

BAKER FOOTBALL OPENS SEASON THIS AFTERNOON AT HOME

# Baker, Cascade to renew rivalry

■ Teams have battled in playoffs three times since 2012

By JAYSON JACOBY

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Driving most of the way across Oregon for a high school football game in Baker City hardly daunts coach Brandon Bennett and his Cascade Cougars.

They had planned to go much farther — all the way to Colorado — to open the 2021 season.

Bennett concedes he was disappointed when COVID-19 concerns canceled the Cougars' Colorado plans.

They had been slated to play his own high school coach's team.

But the chance to renew the rivalry with the Baker Bulldogs is more than a consolation prize, Bennett said.

"Baker's a great opponent — they have history," Bennett said in a phone interview on Wednesday, three days before his Cougars were scheduled to take on the Bulldogs at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium. "It's a great battle between two country-type schools from smaller towns."

Kickoff is set for 2 p.m. this afternoon, Sept. 4.

Baker and Cascade, being separated by more than 300 miles and playing in different leagues, wouldn't be expected to have a rivalry.

But the vagaries of playoff scheduling have pitted the schools against each other three times in the past decade.

The first of those games was the most dramatic.

In November 2012 at Hillsboro Stadium, Baker topped Cascade 35-29 in a triple-overtime thriller capped by Braden Phillips' touchdown run.

The Bulldogs rallied after Cascade scored two touchdowns in 25 seconds in the fourth quarter to forge a tie in the Class 4A semifinal game.

Baker went on to beat North Bend for its second state title in three years.

A year later Cascade avenged the loss by beating Baker 37-14 in a play-in game at Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium.

The Bulldogs then had to wait six years for their chance at revenge on the Cougars' home field near Turner, south-east of Salem.

In November 2019 Baker traveled to Cascade and beat the Cougars 38-21 in a playoff game.

Almost two years — and a pandemic — later, Bennett said the Cougars, many of whom played in the 2019 loss to Baker, remember that game.

"We have unfinished business," Bennett said.

He sees today's game as something of a reversal from the 2019 playoff contest.

Baker relied largely on juniors and seniors in that game, all of whom have graduated.

Cascade, though, had just six senior starters on the 2019 squad, and 17 sophomores played in the loss to Baker, Bennett said.

"That was their first experience in a varsity playoff game, and we have not forgotten," he said.

Among those players, now seniors, are quarterback Jacob Hage, who threw a 76-yard touchdown pass in the 2019 playoff game, and Blake Lewis, who had a 33-yard touchdown run against Baker.

The Bulldogs, meanwhile,



Buell Gonzales Jr./Contributed Photo

Baker's Alex Hammans, No. 23 at left, carries the ball against Cascade Saturday, Nov. 9 2019, at Cascade. Hammans had a touchdown run in Baker's 38-21 playoff win.

return just a few players from the 2019 playoff team.

One of those players, though, has the Cougars' attention, Bennett said.

Running back Gauge Bloomer, now a senior, led Baker with 95 yards on 18 carries as a sophomore in the 2019 playoff win at Cascade, including an 8-yard touchdown run late in the game.

"He was a significant player from that game," Bennett said of Bloomer.

Baker coach Jason Ramos, who was on the sidelines for the Bulldogs' win at Cascade two years ago, agrees with Bennett's assessment of the differences between the two teams compared with 2019.

"We're young," Ramos said. "We've got some pretty athletic young kids, but it is kind of a reversal of that game two years ago. We know that (Cascade) has upperclassmen this year, and they're loaded."

Ramos said the Bulldogs are grateful for the chance not only to play, but to do so in September, the traditional start to the season.

"We know that they're going to be a tough opponent," he said of Cascade. "We're always excited for the opportunity to

## More Information

- Cascade Cougars vs. Baker Bulldogs
- Saturday, Sept. 4, 2 p.m.
- Baker Bulldog Memorial Stadium, Ninth and E streets
- Fans required to wear face masks. No limits on the number of fans.

play westside teams. This will be a good gauge for where we are as a team."

Sophomore Paul Hobson will start at quarterback for Baker.

"He did play some as a freshman, and we're expecting him to step up and have a good sophomore season," Ramos said.

Breaking in a new quarterback is less challenging, he said, when Hobson has a veteran running back such as Bloomer to hand the ball to.

"Gauge is a great senior leader," Ramos said. "He's got a lot of experience. That is going to be helpful."

Baker and Cascade both went 3-3 during the pandemic-abbreviated season that ran from early March to early April this year.

They didn't have any common opponents.

BAKER SPORTS ROUNDUP

# Bulldogs get road wins

**Baker City Herald**

Multiple Baker High School sports teams went on the road Thursday, Sept. 2 and all had successful trips.

The Bulldog girls soccer team traveled to Ontario and beat Four Rivers 5-1 for its first win after opening the season with three losses.

Baker's volleyball team rallied in the fifth and deciding set to nip Union.

And the Baker girls and boys cross-country teams had strong performances at the big Caldwell Twilight meet in Idaho.

## Girls soccer

Junior Sydnee Pierce had a hat trick as Baker took 36 shots on goal in its strongest offensive performance of the season.

Junior Daphne Thomas and freshman Jill Poe each had a goal.

Although Baker's five goals was one more than the Bulldogs scored in their first three matches, assistant coach Christine Teegarden said defense was the real key in the win over Four Rivers.

"Our defensive line is really starting to understand their positioning and function well as a defensive unit which in turn helps the whole team stay in formation better," Teegarden said.

## Volleyball

Baker seemed poised to get the sweep at Union, winning the first two sets, 25-21 and 25-18. But the

Bobcats rallied to win the next two, 25-17 and 25-23, forcing a decisive fifth set.

Union continued its momentum in the final set, racing to an 8-4 lead.

But after Baker coach Ali Abrego called a timeout, the Bulldogs dominated, winning 11 of the final 14 points to claim the hard-fought match with a 15-11 win in the final set.

Abrego said she simply told her players during the timeout to "trust each other."

"They really banded together, and it was awesome to see," Abrego said. "It was a big moment for us mentally."

## Cross-country

Baker traveled to Idaho for the Caldwell Twilight, a major meet with 33 teams and more than 275 runners competing.

The Baker girls, led by senior Emma Bath's 27th-place finish (21:12.41), placed 11th in the team standings.

Other girls results: Sydney Lamb, 39th; Sofia Kaaen, 68th; Emma Timm, 85th; Paige Maria, 87th.

Junior Thaddeus Pepera was Baker's top boys runner, placing 54th in a time of 17:52.53.

Baker finished 17th in the team standings.

Other Baker boys: Jordan Mills, 73rd; Daniel Brown, 90th; Seth Masturde, 120th; River Clark, 132nd; Payton Waters, 133rd.

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