

Vikings claim top spot in EOL

By ALEXIS MANSANAREZ
STAFF WRITER

UMATILLA — For the second straight year, members of the Umatilla boys basketball team climbed atop a ladder to cut down the net commemorating its Eastern Oregon League championship.

Last year, the Vikings sealed the deal with a 68-52 win over Vale. This year, they dominated early, came back from a third-quarter lull and pulled off a 61-44 victory against Burns.

“(When) you win back-to-back league champs it’s an awesome feeling to be the senior group to do that,” Kaden Webb said. Webb was one of six seniors honored before Umatilla’s final regular season home game.

But in the same breath that Webb spoke praises for the team’s effort Saturday evening, he admitted the celebration would need to be a quick one.

“At the end of the day, you have to move on,” Webb added. “You celebrate it in the moment but next week we have got to move on to district, then get ready for the state playoff game, so the road doesn’t stop here, you’ve got to keep going.”

As the Vikings (20-5



Umatilla's Sebastian Garcia laughs himself toward the basket despite pressure from two Burns defenders during Saturday's Eastern Oregon League game.

overall, 8-2 EOL) would have it, they will be heading into the postseason riding a five-game win streak.

Umatilla opened the game with a staggering 22-8 lead after the first quarter capped off by two consecutive 3-points from Webb. He was responsible for 10

of those first-quarter points, and he ended the game leading all scorers with 20.

“During timeouts, there was really nothing to tell the kids but to keep working hard and doing what they were doing because there were no adjustments,” head coach Scott Bow said.

The shots kept falling in the second, again Webb hit a three to extend the Vikings’ lead to 30-10. Fellow senior Moises Garcilazo chipped in a 3-pointer second early, and would score five of his seven total points in the second.

The Vikings entered the locker room at halftime up 36-17, and had everything going their way.

As Umatilla prepared to come back out to the court and dominate, Burns was working on its own adjustments to vie for a league championship itself.

The Hilanders outscored Umatilla 13-4 in the third quarter, and kept chipping away at their deficit little by little.

Sophomore Dakota Ceja hit two 3-pointers two minutes apart to keep Burns within striking distance.

But in no time, the Vikings’ shots began to fall again and they eventually put enough distance between themselves and the Hilanders.

“Any time we’ve been down, we rallied every single time so there were no worries that way in the third quarter,” Bow said. “In the end, we made adjustments, (the kids) did what they were supposed to and took care of business.”



Hermiston's Jordan Thomas and Pendleton's Kalan McGlothan go up for a rebound Friday in Pendleton.

GIRLS

continued from Page A10

This is when Pendleton needed another big play.

The Bucks (15-6 overall, 6-0 Columbia River Conference) got it from senior Maureen Davies. Davies was fouled hard at half court, and at the charity stripe made her two free throws. On the ensuing play, Davies towered over the Bulldogs for a big-time blocked shot on Thomas that fellow senior Rylee Gentner secured.

To seal the game-winning score, another senior — one of five on the roster — Hallie Porter, knocked down a jumper in front of Pendleton’s bench that sent the crowd into a frenzy.

With the win, the Bucks have all but secured their place atop the league standings. Only three games remain on the regular season schedule, ending with one final matchup against the Bulldogs (8-13, 4-2) in Hermiston.

The Bulldogs hit four of their six total 3-pointers in the third quarter, and went on a 17-4 run to pull within one point of the Bucks. It was Hermiston’s first chance claim its only lead of the game, and three plays later it did.

Thompson hit a three to put Hermiston up 38-36 with only 15 seconds before the fourth quarter.

The half time coaching that worked was less of a message and more of a much needed adjustment.

“It was more of letting them compose themselves,” Hermiston head coach Juan Rodriguez said. “It’s a big

game and they were out shooting not within our offense and they were a little unfocused defensively. It was just a matter of refocusing, making sure we were in the right defensive spots and making sure we were in our motion offense, executing.”

The Bulldogs were able to do just that and held the Bucks to single digits for almost the entire third quarter. But as the clock ticked down, Pendleton didn’t hesitate to fire back and senior Hallie Porter answered with a three of her own as the buzzer sounded.

Pendleton only gave up its lead once in the final quarter, again behind the efforts of Thompson, but the Bucks went on to play sound, focused offense — hitting all of their 11 free throw attempts — and in the final minutes, aggressive defense.

Hermiston was led by Thompson, but also received help from senior Maddy Juul — who played her most minutes and best game since returning to the floor from a knee injury that has plagued her final year. Juul hit Hermiston’s first two threes in the third quarter to help spark its long run.

Stefani ended that run, and hit a three of her own which was the shot that gave the Bulldogs their first lead.

Stefani has been a reliable player off the bench, and put up nine points in Hermiston’s last outing — the second best team performance.

“Everybody who came off the bench did a good job,” Rodriguez said. “(Sydney) came off the bench tonight and gave us a little bit of a spark as well with the scoring.”

BOYS

continued from Page A10

Both teams took care of the ball in the half with only five combined turnovers, and were matching shot-for-shot on field goals as Hermiston shot 38 percent (11 for 29) and Pendleton 42 percent (11 for 26). In the locker room, Ortiz said the Bulldogs simply talked about continuing the type of play that had helped the Bulldogs earn the halftime advantage.

“Just limiting our turnovers and being patient with the ball,” Ortiz recalled. “We knew that was going to win us the game and that’s what we did, and we came away with (the win).”

In the second half, Hermiston’s defense tightened up and Pendleton’s offense simply dried up, especially from deep. The Buckaroos (12-9, 4-2) were 4 for 8 from three in the first half, but finished 3 for 15 in the second half, including a stretch of 10 straight misses between the third and fourth quarters.

Pendleton fought back to re-take a 37-36 lead



Pendleton's Ryan Russell and Jordan Ramirez, of Hermiston, battle for a rebound during Friday's game at Warberg Court.

with 4:09 left in the game after two technical fouls on Hermiston’s Jordan Ramirez and the team’s bench sent Buckaroos’ Dakota Sams to the free throw line where he made three off the four shots. But that would be the Buckaroos’ only lead of the half as Hermiston tied it back up at 39-39 just 30 seconds later and then took back the lead 42-39 on a 3-pointer by Ortiz with 3:10 left.

Hermiston’s lead was only six with two minutes

left, but as Pendleton still couldn’t buy a bucket they had to resort to fouling the Bulldogs and taking their chances with the Dawgs’ free-throw shooting. And the Bulldogs followed through, as they nailed 10-of-13 shots in the fourth quarter and 16-of-22 for the game, which grew the lead and helped seal the victory.

“I’m proud of the guys,” Hermiston coach Casey Arstein said. “We played good at times and average at times, but the kids stuck

together and that was huge. I just thought it was a great team effort and the guys stayed positive.”

Andrew Earl made his first start of the season for Hermiston in place of Ramirez, who is battling an injury, and played well with 14 points with a pair of first quarter 3-pointers. Adrian Mendez also gave Hermiston a big 11 points, with six of that coming in the fourth quarter.

“A lot of our guys stepped up tonight and we’re pretty happy with that,” Ortiz said.

Arstein knows that the Bulldogs can’t afford to get too confident following Friday’s win. Next up is a home tilt with The Dalles, a team that knocked off the Bulldogs just seven days prior.

“We only have a couple days to rest until Tuesday with The Dalles, and we’re 1-1 with them so we have our work cut out for us,” Arstein said. “But hopefully when we see Pendleton again at home again, it’ll possibly be playing for a conference championship. But right now, we have to just take it one game at a time.”

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