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Late miscues erase 4th-quarter lead for Grafton girls in North Shore Conference home loss to Nicolet

Failure to finish took its toll on the Grafton girls' basketball team last Friday.

After taking a three-point led into the fourth quarter, the Black Hawks fell victim to careless ball handling and defensive lapses that resulted in a frustrating, 42-38 loss to Nicolet.

"We had some costly turnovers, and we didn't get the stops at the end of the game," Grafton coach Steve Reinhardt said.

"We had our chances, but we panicked a little bit and didn't protect the ball."

The host Hawks, who slipped to 2-2 in North Shore Conference play, got off to a strong start and owned a 12-8 lead after one quarter. The margin grew to 10 points in the second period and stood at 20-14 by halftime, when Reinhardt thought his team was in good shape.

"We played really well in the first half. We played good defense and ran our offense," he said. "But in the second half, it was the same old story. We just lacked focus and rushed things."

Nicolet (3-1) rode the hot hand of Briana Gray much of the night. The senior guard scored a game-high 22 points, including a key three-pointer in the fourth quarter.

"Gray hit some really tough shots. Even when we had her guarded, she managed to make them," Reinhardt said.

But the bigger problem for the Hawks, Reinhardt noted, was a loss of composure in the fourth quarter, when they were outscored, 19-12.

“We were up three or four points most of the game, but at the end when Nicolet stayed with us, we didn’t handle it well,” he said.

Junior forward Amanda Hunt led Grafton with 11 points, and Angie Mann added eight.

The loss, which left Grafton at 4-2 overall, came in a game that Reinhardt believes will typify a fight for the conference title this season.

“Every game is going to be a battle, and we have to keep ourselves in them,” he said. “There are a lot of evenly matched teams in the conference.”

Grafton 32, Homestead 30

The Hawks survived a shaky fourth quarter to secure a conference road win Dec. 11.

After a strong first half that included a 10-0 advantage in the opening period, Grafton owned a 19-7 lead. The advantage stood at 27-14 entering the final period.

The Highlanders came to life down the stretch and outscored Grafton, 16-5, to make things interesting. A 9-for-11 effort at the free-throw line aided Homestead’s fourth-quarter rally.

“We played well for 3-1/2 quarters,” Reinhardt said. “Then we missed some shots and let them back in it.”

Hunt finished with a team-high 14 points, and Haley Orlowski had seven.

Homestead was led by freshman Taylor McIlwraith’s 15 points.

This week, the Hawks were scheduled to travel to Milwaukee Hamilton on Wednesday for a 6:30 p.m. nonconference game and will resume league play Friday with a 7:30 p.m. contest at Whitefish Bay.

Image Information: ANGIE MANN dribbled past a pair of Nicolet defenders during Grafton’s North Shore Conference loss. Photo by Sam Arendt