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Few things in sports are more frustrating than seeing a win slip through your fingers.

The Port Washington girls' basketball team received a sobering sample March 1 when it watched Cedarburg steal a 38-37 win in the North Shore Conference finale for both squads.

After leading most of the Senior Night game, host Port was poised to escape on top when it held a 37-36 lead in the closing minute. By forcing a turnover, the Pirates stymied a Cedarburg scoring threat and got the ball to midcourt with 17 seconds left.

But after a Port timeout, the Bulldogs' Kendall Lynch stole the inbounds pass and drew a foul on the way to the basket. Lynch sank both ends of a bonus free-throw chance to put Cedarburg ahead with 14 seconds to go.

After the Pirates raced downcourt and missed a hurried layup, the Bulldogs regained possession and were able to run out the clock.

Turnovers and shaky shooting plagued Port, which scored only two points in the fourth quarter and was 1-for-9 at the free-throw line for the night.

"We just made a ton of mistakes, and it cost us," said Pirates coach Brian Johnson, whose team finished NSC play 3-11.

"We had a lot of people who don't normally make those kind of mistakes make them."

Neither team was able to establish offensive rhythm. However, Port managed to take a 25-20 lead into halftime and held a seven-point edge early in the third quarter.

Cedarburg had only two field goals in the second half. But unlike Port, the Bulldogs enjoyed enough success at the free-throw line (12 for 18) to stay in contention.

With guard Caity Tydrick, Port's best ball handler, slowed by foul trouble, Cedarburg used defensive pressure to fight back. After trailing, 35-31, at the end of the third quarter, the Bulldogs made five unanswered free throws to take a 36-35 lead.

On their only points of the period, the Pirates got a layup by Kelsey Steffen to move back ahead, 37-36, with 2:03 left. Twenty seconds later, Port missed the front end of a bonus free-throw chance.

With less than a minute left, the Bulldogs ran the clock down before turning the ball over. However, the Pirates returned the favor when Lynch stepped in front of Tydrick for the biggest defensive play of the game.

"Turnovers and free throws, that made the difference in the game," Johnson said.

The Bulldogs, who finished 7-7 in the conference, were led by Kylee Marks and Lynch with eight and seven points, respectively.

Port got 10 points from Nicole Ziehm and nine from Tydrick.

This week, the Pirates tried to bounce back when they opened WIAA Division 4 tournament play Tuesday with a quarterfinal game against Kewaskum (see related story).

Image Information: PRESSURE FROM A pair of Cedarburg defenders forced Port Washington's Kayla McIlree to look for an open teammate. Photo by Sam Arendt