

By JASON EPP

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HOOKER, OKLA.-- Sometimes you have to win ugly. Sometimes you have to win any way you can.

Friday night the shots were not falling, but the Lady Bulldogs found a way with tough defense and just enough offense to win 30-24 over Stratford, Tex..

Part of the Lady Bulldogs problem has been the flu bug that has been passed from teammate to teammate.

"We've been sick now for probably two weeks," said Lady Bulldogs head coach Ray Kennedy. "Hopefully over this break we can get some rest and get healthy."

The flu has not hurt Hooker too bad. They have won four in a row since their loss to Southwestern Heights. The Lady Bulldogs also had to battle Stratford's physical play.

"They are real physical," said Kennedy. "We weren't breaking down in the post area like we are supposed to, and they were just pushing us out of there. They made it tough to score."

The Lady Elks physical style worked in their favor early in the game, taking a slim 7-4 lead. The last point coming from a free throw after Kennedy was hit with a technical foul.

Lady Bulldogs win defensive struggle

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"I just wanted them to call it closer," said Kennedy. "They were calling it both ways. I just wanted them to call it closer."

The physical style did catch up with the Lady Elks as Jessica Ibarra, Stratford's tallest post player collected her third foul in the first period, and Ragan Foos, Stratford's top scorer, got her third foul in the second quarter. But on the scoreboard it was still working with the Lady Elks leading 15-7.

Kennedy changed his team's defensive strategy, and the Lady Bulldogs ended the half on a 7-0 run to close the gap to one.

"We were trying to play man, that's what we would have normally played against them," said Kennedy "but we didn't have any legs, so we ended up going zone."

It worked. Stratford scored 15 points in the games' first 12 minutes, and only 9 in the final 24.

Two quick baskets increased the Lady Elks lead to 20-14 just over a minute into the second half. Hooker was very deliberate at the offensive end, getting the ball to Shayla Mathis on the block. When Mathis scored and was fouled with 3:58 left in the third, she converted the free throw to give the Lady Bulldogs their first lead of the game at 21-20.

Hooker never relinquished the lead, and only gave up four points the rest of the way. Stratford was held scoreless for six-plus minutes twice in the second half.

All of the Lady Bulldogs scoring was done by three players. Shayla Mathis was the top scorer with 15, Lucero Ugarte added 9, and Jayme Walton 6.

Hooker is 6-4 heading into the Christmas break.

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