

By JASON EPP

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BEAVER — For the Beaver Dusters, The free throw line has been a season-long nemesis. But Tuesday night the Dusters made it their ally making eight of their last ten to seal a 49-41 victory over 11th-ranked Gruver, Texas (20-4).

"Free throws did make the difference at the end," said Duster coach Brian Stalder. "We could have done a lot to make it not so tight at the end if we would have made free throws in the second and third quarter. But there at the end we did shoot them well and hopefully that will give us some confidence later. We need that because in close games that will make or break you."

The Dusters did not do themselves any favors at the charity stripe in the first half. After Samuel Becker made the teams first two free throws after being fouled just four seconds into the game, Beaver missed all five of their other first half attempts including the front end of three one-and-ones.

What was working for Beaver in the first half was their transition offense.

"The reason we were able to get out in transition is because we boxed out," said Stalder. "In the first half we earned some rebounds and they had four guys crashing the boards, and we're running and got some easy points."

Gruver cut the Dusters lead to one, a minute and a half into the second quarter, but Beaver went on a 7-0 run and carried a 21-15 lead to the locker room.

"I told them at halftime that they send so many to the board that if you get a box out we'll be able to run out, but we have to earn the rebound first," said Stalder.

Stalder's players heeded their coaches advise and started the second half with an 8-2 run that gave them their biggest lead of the game at 29-17 with two minutes left in the third.

Over the next eight minutes, Gruver clawed back into the game, cutting the lead to five.

"We again let them have a run," said Stalder. "Good teams have to figure out how to not let the other team have a run."

But the Dusters slammed the door shut at the free throw line at that point, and finished the game making more free throws (16) than Gruver attempted (10).

"I thought it was a very quality win," said Stalder. "People in the Texas panhandle know how good they are. I was real pleased with what we did tonight I thought we played real hard."

Samuel Becker led the Dusters offense with 12 points including 5 of 6 from the line. Daniel Reed gave Beaver 11 points of the bench. Jacob Bridwell scored 11 as well, and Cole Trippet added 9.

The Dusters are now 13-7 and will travel to Laverne Friday.