

BAKER BOYS BASKETBALL

La Grande romps past Bulldogs, 76-44

Tigers avenge Baker's 67-41 win at La Grande on Jan. 28

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So much for home court advantage.

The Baker and La Grande boys basketball teams seem to have no respect for the traditional notion that the home team, comforted by familiar surroundings and energized by its fans filling the gym with decibels, can overcome rough stretches.

The last two games between these rivals, over a span of nine days, have defied that convention.

On Tuesday night, Feb. 8, in a loud Baker gym, the Tigers scored the final 14 points of the first quarter and the first basket of the second to take a 12-point lead.

Baker rallied briefly later in the second quarter, but the Tigers dominated thereafter and went on to a 76-44 rout.

The margin of victory was especially shocking given what happened on Jan. 28 at La Grande.

There, the Bulldogs controlled the game from the start in a 67-41 win that Baker coach Jebron Jones described as "one of the funnest games I've been a part of in my coaching and playing career."

The rematch was decidedly less pleasant.

"La Grande came in with something to prove," Jones said after the loss on Tuesday night. "When you lose on your home court like they did the first time, they came out and played hard all 32 minutes. They attacked the glass, made the right pass. They did a great job."

As the wildly different results in the two games make clear, almost everything that worked for Baker at La Grande nine days earlier was ineffective Tuesday.

The halfcourt trap that so discombobulated the Tigers yielded just a few steals Tuesday at Baker.

Baker's fullcourt press was similarly fruitless.

La Grande coach Mark Carollo said he emphasized in preparing his team for the rematch how vital it was that they keep their composure against Baker's frenetic defense.

"We knew the pressure was going to come," Carollo said. "It was a matter of knowing where to go with the ball, frankly just being strong with the ball. We did a good job of not getting in a hurry."

The Tigers also took advantage of Baker's double teams to find open teammates in the key for more than half a dozen easy baskets.

"It's about keeping your head up and seeing your options," Carollo said. "If you have two people guarding you somebody is going to be open."

That Tuesday's game was back and forth to start shouldn't have surprised anyone.

Baker's romp at La Grande is a stark anomaly on the Tigers' 12-2 record. Their only other loss was 57-43 against Fruitland, Idaho, on Dec. 14.

On Tuesday the teams traded baskets, and leads, early.

The score was tied at 5 and 7. Isaiah Jones and Hudson Spike had consecutive short jumpers to give Baker an 11-7 lead midway through the first quarter.

But the Bulldogs didn't score again before the break.

Devin Bell started La Grande's game-turning 16-0 run with a 3-pointer.

The Tigers scored seven points in the last 48 seconds, capped by Sam Tsiatsos' two inside hoops, and La Grande led 21-11 after the first quarter.

Alex Rodriguez opened the



Baker's Jaron Long, who missed the previous three games with a knee injury, guards La Grande's Logan Williams on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in the Baker gym.

"We have a target on our back. The kids have to get used to the fact that people are coming at them."

— Baker coach Jebron Jones



Baker's Isaiah Jones is swarmed by La Grande defenders during the Tigers' 76-44 win in the Baker gym on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022.

scoring in the second quarter with two free throws to push La Grande's lead to 23-11.

Jones ended the 16-0 run with an inside basket, and he followed that with a 3-pointer. Hobson scored on a nice pass from Jaxon Logsdon to cut La Grande's lead to 25-18.

After Tsiatsos' rebound basket boosted the Tigers' lead to 29-20, Jones swished another 3-pointer that provoked a roar from the Baker fans and cut the lead to 29-23.

But the Bulldogs would never get closer.

Bell scored seven points in the final three minutes of the half, and Rodriguez's inside basket with seven seconds left pushed the La Grande lead to 44-31 at halftime.

Bell had 14 of his game-high 21 points in the first half, and the Tigers had four 3-pointers.

"We came out and shot the ball extremely well in the first half," Carollo said.

Jones had 14 of his 16 points in the first half.

With ruthless efficiency the Tigers quickly quashed any hope of a Baker rally in the second half.

La Grande scored the first 10 points of the third quarter, and after Brady Hutchins made a 3-pointer with 4:37 left in the quarter, La

Grande's lead had swelled to 54-31.

Grant Gambleton made a reverse layin, and Logsdon hit a 3-pointer with 3:30 left in the quarter, his fist pump briefly enlivening the Baker crowd as he trimmed the lead to 54-36.

But Hutchins had a rebound basket and Rodriguez had yet another layin to push the Tigers' lead back to 58-36.

La Grande then capped its nearly flawless performance by scoring the final 12 points of the game.

The Tigers outscored Baker 32-13 in the second half.

La Grande had four players in double figures — in addition to Bell's 21, Rodriguez had 17, and Hutchins and Tsiatsos 13 each.

Baker had just two players in double figures — Jones



Baker's Hudson Spike goes to the basket against La Grande on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in the Baker gym.



Baker's Hudson Spike leaps to block a shot by La Grande's Jace Schow on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in the Baker gym.

with 16 and Hobson with 11. Carollo admitted that the outcome surprised him.

And with a laugh he sug-

gested that Jones, his longtime friend, probably felt the same.

(Jones, a former basketball player at Eastern Ore-

LA GRANDE (76)

Tsiatsos 6 0-0 13, Williams 3 0-0 8, Young 0 0-0 0, A. Rodriguez 7 3-3 17, Bell 9 1-2 21, C. Rodriguez 1 0-0 2, Huntsman 0 0-0 0, Schow 0 2-2 2, Hutchins 6 0-0 13, Staab 0 0-0 0, Begin 0 0-0 0. Totals 32 6-7 76.

BAKER (44)

Logsdon 1 0-0 3, Harper 0 0-0 0, Gambleton 1 0-0 2, Quintela 0 0-0 0, Younger 1 0-1 2, Molina 0 0-0 0, Spike 2 2-2 6, Jones 7 0-2 16, Long 2 0-0 4, Hobson 5 0-0 11, Charbonneau 0 0-0 0, Mitchell 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 2-5 44.

La Grande 21 23 14 18 — 76
Baker 11 20 7 6 — 44

gon University, was on the coaching staff at EOU during the mid 2000s while Carollo, from Hermiston, was an All-American player for the Mountaineers.)

"I don't know if either of us expected what we got on our home court," Carollo said. "I'm just happy that our boys were able to show up tonight."

Jones said that despite his disappointment, he understands — and told his players — that La Grande's performance shows that all of Baker's opponents are likely to bring a special intensity to the game given the Bulldogs' record — now 15-5 and 4-1 in the Greater Oregon League.

"I take it as a compliment," Jones said. "We have a target on our back. The kids have to get used to the fact that people are coming at them."

He conceded that the two straight losses — Baker lost 69-68 to Powder Valley on a late 3-pointer by Reece Dixon on Feb. 5 — stung because the two opponents are Baker's closest foes, geographically, and both games were in Baker's gym.

"It hurts a little more because it's La Grande, and it's at home," Jones said. "That hurts the pride a little bit."

He was glad, though, that the Bulldogs had little time to think about the two losses. They returned to their home court on Wednesday, Feb. 9, against Vale (the game tipped off after press time for the Thursday, Feb. 10, issue).

Jones said the Vikings, like La Grande and Powder Valley, have something to prove against Baker.

The Bulldogs beat Vale 88-87 in a three-overtime thriller on Jan. 18, at Vale.

"I'm glad we play tomorrow," Jones said Tuesday night, "just so I can see the character of the young men."

Baker freshman Jaron Long, who missed Baker's previous three games after injuring his knee in the win at La Grande on Jan. 28, returned on Tuesday. Long entered the game with five minutes left in the first quarter and finished with four points.

Baker concludes its GOL schedule Friday, Feb. 11, traveling to Ontario for a 6:30 p.m. PST tip off.

If Baker wins it will finish with a 5-1 league record. La Grande is 3-1 with games remaining against Mac-Hi and Ontario. If Baker and La Grande are tied, the team with the highest RPI ranking would host the GOL playoff game on Feb. 19. As of Wednesday morning, Feb. 9, Baker was ranked eighth, and La Grande ninth.

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