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Shorthanded Port girls dig down to snap losing streak with eye-opening victory over first-place Cedarburg

Most people would regard the Port Washington Pirates' 35-34 win over first-place Cedarburg last Friday as an upset, but don't count Port coach Vinnie Murray among them.

"We knew that we could beat them. We're finally playing the kind of basketball we're capable of," Murray said after watching his team rally to stun the visiting Bulldogs in a hard-fought
North Shore Conference game.

The Pirates, who started the night 0-4 in league play, were underdogs against 4-0 Cedarburg, which had shared the NSC top spot with Nicolet.

But Port, which had lost seven straight times since winning its season opener Nov. 27, found a way to make the big plays down the stretch.

After trailing, 28-24, entering the fourth quarter, Cedarburg rallied to take a 34-33 lead with 14 seconds left. The Pirates missed a shot at the go-ahead basket, but sophomore center
Nicole Ziehm scored on a put-back with five seconds to go to give her team the final edge.

For good measure, Ziehm foiled the Bulldogs' try at a buzzer-beating winner by deflecting a shot by Carly Lythjohan. It was the last of Ziehm's seven blocks in the game.

"Nicole really stepped up for us at the end there," said Murray, whose team improved to 2-7 overall.

"She did a great job, and several of our other players had big games, too."

With starting point guard Alyssa Ross sidelined much of the night with foul trouble, the short-handed Pirates needed contributions from most of the eight players they had suited for the game.

Sophomore Kelsey Steffen scored a team-high nine points for Port, and Marly

Trier added seven.

The Pirates also got a key fourth-quarter basket from freshman Mikayla Hilton, who finished with six points.

The victory, which Murray said was Port's first against a team with a winning record in eight years, required the Pirates to overcome a slow start.

The Bulldogs held a 14-3 lead in the second quarter before Port went on a 15-1 run to take an 18-15 lead into halftime. The second half became a dogfight, with neither team able to
grab control until Ziehm's late heroics.

"This was really, truly a team effort for us," Murray said. "I couldn't be prouder of the girls."

Kelly Doedens led Cedarburg (8-3 overall) with 11 points.

Milwaukee Lutheran 40, Port 35 (OT)

The Pirates couldn't protect a five-point lead in the final minute of regulation and were saddled with a frustrating conference loss at home Jan. 5.

Port led, 30-25, with 45 seconds to play only to have Johnikka Nash pulled the Red Knights even by hitting a two-point basket and a three-pointer to force the extra period.

Lutheran then went on a 10-5 run in the overtime.

"It was very frustrating, a game we should have won," Murray said. "But I think our girls learned from that game that you have to keep playing to the very end."

Ross led the Pirates with 14 points.

Nash had 15 points for Lutheran.

Port will continue conference play this Friday when it travels to Homestead (0-5)

for a 7:30 p.m. game.