

By Randy Whalen

The Lockport Township boys basketball team battled.

But in the end, the Porters couldn't overcome their foul trouble and went home early from the Pontiac Holiday Tournament last week.

Lockport lost to St. Charles North 68-67 in overtime on Friday, Dec. 29 in the consolation quarterfinals at Pontiac.

For the second time in the past three seasons, the Porters were two and done at Pontiac. They won their opening game there last season but lost the next two. In a coincidence, they lost their second game there two years ago by the same 68-67 score.

But this game was a little different developing game as the North Stars had quite a disparity in free throw attempts.

"With the expectation that we would be in real competitive games, we get the value of that experience," said first-year Lockport coach Dave Wilson, who had never coached at Pontiac before this tournament. "We had four juniors on the floor a lot of the time.

"But they got to the foul line nearly 40 times compared to four for us."

Indeed, St. Charles North was 25-of-39 from the free throw line. The good news for the Porters was they were perfect from the free throw line. The bad news was they only had four attempts.

St. Charles North's height advantage was a big factor in this, leading to a 33-to-16 rebound advantage.

"They had some big guys," Lockport junior guard Anthony Kosi said. "We got into foul trouble and they shot a ton of free throws. That just made it harder."

Yes, it did. Still, thanks to the hot shooting of Kosi, who had a season-high 23 points, Lockport opened the second quarter with a big 20-6 burst for its largest lead at 32-19. The Porters led 36-26 at halftime.

"He didn't miss in the first half," Wilson said of Kosi. "We were hot as a team in the first half."

Kosi has been the Porter's high scorer numerous times this season.

"Coming into every game, my strongest part has been shooting so I had confidence coming in," Kosi said. "We've had a bunch of close games. We just have to watch film and fix some things. I'm confident we can do that."

The North Stars, however, were confident in their comeback attempt. They closed within 51-45 after three and tied the game at 53-53 with 4:37 to play. A layup by senior guard Drew Gallagher 23 seconds later gave Lockport its last lead.

Parker Reinke, a senior forward who finished with 14 points, converted an old-fashioned 3-point play with 3:00 remaining to give St. Charles North a 58-55 lead and it would never trail again. Senior guard Evan Dziadkowiec, who poured in 21 points on 8-of-9 shooting, including 3-of-3 from downtown and 2-of-2 from the free throw line, scored on a layup with 34 seconds to play to cut the Porter deficit to one.

"Especially after (a first-round loss) we wanted to win," said Dziadkowiec, who also had five rebounds. "We can't be mad at how we played. We know we can compete with anyone and be in every game. We just have to finish games but we are building confidence."

Junior point guard Bryce Turner (12 points, 3 assists) twice tied the game for the Porters. Both came on driving layups, the first with 18 seconds to play tied it at 59-59. Then, following a layin by senior forward Jake Furtney, who had a game-high 25 points and 13 rebounds, Lockport called time out with 5.5 seconds to play. Turner took the inbounds pass and drove all the way to the hoop, tying the game at 61-61 on a layup with less than a second to play in regulation.

"I told him to take five dribbles and either go to the hoop or kick it out for a winning three opportunity," Wilson said of Turner. "He got what he needed."

Turner was glad to be in that spot.

"Coach drew the play up and going down the court I was just thinking that all the way," Turner said of tying the game. "We had foul trouble but still played together. We just needed to capitalize on some other moments."

"There are still a lot of good things, a lot of positives to build off."

But unfortunately, the North Stars took control midway through the overtime. After an exchange of baskets, they scored the next five points. Kosi hit a jumper and Turner converted a pair of free throws with 56.9 seconds left in the overtime to close the Porters within 68-67 but they never scored again.

St. Charles North missed a pair of free throws with 20 seconds remaining and the Porters had a final opportunity, But Turner was trapped up top, and by the time they called time out there was less than a second on the clock. A final inbounds pass was intercepted and the game ended with Lockport (4-9) suffering its fourth loss of the season by five points or less, with a trio of those coming by two points or less.

Senior guard Sam Keenan added 14 points and eight rebounds in the game for St. Charles North. Later that evening, the North Stars (6-8) had a tough loss of their own as they fell to Plainfield North 74-71 in a game to determine who would advance to the consolation championship. Plainfield North (9-8) lost 64-52 to Peoria Manuel (8-5) on Saturday, Dec. 30 in the consolation championship game.

Before the Pontiac Holiday Tournament, the Porters played a pair of games. They defeated Bremen 69-33 on Friday, Dec. 15 at home. Logan Cooper led the way with 25 points, including a half dozen 3-pointers, and added five rebounds. Fellow senior guard Majd Awad had 11 points and junior forward Collin Miller added eight points and nine rebounds.

Then, on Tuesday, Dec. 19, Lockport lost 54-49 to a good Stevenson (9-5 through Dec. 30) squad in Lincolnshire. Cooper and Turner (4 assists) scored 16 points apiece and Kosi came in with 11 points and six rebounds.

In the opening game at Pontiac, on Thursday, Dec. 28, the Porters were overwhelmed 59-34 by an excellent Benet Academy team. It was 25-12 at halftime and 50-25 after three. Kosi and junior forward Izeyah Pruitt each had nine points for Lockport.

Benet (14-1) then went on to defeat Oak Park/River Forest 60-48 in the quarterfinals the next day. On Saturday, Dec. 30, they beat Bloom Township 59-58 in double overtime in the second semifinal. The Blazing Trojans (8-5) then lost 66-38 to New Tier (13-2) in the third place game. The Redwings lost 69-66 in double overtime to Curie in the title game. It was the first tournament title for the Condors (14-1) since 2019 but their fifth in the past 10 tourneys.

"You can't just base it off wins and losses at this point or there's going to be a lot of disappointment," Wilson said. "It's the process. we want to see incremental improvement, keep the team together, and make a run at the end."