Written by Steve Ostermann
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Team cruises by Escanaba on way back into NSC play

Facing an unfamiliar opponent during the distractions of a holiday break has thrown more than a few basketball teams for a loop.

The Port Washington High School boys' squad didn't stumble into the pitfall, though, when it hosted Escanaba, Mich., in an unusual nonconference game Dec. 29.

Zipping ahead early, the Pirates glided to a 67-40 win that gave everyone plenty of playing time.

"We didn't know the level of competition we would face from the Upper Peninsula, but we responded well," Port coach John Bunyan said. "It was a good win, and we got a lot of kids in the game."

The contest, which marked the first time teams from the schools faced each other in any sport, was scheduled to help both squads fill out their nonconference schedules.

Escanaba, which plays in the five-team Great Northern U.P. Conference, made the 4-1/2-hour bus ride south for a pair of games wrapped around a one-night stay at the Country Inn & Suites in Port. After losing to University School, 52-50, on Dec. 28, the Eskymos brought a 4-2 record into their contest against the Pirates.

Port broke to a 22-12 lead in the first quarter and held a 40-28 edge at halftime before turning the game into a rout.

Turning up the defensive heat, the Pirates went on a 16-4 run in the third period and held Escanaba to just 12 points for the second half.

Ten Port players scored in the game, led by senior guard Josh Gasser's 19 points in limited court time. Cory Steinmetz had 10 points, and Kyle Rismeyer added eight.

Quinn Wakefield, a senior forward, paced the Eskymos with 12 points.

The win was the Pirates' third straight and improved their season record to 7-1.

Bunyan said the highlight of the night for his team was a determined second-half performance.

"At halftime, we talked about improving our defense," he said. "We didn't move our feet and weren't real active in the first half.

"They really stepped it up and played a lot better the rest of the game."

The Pirates resumed North Shore Conference play this week, starting with a game against Milwaukee Lutheran on Tuesday. On Friday, they will travel to Cedarburg for
a 7:30 p.m. contest.

"We need to start focusing on conference games now," said Bunyan, whose team started the week tied for second place in the NSC race with a 2-1 mark.

"We have an important stretch coming up and need to improve each week."

JOSH GASSER (center), teammate Cory Steinmetz and the rest of the Port

Washington boys' squad had little trouble overpowering Escanaba for a nonconference win. Photo by Sam Arendt