

La Grande pulls away in second half to spoil Baker's Homecoming

■ Tigers score 20 straight points in second half to win, 27-7

By COREY KIRK

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For the first half of Baker's Homecoming football game against La Grande Friday, Oct. 29, it looked as though the Bulldogs might earn another game at Bulldog Memorial Stadium, this one in the Class 4A playoffs.

But after playing to a 7-7 tie at halftime, Baker (4-5) couldn't fend off the Tigers (6-1) in the second half as they pulled away for a 27-7 win.

The win gave La Grande the Greater Oregon League championship, and a home playoff game Friday, Nov. 5 against Gladstone.

Baker, meanwhile, will have to board a bus for a long drive across the state to Eugene. The Bulldogs will take on Marist Catholic Saturday, Nov. 6 at 2 p.m.

Baker has a bit of history with the Spartans.

Marist beat Baker 55-16 in the 2009 state championship game. The Bulldogs then won state championships in 2010, beating Douglas in the title game, and again in 2012, beating North Bend.

In preparing for Friday's Homecoming game against rival La Grande, Baker coach Jason Ramos said he expected the Tigers' ground game, led by Brody MacMillan, would be tough.

"We were going to have to really be physical and aggressive on playside and be very disciplined on the backside," Ramos said. "We didn't get fancy on defense, we gave them probably two or three different looks from time-to-time."

The strategy largely worked in the first half.

The Tigers got on the



Baker quarterback Paul Hobson, No. 3, looks for room against the defense of La Grande's Myer Whitmore, left, No. 77, and Cole Jorgensen, No. 51, during Baker's Homecoming game Friday, Oct. 29.



Baker senior Gauge Bloomer carries the ball against La Grande during the Bulldogs' Homecoming game Friday, Oct. 29.

board first when junior quarterback Logan Williams ran 11 yards for a score early in the first quarter.

But the Bulldogs responded on their next possession when sophomore quarterback Paul Hobson scored on a 12-yard run.

Ramos said Hobson had a strong first half.

"He did a great job, we kind of expected that coming off of the week before where we felt

like he had a really good game against Burns and he managed the game well through the first half," Ramos said.

On the defensive side, meanwhile, Baker kept the Tigers out of the end zone for the remainder of the first half.

"Felt pretty good about how the game went the first half and how we played really good defense and got them (Tigers) off the field a couple of times," Ramos said.

The teams exchanged a series of four punts during the second quarter.

Jaron Long's interception late in the quarter gave Baker good field position, but Hudson Spike's field goal try was just short and the score remained 7-7 at intermission.

Although Ramos was pleased overall with Baker's performance, he told the team at halftime that they needed to improve.

"We knew we needed to block better, we talked about a couple things they were seeing that La Grande was doing and how we were going to adjust to that," Ramos said. "We talked about how we need to get the run game going, and we just need to execute our game plan better."

MacMillan had a 30-yard run on the Tigers' first drive of the second half, but the Baker defense tightened and, with help from three La Grande penalties, the Bulldogs forced a turnover on downs.

On the subsequent La Grande possession Williams connected with Jace Schow on a leaping 40-yard reception deep in Baker territory.

The Bulldogs denied the Tigers on three straight plays, forcing a fourth-and-goal from the Baker 5.

Williams then kept the ball on a bootleg and sprinted to the right side of the end zone to give La Grande a 13-7 lead. Baker blocked the extra point.

Baker had to punt on its next possession, and La Grande again took advantage, this time on MacMillan's 41-yard run that pushed La Grande's lead to 20-7 at the end of the third quarter.

Baker's offense struggled to get first downs. The Bulldogs punted on six of their 10 possessions in the game.

"You can't go three and out," Ramos said. "They pinned us in our own end multiple times and those are situations where you have to string together first downs

Baker travels for playoff game

The Bulldogs will travel to Eugene for a 2 p.m. game Saturday, Nov. 6 against Marist Catholic. Marist is 7-2. The teams have one common opponent, both losing to Cascade. The Cougars beat Baker 35-0 on Sept. 4, and they beat Marist 38-33 on Oct. 8.

Powder Valley advances

The Powder Valley Badgers routed Lone/Arlington 48-20 on Friday, Oct. 29 at Community Stadium in La Grande to advance in the Class 1A football playoffs.

The Badgers, seeded second in the state, will play host to No. 15 Perrydale on Friday, Nov. 5 at 6 p.m.

for field position sake. We just didn't do a very good job, especially in the second half, being able to sustain any drives."

La Grande junior Kaden Nelson completed the scoring when he intercepted a Hobson pass in the fourth quarter and returned it 35 yards for a touchdown.

La Grande held Baker to 115 yards of offense and largely contained senior running back Gauge Bloomer, who had 22 yards on 15 carries.

Ramos said he told his players after the disappointing loss to remember that they have a playoff game coming up.

"We talked to them after the game about how we have to use every game as a learning opportunity and so there are things that we have to take away from the La Grande game," Ramos said. "The positives, definitely, but also things we definitely need to work on in preparation for this week."

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