

BAKER VOLLEYBALL

4th-ranked Baker sweeps Vale

■ Bulldogs win eighth straight match

By JAYSON JACOBY

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Baker's volleyball team continued its September win streak Tuesday, Sept. 28 at Vale with what coach Ali Abrego called a "perfect" match.

The Bulldogs won their eighth straight match with a 25-22, 25-13, 25-18 sweep of the Vikings.

"The kids had a breakthrough," Abrego said. "They played perfect for the first time this season. It was really fun to see them recognizing their own success."

Baker, ranked fourth in the Class 4A standings by the Oregon School Activities Association, improved to 10-2.

The Bulldogs haven't lost since a 3-0 sweep by Weiser in the Baker gym on Sept. 8.

Abrego said Baker's stand-out performance Tuesday at Vale was especially impressive because it was the Bulldogs' first match in eight days.

And although Abrego said Baker had a few "slow" practices during the break, she wasn't overly surprised that the Bulldogs played so well at Vale.

"It can be hard to maintain that competitive mindset during such a long break, but we have a really competitive group, and they're pretty self-driven," Abrego said. "It was awesome to see them put it all together."

The sweep of Vale was a

true team effort, Abrego said, but she said several Bulldogs excelled in particular areas.

Rylee Elms had multiple key blocks, Abrego said, and fellow junior Jozie Ramos, who plays both as setter and outside hitter, had an "outstanding" match.

Lacy Churchfield, Baker's lone senior, played well in the back row, as did junior Taylor Dalton, Abrego said.

Another junior, Macey Moore, "scored several points just by being smart with the ball," Abrego said.

Sweeping Vale is no small accomplishment, Abrego said.

The Class 3A Vikings are "a solid program," she said, and they've already swept Greater Oregon League teams Ontario and La Grande this season.

During the abbreviated season this past spring, Baker's two matches against Vale both went to five sets, with each team winning on its home court.

Baker will try to keep its winning streak intact as it moves into the heart of its league schedule, starting this evening, Sept. 30, by playing host to Mac-Hi at 6:30 p.m.

"I feel good about how we are playing," Abrego said. "But it's one game at a time. You can never be too comfortable with where you're at. That's how mistakes happen."

Lillard has faith Blazers will be better this season

By ANNE M. PETERSON

Associated Press

If this summer taught Damian Lillard anything, it's that he's dedicated.

The Trail Blazers guard married his longtime girlfriend and the mother of his three kids, played in the Olympics despite withdrawing his name from consideration from the national team a few years ago, and worked on his second career in music.

He said the busy offseason centered him, because he acted on his convictions.

"All of those things that I stuck with is what has me here," Lillard said Monday, Sept. 27, at the team's media day. "What keeps me so invested here is I want to see it through. I want to see it happen. I mean what I say."

There was speculation at the end of last season that Lillard might be looking to move on from the Blazers.

Lillard fueled rumors about his future in Portland following the team's first-round elimination from the playoffs. He posted a photo of himself in street clothes at the Moda Center, and quoted the late rapper and activist Nipsey Hussle.

"How long should I stay dedicated?" he wrote. "How long til opportunity meet preparation?"

But in the offseason the Blazers dismissed longtime coach Terry Stotts and hired

Chauncey Billups to take over. The team also added players including forward Larry Nance Jr., center Cody Zeller and Ben McLemore.

While Portland didn't end up making a blockbuster deal that some fans wanted, the Blazers have solid depth.

"We've established so much as a team and as an organization, we don't want to just go do something to just to say, 'I made a change.' You want it to be in line with something that could actually make us better, something that could send us to the level that we're trying to get to," Lillard said. "We've done some things that I like. I didn't expect us to go out there and get Kevin Durant all of the sudden."

Portland finished the regular season 42-30 and earned the sixth seed in the Western Conference. The team was riding momentum, having won 10 of its final 12 regular-season games. But the playoffs were brief as Portland was eliminated in the opening round by Denver.

Lillard averaged 28.8 points and 7.5 assists during the regular season.

"Everybody knows the affinity he has for the city, for the fan base. He's really excited," Billups said. "At the end of the day, Dame wants exactly what we all want,



Sean Meagher/The Oregonian-TNS

Portland Trail Blazers guard Damian Lillard holds up his gold medal won with USA Basketball during the Tokyo Summer Olympics during media day on Monday, Sept. 27, 2021 at Moda Center.

and that's to be successful and win. I think he's happy with what's happened this summer, with our roster being a lot deeper. A little less pressure for him to be absolutely amazing every single night."

The Blazers announced Monday that the team is 100% vaccinated.

Lillard said the decision to get the vaccination was an easy one.

"I have a lot of people in my family who I'm tight with and spend a lot of time around, and I'm just not going to put their health or their lives in danger because I have to go do research," Lillard said. "As a kid, I had to get shots my whole life, before I went to college, I had to get shots. And I couldn't

tell you one thing about any of them."

Lillard is entering his 10th NBA season. The closest he's come to a title was a trip to the Western Conference finals in 2019.

Perhaps this is the season the Blazers take the next step.

"I think over the years we've always had a competitive team, I think we'll be competitive again," Lillard said. "Obviously, at the end of last season I wanted to see our roster improve. I wanted us to have a better chance to win. And we had our conversations throughout the summer about what that looked like, and how we could take steps in that direction. I come into this season with faith that that's going to happen."

Beavers' offensive line honored

By NICK DASCHIEL

oregonlive.com

CORVALLIS — There isn't a position group in the Pac-12 getting more kudos and love this week than Oregon State's offensive line following their beatdown of USC's defense last Saturday, Sept. 25.

It was effective, dominant and breathtaking to watch, particularly when OSU turned to the running game, which was often. The easiest call come Monday was that the Pac-12's offensive line player of the week would come from Oregon State.

"I think any one of our guys could have gotten that award," Oregon State center Nathan Eldridge said.

Why Eldridge?

"I don't know. Maybe because I'm old and got a bald head," said the seventh-year senior.

The praise is deserved, but the offensive line wasn't alone in opening holes for running back B.J. Baylor and others. Oregon State's tight ends are quietly becoming one of the Pac-12's best at their position.

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Tight ends are often judged by outsiders for their ability to enhance the passing game. The Beavers have that ability, as 6-foot-6 Teagan Quitoriano and Luke Musgrave are big, mobile targets. Through four games, though, their pass catching isn't game changing. Quitoriano and Musgrave combined have 14 catches for 168 yards and two touchdowns.

But in the Jonathan Smith/Brian Lindgren offense, the value of a tight end is primarily judged on their ability to block. And block this pair does. Against USC, Oregon State often used Quitoriano and Musgrave in two tight end sets, many times on the same side.

Adding two proven run-blocking tight ends to a veteran offensive line gives Oregon State's running game versatility.

"It makes it tough for people to defend. We can motion them a little bit," said Lindgren, OSU's offensive coordinator. "Just having that physicality on the edge, and that size on the edge has really helped us."

Quitoriano, a fourth-year junior, earned early playing time as a true freshman because of his run blocking ability. Musgrave's strength early in his career was receiving, but Lindgren said he's blossomed as a run blocker in 2021. But by season's end, Lindgren thinks Musgrave will become the complete package. Lindgren said defensive coverage and play calls have contributed to Musgrave's low total of five receptions through four games.

"It'll end up evening out as we keep going through the season," Lindgren said.

If tight ends wanted to become run blockers, most of them would bulk up and become offensive linemen. Lindgren said he hears about the routes they'll run and touchdowns they'll score on the tight

end recruiting trail. But ultimately the tight ends the Beavers offer and eventually sign know the drill at

Oregon State.

"The guys we're trying to recruit and want in our program are guys who want to

excel at both. The guys who want to play at the highest level have to do both," Lindgren said.

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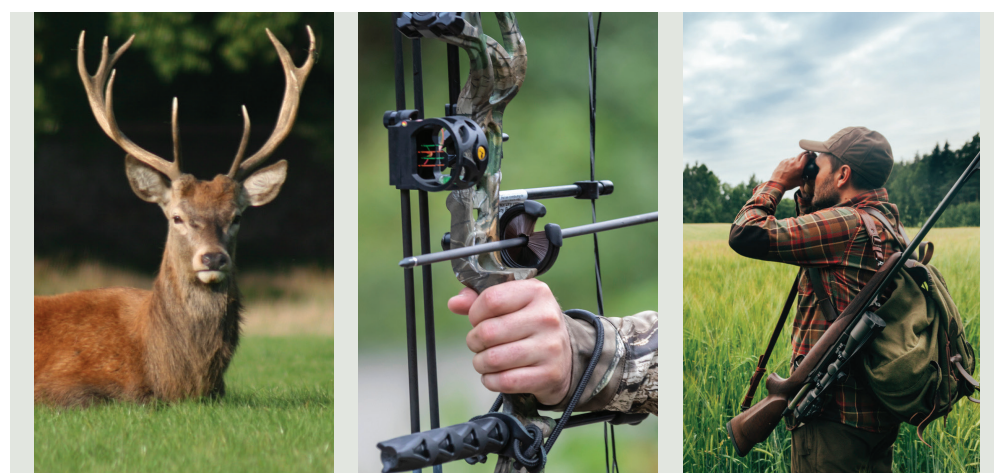
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