

BAKER BOYS BASKETBALL

Baker rallies past Vale in 3 OT thriller

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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Baker's boys basketball team lost an hour crossing into the Mountain time zone, but the Bulldogs had barely begun to extend their evening.

It took three overtimes — 12 minutes total, the equivalent of an extra quarter and a half — but Baker finally vanquished the Vale Vikings, 88-87, on Tuesday, Jan. 18, in a raucous Vale gym.

Isaiah Jones scored off a missed layup with 2 seconds left, the final lead change in a tense, exciting game in which the teams swapped momentum like trading cards.

Jones was fouled on the putback.

He missed the free throw, and although his dad, Jebron Jones, who's also Baker's head coach, said the miss wasn't intentional, it was actually to the Bulldogs' advantage.

Had Isaiah Jones made the free throw, Vale could have called timeout — Vikings coach Colby Shira had tried to do so before the free throw — and potentially set up a play that would have led to at least a decent look at a game-winning shot.

But with just 2 seconds left, the Vikings had no chance to rebound the missed free throw and get anything resembling a shot.

"It worked out great for us," Jebron Jones said.

That last missed free throw was the only one, however, that he would describe in anything but negative terms.

Baker went just 6 for 14 from the line, including 4 for 10 in the three overtime periods.

"We could have won in regulation if we had made one or two more free throws," Jebron Jones said. "It just goes to show how important free throws are. We missed a bunch."

Vale did not. The Vikings were 11 of 12 from the line, including 8 for 8 in the overtimes.

Despite his disappointment



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Baker's Isaiah Jones, shown here against Fruitland on Jan. 6, 2022, scored the game-winning rebound basket with 2 seconds left in the Bulldogs' 88-87, three-overtime win at Vale on Tuesday, Jan. 18, 2022.

at Baker's free-throwing shooting woes, Jones was impressed by the Bulldogs' fortitude in a road game in front of an enthusiastic group of Vale fans.

"They definitely had the advantage, and their fans were really intense," Jones said. "It was a great atmosphere to play in. I like the way they handled themselves on the court. They didn't seem too flustered, and they didn't fold."

Indeed the Bulldogs seemed to thrive on adversity.

Baker trailed in each of the overtime periods.

"We had to battle back for sure," Jones said.

Vale had a chance to win the game in regulation, with the score tied at 64, but Baker forced a turnover in the final second to send the game into the first overtime.

Baker led 73-69 with 1:40

left in the first extra 4-minute period, but Vale rallied.

Baker still led 73-71 with 17.8 seconds left, but Isaiah Jones missed a free throw with 14.7 seconds left and the referees called a foul on Paul Hobson on a rebound attempt, sending Vale's Tanner Steele to the free throw line. Steele made both shots with 13.9 seconds left.

Baker had two potential game winners in the final 5 seconds, but Hobson's three-pointer, and Hudson Spike's 15-footer, both just missed, sending the game into a second overtime.

Vale's Diesel Johnson, who led all scorers with 31 points, banked in a three-pointer with 2:02 left in the second overtime to give Vale a 76-75 lead.

Jones beat his defender with a crossover and soared for a

BAKER (88)

Logsdon 0 3-4 3, Gambleton 1 0-0 2, Quintela 1 0-0 2, Younger 2 0-0 5, Molina 1 0-0 2, Spike 10 1-2 22, Jones 10 2-8 23, Long 6 0-0 12, Hobson 6 0-0 17, Mitchell 0 0-0 0. Totals 37 6-14 88.

VALE (87)

Stepleton 4 4-4 16, Wolfe 7 0-0 15, Steele 3 2-2 8, McCourtney 5 0-0 14, Johnson 11 4-4 31, Haueter 1 0-0 2, Karata 1 1-2 1. Totals 31 11-12 87. Baker 17 19 18 10 9 5 10 — 88 Vale 20 16 11 17 9 5 9 — 87

twisting layup that gave Baker the lead at 77-76 with 1:42 left. Baker led 78-76, but Vale's John Wolfe scored inside with 39 seconds left to tie the score, and the game went to a third extra period.

Vale led 85-81 after Colten Stepleton made two free throws with 1:43 left, but Baker's Jaxson Logsdon made two free throws 12 seconds later to cut the Vikings' lead to 85-83.

Logsdon then made one of two free throws to cut the lead to 85-84 with 55 seconds left.

Baker's Jaron Long stole a pass, then rebounded his own miss to give Baker an 86-85 lead with 23.8 seconds left.

On Vale's ensuing possession, Isaiah Jones, going for a steal, committed what Jebron Jones called a "silly" foul, and Stepleton made both free throws to give Vale its final lead with 17.7 seconds left.

On the final possession, Spike beat his man off the dribble and drove to the basket, but his layup attempt rolled off the rim.

Isaiah Jones and Logsdon

were both in position to grab the rebound, and Jones made the game-winning putback.

Prior to the overtime dramatics, the game was close most of the way, just as Jebron Jones expected.

Vale entered the game with a 12-3 record, with two wins each over Ontario and Weiser, Idaho. The Vikings lost 61-56 to La Grande, which is likely Baker's chief rival for the Greater Oregon League title, on Dec. 16.

"I knew going into the game Vale would be ready to go," Jones said.

The game was tied at 36 at halftime, but Baker forged ahead by as many as 10 points in the third quarter before settling for a 54-47 lead entering the fourth quarter.

Vale rallied in the fourth quarter thanks largely to 3-pointers.

The Vikings had three of their 14 3-pointers in the fourth quarter.

Jones said a few of the 14 long balls resulted from Baker's defensive lapses, but he also

credited Vale with making "a lot of tough shots."

"We can't continue to give up 14 3's and expect to win," he said.

Jones was generally pleased with Baker's offensive performance, which yielded a season-high 88 points — albeit with 12 extra minutes.

"We shared the ball well," he said.

Baker had four players score in double figures, with Isaiah Jones tallying 23, Spike 22, Hobson 17 and Long 12.

The Bulldogs, who have won four straight and, at 10-3, are ranked eight in the Class 4A division, now prepare for their twice-delayed start to the GOL season, by playing host to Ontario on Friday, Jan. 21, at 7:30 p.m. in the Baker gym.

Baker is then scheduled to travel to Milton-Freewater on Saturday, Jan. 22, to take on Mac-Hi at 2:30 p.m. That game was initially set for Jan. 14, but was postponed due to COVID-19 issues on the Mac-Hi team.

Jones said he's confident that Baker is ready for back-to-back games, after showing that they're in good condition by playing strong against Vale despite the extra quarter and a half.

"I think our kids are in decent shape," Jones said. "We know that we have to be, because we're not very big. We're looking forward to league play."

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