Port boys ride Gasser's flurry to easy win in Grafton that leaves them alone in first

Hope didn't spring eternal for the Grafton boys' basketball team last Friday night, but it did last for more than one quarter.

When C.J. Koehler came off the bench and nailed a three-point shot to start the second period, the host Black Hawks found themselves deadlocked at 11-11 with Port Washington in a North Shore Conference game.

Grafton's dream of scoring an upset in the second game of a coed doubleheader didn't last much longer, though.

Sparked by a second-quarter flurry by Josh Gasser, Port responded with a 21-6 run that put it in control on the way to a 68-39 victory.

Gasser poured in 15 points in the period and finished with a game-high 28 despite sitting out the entire fourth quarter. The senior guard led the Pirates to their seventh straight win overall and, more importantly, helped them improve their first-place NSC record to 6-1.

Port now stands alone atop the standings, thanks to Milwaukee Lutheran's overtime win against second-place Whitefish Bay (5-2) on Friday.

After his team's game, Port coach John Bunyan was hoping for help from Lutheran but more focused on the task at hand — handling an upstart and winless Grafton squad.

"Grafton came out and played really hard against us. They mixed up their defenses and made us work," said Bunyan, whose team improved to 11-1 overall.

"We weren't finishing on our scoring chances early in the game, but we had to be patient and get back into it."

The Gasser-fueled rally helped the Pirates build a 34-21 lead by intermission. Any hope of a Grafton resurgence in the second half were dashed by an 18-5 Port run in the third quarter.

Shooting woes, a season-long problem for the Hawks, stymied them again. They shot less than 30% from the field and were 4-for-14 at the free-throw line.

“We wanted to come out and trap a little more defensively, but you’ve got to make baskets to do that,” said Grafton coach Kevin McKenna, whose team fell to 0-13 overall and 0-7 in conference play.

“I thought we played a good third of a game. We had a good start, but after that our shooting and ball handling were suspect.”

Nick Scherzer, a junior center, gave the Hawks an early boost. He scored 10 of his team-high 12 points in the first half, including six in the opening period.

The only other Grafton player with as many as eight points was reserve guard Joey Ritonia, who did all his scoring in the second half.

Besides Gasser, Port got double-figure scoring from forward Cory Steinmetz and guard Joey McIlree, who finished with 11 and 10 points, respectively.

McIlree came off the bench to give the Pirates a lift in the second half, when he had eight points and four steals.

“I thought Joe came out and did a great job,” Bunyan said. “It was good to get that kind of performance from our bench.”

Port played without starting forward Shane Kennedy, who was sidelined due to an ankle injury.

On a positive note for both schools, a silent auction held Friday as part of a coed doubleheader between Port and Grafton basketball teams raised more than $1,200 for the Midwest Athletes Against Childhood Cancer (MACC) Fund.

This week, the Pirates faced Kewaskum in a nonconference game Tuesday and will travel to Germantown for an NSC contest Friday. On Feb. 2, they will play at Nicolet.

Grafton will play at Homestead on Friday and at Cedarburg on Feb. 2.

All games start at 7:30 p.m.

West Bend West 54, Grafton 31

The Hawks' offensive struggles continued in a nonconference road loss last Saturday.

Grafton only trailed by 9-5 after one quarter but managed just 13 points during the next two periods as West pulled away. The Spartans held a 40-18 lead after three quarters.

"It was more of the same thing," McKenna said. "When you struggle to score, it affects everything else in your game plan, including defense."

Ritonia, a senior, led the Hawks with 12 points, but none of his teammates had more than four.

Tim Callen had 14 points for West, and Brandon Cowie added 12.

Big third quarter helps Grafton girls drop Pirates, end home losing skid at four

A cold-shooting foe was just what the doctor ordered for the Grafton girls' basketball team last Friday night.

Although Port Washington had no intention of writing a prescription, it provided a remedy nonetheless for the host Black Hawks, who rebounded from a tough defeat the previous week with a 49-34 victory in North Shore Conference play.

"It was a good win. I thought our intensity was good," said Grafton coach Bob Maronde, whose team improved to 4-3 in the league and snapped a four-game home losing streak that included an 11-point loss to Germantown on Jan. 15.

Port, which lost for the second straight time after upsetting Cedarburg on Jan. 8, was again frustrated by errant marksmanship in the first game of a coed doubleheader. The Pirates missed their first 15 floor shots and trailed, 12-1, after one quarter.

Grafton's quick start included three straight baskets by reserve Emily Schreiner.

Although Port hung within 21-10 at halftime, any comeback hopes they had were derailed in the third quarter. The Hawks pushed the ball up court at every opportunity, went on a 15-2 run to start the period and took a 42-18 lead into the fourth quarter.

"We're just missing way too many makeable shots," said Port coach Vinnie Murray, whose team fell to 1-6 in the conference.

"Our shot selection is fantastic, but we can't seem to knock them down.

We just have to keep working at it."

The Pirates managed just four free throws in the first 11-plus minutes, a drought that ended with a layup by sophomore center Nicole Ziehm with 3:25 left in the half.

A similar pattern unfolded at the start of the second half when Ziehm scored her team's first six points. However, by the time the sophomore capped the run with two free throws, Grafton owned a 36-16 lead.

Maronde was especially pleased with his team's third-quarter surge, which included nine points by forward Hannah Eichler and eight by center Myranda Tyler.

Eichler, a sophomore, finished with a game-high 14 points — including a 7-for-10 effort at the foul line — and provided much-needed court leadership, he said.

"Even though we've won a lot of games this year, we haven't had that killer instinct," Maronde said. "We talked about that, and they went out and did it."

Tyler had 10 points for the Hawks, who improved to 8-4 overall.

Kelsey Steffen, a sophomore forward, led Port with 13 points, and Ziehm had 10.

While disappointed with the Pirates' offense, Murray praised the effort of his injury–plagued roster, which had only eight players with varsity experience dressed for the game.

"It's really tough with so few players, but they didn't blink, even when Grafton put some pressure on us," he said. "We just don't have the depth, and we're struggling right now to put the ball in the basket."

This week, Port was scheduled to travel to Wauwatosa West on Wednesday for a 7:30 p.m. nonconference game.

Both local teams will resume league play Friday with 7:30 p.m. home contests — the Pirates facing Germantown while Grafton takes on Homestead.

On Feb. 2, the Hawks will play at Cedarburg at 5:45 p.m. as part of a coed doubleheader, and Port will host Nicolet at 7:30 p.m.

PORT WASHINGTON'S Marly Trier (bottom) and Grafton's Myranda Tyler found themselves entangled during a scramble for a loose ball in Friday's North Shore Conference game. Host Grafton grabbed an early lead and pulled away in the second half for a 49-34 win. Photo by Sam Arendt