

BAKER BOYS BASKETBALL TEAM

Bulldogs rout Gladstone, earn berth in state tourney



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Jaron Long had a game-high 19 points in Baker's win over Sisters on Feb. 26, 2022, in the Baker gym. Long had 20 points in Baker's playoff win at Gladstone on Friday, March 4, 2022.

BY JAYSON JACOBY

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With its season goals hanging in the balance, the Baker boys played with a precision both brutal and balletic.

Ruthless, really.

With their first berth in the Class 4A state tournament since 2007 at stake, the Bulldogs played perhaps their best game of the season, leading almost from the start in dismantling host Gladstone 80-52 on Friday night, March 4.

Baker will play top-seeded Junction City in a quarterfinal on Thursday, March 10 at 2 p.m. at North Bend High School.

The Gladiators led just once, 3-2 on Carver Mellema's 3-pointer.

Gladstone tied the score at 9, but from there the rout was on.

The Bulldogs scored the next 12 points, with four players getting on the board as Baker turned a close game into a 21-9 lead in little more than a minute.

During that brief but decisive sequence the Bulldogs played with flair and focus, displaying the full array of their strengths on both sides of the court.

Baker's halfcourt trap flustered Gladstone into errant passes and led to turnovers and easy baskets.

Isaiah Jones and Paul Hobson each had a 3-pointer.

Jaron Long weaved between defenders for an acrobatic layin.

Hudson Spike scored in the lane.

After Gladstone's Ben Hoffman ended the Baker scoring run with a 15-footer, the Bulldogs finished the first quar-

ter with an 8-2 run capped by Spike's conventional 3-point play.

Baker scored a season-high 29 first quarter points, leading 29-13 at the break.

Although it was technically still early in the game, the contest was for all intents and purposes over.

Not that Baker stopped playing with urgency.

Gladstone never got closer than 14 points in the final three quarters, and Baker's lead swelled to more than 30 points.

Baker's stellar play even showed up in less obvious statistics than points, rebounds, steals and assists.

The Bulldogs weren't whistled for their first foul until almost halfway through the second quarter.

By that time Gladstone had six fouls.

Baker coach Jebron Jones said he thinks the Bulldogs' most complete game of the season probably was their 67-41 rout of La Grande on the Tigers' home court on Jan. 28.

"But this was a close second or third," Jones said of the Gladstone game.

"The kids knew what they had to do," he said. "It was fun to watch. The kids were extremely unselfish. If we do that we get better looks and easier baskets."

And now the Bulldogs prepare to compete at the state tournament for the first time since 2007, when Baker won its second state title, and first since 1938.

Jones said he is confident the players, many of whom he has coached since they

were in elementary school, will be ready.

"They're playing great ball right now," he said.

Jones said that although he knows his players were nervous before Friday's playoff game at Gladstone, they weren't scared, and their performance showed that.

"I told the kids, there's eight teams left and anything can happen," he said. "It's a bigger stage for sure, but I think they will go into the (state tournament) with confidence."

Baker's unselfish play against Gladstone showed up in the balanced scoring sheet.

Four Bulldogs were in double figures, led by Spike with 21. Long had 20 points, Hobson 15 and Isaiah Jones 12.



Lisa Britton/Baker City Herald

Baker's Hudson Spike goes to the basket against La Grande on Tuesday, Feb. 8, 2022, in the Baker gym. Spike had a game-high 21 points in Baker's playoff win at Gladstone on Friday, March 4, 2022.

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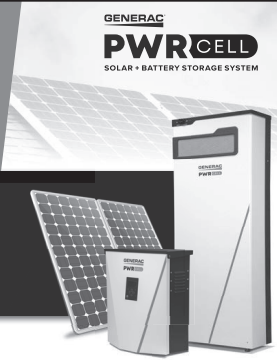
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