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By SHAWN YORKS

The Guymon Daily Herald

TEXHOMA, Okla. — Kyra Cathcart muscled in for a layup with 3 seconds left on Saturday to lift the Hooker Lady Bulldogs to a 44-42 win over Balko in a battle of 12th ranked teams.

“That was a wild game,” said Hooker coach Ray Kennedy, who’s 12th-ranked Class 2A Lady Dogs improved to 16-2 on the season. “You got to give credit to Balko. They’re a really good team.”

Hooker was in the unfamiliar position of playing from behind for most of Saturday night’s championship game as No. 12 Class B Balko (15-3) used a stifling pressure defense to keep Hooker off balance.

“First of all, Balko’s been there before,” Kennedy said. “They’ve been to the state tournament, have a ton of seniors. They know what’s going on and they know how to play.

“I feel awful fortunate that, down the stretch, we executed well enough to win the ballgame.” The score was tied or changed hands eight time in the first quarter alone, and was tied at 12 after the first eight minutes.

Madison Dearmin, who led Balko with 12 points, was once again strong in the paint, but it was Rylee Stockton, Danielle Gentry and Mary Castro that led Balko early on. Hooker’s Mariana Cervantes carried the bulk of the load early for Hooker.

Dearmin gave Balko the lead to start the second, and the Lady Bison built a 7-point lead behind Stockton and Kylie Edwards.

Cervantes kept Hooker in the game, while Naomi Rodriguez and Cathcart helped pull it back to a 4-point game at the half.

Balko maintained the lead throughout the third behind Dearmin and Stockton, but Cathcart and Vanessa Wiebe kept Hooker within striking distance, needing just a stop or a turnover to give itself a chance to win it.

The Lady Dogs got their chance.

After Edwards put Balko ahead 42-38, Rodriguez cut it to 42-40 on a steal by Cathcart.

Cathcart got another steal but was called for a foul, then Shania Miller stole the ball but walked. But two missed free throws by Edwards with 2:28 left kept it a one-possession game. After an exchange of turnovers, Balko got the ball back and began to hold the ball with a 2-point lead. But the Lady Bison turned the ball over, and Hooker drove in and scored the tying basket.

Cathcart took a nice lob pass from Rodriguez to lay it in with 52 seconds left. Edwards missed

what would have been the winning shot for Balko, and Hooker got the ball with seven seconds left to set up the winning play.

“They covered that pretty well, and we kicked it back out,” Kennedy said.

Jessica Ugarte took the ball on the wing and fed it back into Cathcart for the winning layup.

“That (assist) was just as important as the shot was,” Kennedy said.

Cathcart led Hooker with 18, Cervantes added 15, Rodriguez 9 and Wiebe 2 for Hooker.

Dearmin led Balko with 13, Stockton 12 and Edwards 8.

Balko goes back to Texhoma on Tuesday to battle the Red Devils, while Hooker travels to Walsh, Colo. to face the Eagles on Tuesday night.

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