

Boys basketball: Rolling Meadows edges Hersey in battle of MSL unbeatens

Dick Quagliano

Ian Miletic and Rolling Meadows pulled a Houdini in Arlington Heights Friday.

Miletic scored seven of his 16 points in the fourth quarter as the Mustangs held off Hersey 48-45 in a battle of MSL East unbeatens.

“It was definitely a back and forth game,” said Miletic, who was held to just one shot by Hersey’s tenacious defense in the third quarter.

“We played very uncharacteristic from our game. But what matters is that we were able to close out the game and get the win.”

Meadows (14-2, 4-0) never trailed. But despite leading by 9 early, the Mustangs couldn’t pull away either.

“It was a war,” Rolling Meadows coach Kevin Katovich said. “We made a lot of uncharacteristic mistakes for us. But you have to give Hersey credit for that. I told the guys we weren’t playing our best and that we had to stick with it. I thought we did that.”

The Mustangs were on fire early. They knocked down 8 of the first 10 shots as they led 19-10 early in the second quarter.

Hersey (12-3, 3-1) then began to turn up the defensive pressure. The Mustangs missed their next seven shots and had two turnovers as Hersey scored 7 unanswered points to pull to 19-17.

But that was the story of the game for both teams. Meadows would open up a 7-point lead and then Hersey would close to with a basket.

What was even more frustrating for Hersey was that they couldn’t get enough offense going to parlay with a staunch defense.

Take the third quarter when Hersey forced 10 Mustangs turnovers. But the Huskies would go on to shoot 4-of-12 from the field to trail 34-32.

Miletic, who was limited in that quarter, finally found some space in the final quarter. The Marquette-commit drilled a short jumper and then three-pointer as Meadows opened up a 39-34 lead.

A basket by Hersey’s Logan Luxem cut the margin to 39-36 with 5:38 to play.

Meadows’ Lazar Lazarevic was then focused at the basket. The 6-foot-6 senior came up with a pair of offensive rebounds that he quickly turned into baskets as Hersey extended its lead to 43-36 with 2:28 to play.

“It was a team effort,” said Lazarevic, who finished with 8 points and 6 rebounds. “It just wasn’t my offensive rebounds. We were gritty on defense and fighting for loose balls. That’s what helped us win.”

But Hersey wasn’t going to go away quietly.

The Huskies, who had hit just 3-of-10 from the free-throw line in the first six minutes of the quarter, finally found the range. They then converted 5-of-6 from the line to make it 45-40 with 1:27 to play.

After Meadows’ Gavin Escobedo hit a free throw, Hersey’s Brody Variano drained a three and suddenly it was 46-43 with 27.1 seconds left.

Ryan Meyer then converted a free throw for Meadows to give them a 47-43 lead. Hersey’s Charlie Pomis converted two free throws as the Huskies closed to 47-45 with 8.9 seconds left.

Hersey attempted to steal the inbounds pass and did get the ball. They also fouled Miletic in the process.

Miletic hit the first free throw, but missed the second. The Huskies rebounded and got the ball up court quickly, but Luxem’s desperation 35-footer was well off the mark.

Escobedo has 8 points for Meadows while Meyer had 6 points and Patrick Coen added 14 rebounds.

Hersey, which missed 12 shots from inside three feet from the basket, was led by Pomis, who had 14 points, and Jackson Hupp, who had 12 points.

“We were very pleased with our competitive attitude tonight,” Hersey coach Bob Widlowski said. “We competed at both ends of the floor and gave ourselves a chance to win.”