as she thought about having just played her final match at home.

Paulsen said she is excited to see her younger teammates continue to grow in the sport.

"Our team is phenomenal, we have a lot of young girls and they are amazing volleyball players," Paulsen said.

With her first season as head coach finished, Abrego is also enthusiastic about the future, and the return of most of her roster this fall.

"We get to continue to grow together for another couple of years, the majority of our crew is sophomores," Abrego said. "It's always hard to lose part of a group, but I'm thankful it's small for my first year."

Baker concluded its season on the road at Nyssa on Saturday, winning 25-22, 25-22 and 25-13.

Baker girls soccer team blanks Four Rivers, finishes 4-2

By **Corey Kirk**
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The Baker girls soccer team completed its season on Saturday, April 3 by shutting out Four Rivers, 2-0, at Ontario.

Baker finished with a 4-2 record. Baker sophomore scored in the first half to give the Bulldogs at 1-0 lead.

Sophomore Brooklyn Jaca scored for Baker in the second half, and

Baker's defense thwarted the Falcons throughout.

Baker assistant coach Christine Teegarden said she was proud of the Bulldogs' performance on Saturday. "Just a lot of really smart moves

this game, which is a big focus this season," Teegarden said. "Not forcing it up the field, but really methodically making smart plays and winning because of it."

Baker won its final three games,

beating Four Rivers twice and Ontario once.

With no seniors on the roster, the Bulldogs look to return to a normal fall schedule later this year with its entire team intact.



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