

Gritty Lady Hawks secure rematch win

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Ruona-led Grafton digs down to outlast Homestead, avenge early-season defeat

After seeing his team struggle in a 30-25 loss to Homestead in December, Grafton girls' basketball coach Steve Reinhardt was hoping for better things in last Friday's rematch. Much better.



He wasn't disappointed again.

Not only did the Black Hawks nearly double their previous point production, they made enough defensive stops to stymie Homestead, 45-42, in a hard-fought North Shore Conference game and notch their fifth straight victory.

"This is a big win for us," Reinhardt said. "We hung tough and found a way to get it done.

"It was just like a lot of our other games. We might have two great plays in a row and then have eight bad plays, but we keep working hard."

Grafton built a 26-16 halftime lead behind the hot shooting of junior Rachel Ruona, who scored 13 of her game-high 21 points before intermission. However, the Highlanders fought back and eventually pulled within 42-40 with just over one minute to play.

Fueling Homestead's determined rally was a 10-for-10 performance at the free-throw line in the fourth quarter.

After forcing a Grafton turnover with pressure defense, the Highlanders pulled even at 42-42 on two free throws by Taylor McIlwraith, who led them with 16 points.

But following a timeout, the Hawks broke the press and regained the lead on a layup by Zoie

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Bauer.

After a Homestead miss, Bauer made the first of two free throws to put Grafton up by three points. She missed the second shot, but the Hawks grabbed the rebound, forcing Homestead to foul again.

Although two missed free throws gave the Highlanders one last possession, they were unable to get off a three-point attempt in the final seconds.

The win was the Hawks' ninth in their last 10 games, lifting them to 5-4 in conference play and 12-5 overall.

Reinhardt was quick to acknowledge his players' fourth-quarter struggles — including a 6-for-15 effort at the foul line and “atrocious defense” — but said he never doubted their determination.

“These kids are very resilient. They make mistakes, but you can yell at them, and they can take it,” he said.

“It's a really good group that plays hard.”

Ruona, who has emerged as the Hawks' offensive leader after they lost standout Amanda Hunt to a season-ending knee injury, earned high praise from her coach.

“Rachel has been playing very well, really solid,” Reinhardt said. “She understands the game and knows what she has to do to step up.”

Ruona hit four three-point shots, including a buzzer-beating banker that put Grafton up, 16-10, at the end of the first quarter.

Although no other Hawks scored in double figures, six contributed points, including Bauer with seven and Kayla Borden with six.

Homestead, which fell to 5-4 in the conference, got 12 points from Christal Hearn and nine from Marciarae Harmon.

This week, Grafton was scheduled to face a pair of tough tests against the conference co-leaders, playing at Whitefish Bay on Tuesday and hosting Germantown at 7:30 p.m. Friday.

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Image Information: GRAFTON'S RACHEL RUONA drove past Homestead's Allison Fochs during a North Shore Conference game last Friday. Ruona scored 21 points to lead the Black Hawks to a 45-42 win.

Photo by Sam Arendt