

Shooting woes top Lady Pirates' must-fix list

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Free-throw problems help leave young Port girls' team searching for its first victory

Don't be surprised if the Port Washington girls' basketball team spends extra time on shooting practice this week.



Sharpening their touch, especially at the free-throw line, became a top priority for the Pirates after they struggled offensively in two losses last week.

After losing to Whitefish Bay Dominican in a nonconference play Dec. 3, Port fell to Homestead, 62-29, in the North Shore Conference opener for both teams Friday.

Although the Pirates stayed within striking distance in the first half Friday, they were outscored, 33-12, the rest of the way.

"We're young, and we're still learning how to play good basketball, and that's tough to do in the North Shore," Port coach Brian Johnson said.

"Right now, we're taking it one quarter at a time."

After falling behind, 17-6, at the end of the first quarter, Port trailed by only 29-18 at intermission. However, Homestead sealed the outcome with a 15-8 run in the third period.

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Poor free-throw shooting continued to bug the Pirates, who were only 22% (3 for 14) at the line.

In losing its first three games of the season, Port was a combined 25% (14 for 55) on foul shots.

"Our inability to shoot free throws with any success will continue to hurt us unless we improve," Johnson said.

"Missed free throws are like turnovers. You can't afford to give them away."

Many of the Pirates' misses have come on the front end of bonus situations, Johnson noted.

With six freshmen on its roster, Port has a decidedly young look this season. Forward Anja Smith, one of those freshmen, provided some spark by scoring a team-high 12 points.

"Anja has had some offensive surges," said Johnson, who also singled out freshman forward Amanda Baierl for her steady play.

Homestead, one of the conference's most improved teams, was led by sophomore Taylor McIlwraith's 26 points.

The Highlanders improved to 2-0 overall.

Dominican 50, Port Washington 26

A solid start wasn't enough to spare the Pirates a nonconference home loss Dec. 3.

Port held a 9-8 lead at the end of the first quarter but was outscored, 32-7, in the next two periods.

Allazia Blockton scored 23 points for Dominican, which took a 40-16 lead into the fourth quarter.

Smith led the Pirates with six points, and Allie Uselding and Brianna Ahner added five apiece.

Port made just five of 17 free throws, but Dominican was enough worse at the line with a 13-for-30 effort.

This week, Port played Milwaukee Messmer in a nonconference game Tuesday and will host Nicolet in NSC play at 7:30 p.m. Friday. On Dec. 17, the Pirates will travel to Cedarburg for another 7:30 p.m. conference contest.

"We'll keep working hard and try to improve each week," Johnson said. "That's always our goal."

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Image Information: FRESHMAN ANJA SMITH did her best to help keep the Port Washington girls' basketball team in contention in a pair of losses last week. She led the Pirates with 12 points against Homestead on Friday after scoring six points against Dominican (above) on Dec. 3. Photo by Sam Arendt