

BAKER GIRLS SOCCER

La Grande shuts out Baker

By COREY KIRK

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The Baker girls soccer team played a strong defensive match against La Grande on Tuesday, Oct. 12, but the Bulldogs couldn't get their offense going in a 2-0 loss to the Tigers.

"It was an awesome showing, I'm so proud of those girls," Baker coach Eric Layton said.

With the loss, Baker fell to 2-8-1. La Grande, which is ranked fourth in the state Class 4A standings, improved to 8-2-1.

It was Baker's second close loss to the Tigers. La Grande won 3-2 on Sept. 21 at the Baker Sports Complex.

With Tuesday's match played on the artificial turf

at La Grande's Community Stadium rather than the grass of the Sports Complex, Layton and his coaching staff employed a more conservative approach to help the Bulldogs get used to the different surface.

"The girls were very flexible and responded to the formation change bravely," Layton said.

Throughout the first half, the Tigers managed to keep the ball mostly on Baker's side of the field, and with less than four minutes remaining in the half, La Grande junior Giselle Sanchez scored the first goal of the game.

In the second half, La Grande continued to get shots on goal, but Layton credits the efforts of Baker junior goalkeeper Neah

Thomas for keeping the Bulldogs in the game.

"She (Thomas) is improving weekly," Layton said. "I thought she exploited the weak side of the field very well and helped our team counterattack. I am very proud of Neah."

The Tigers were able to secure the victory late in the second half with an insurance goal from junior Rosie Aguilera.

Layton praised freshman Jaycee Gray's play on offense.

"She was patient attacking their defense and really strong when she had the ball," Layton said.

The Bulldogs return to the road next Tuesday, Oct. 19, traveling to Ontario to take on the Tigers (2-7) for a 4 p.m. PDT kickoff.



Alex Wittwer/The (La Grande) Observer

Baker junior co-captain Anna Belding attempts to dribble past a Tiger defender early in the first half on Tuesday, Oct. 12 at Community Stadium in La Grande.

Lillard embarking on pivotal season with Blazers

By ANNE M. PETERSON

Associated Press

PORTLAND — For all the handwringing this summer over Damian Lillard's happiness in Portland, the Trail Blazers guard is staying put, hopeful the team's moves will pay off.

The biggest, of course, was parting ways with coach Terry Stotts after nine seasons. Portland hired Chauncey Billups, who has no prior experience as an NBA head coach.

The nucleus of Lillard, guard CJ McCollum and center Jusuf Nurkic remains intact, but Portland shored up the roster with the addition of Larry Nance Jr., Cody Zeller and Ben McLemore. Carmelo Anthony and Enes Kanter have moved on.

While the team didn't strike any splashy offseason deals, Lillard believes the Blazers are in a better place.

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

Portland finished 42-30 last season and earned the sixth seed in the Western Conference. The team won 10 of its final 12 regular-season games but the playoffs ended quickly with the Blazers eliminated by Denver in the opening round.

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.

He ranked third in the NBA with an average of 28.8 points last season, and was in the top 10 with 7.5 assists. But it may be Portland's last season with their All-Star and Olympian, unless the team gets results.

"I think we all know

we've got to get over the hump," Nurkic said.

Anfernee's opportunity

Portland didn't make any moves for a proven backup point guard in the offseason, an issue that's plagued the Blazers in recent years. McCollum has taken on those duties at times.

Anfernee Simons, going into his fourth year in the NBA, is looking to fill the role.

When Lillard was given the night off in a preseason game against the Sacramento Kings, Simons scored 24 points.

"He's continued to make strides and stay aggressive. I want him to always just be confident," Billups said. "Even some nights those shots aren't going to be falling, just him being aggressive and getting spots he wants to get to and playmaking."

More involved

Nurkic is excited about taking on a greater offensive role this season.

He was frustrated with how he was used last season under Stotts, who leaned on him defensively. He averaged 11.5 points and nine rebounds last season but missed time because of a broken wrist.

Billups told Nurkic in the offseason that he'd expand his presence on both ends. "I'm looking for a big year personally for me and the team," Nurkic said.

Vaccination status

The Blazers are 100% vaccinated among the players and coaching staff. Lillard said when the vaccinations became available, he wanted to line up his whole family for the shot.

"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."

Fraud case

Trail Blazers assistant coach Milt Palacio was among 18 former NBA players who were charged in federal court this month with defrauding the league's health and welfare benefit plan. Authorities said the scam involved claiming fictitious medical and dental expenses.

As a result, Palacio was placed on administrative

leave by the Blazers.

"The federal investigation is independent of the Trail Blazers organization and we will have no further comment pending the outcome of the legal process," the team said.

Former Trail Blazers Sebastian Telfair, Darius Miles and Ruben Patterson were also charged.

Busy offseason

The Blazers backcourt didn't rest in the offseason.

Lillard got married to his college sweetheart, won an Olympic gold medal, and released new music. Not to be outdone, CJ McCollum announced he and his wife are expecting their first child, bought a winery and that he was named president of the NBA Players Association.

Lillard brought his gold medal to the team's annual media day, asking whether

he should pass it around to the reporters present. Then

he quickly changed his mind: "Y'all can't touch my medal."

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