Girls fall to McCook 41-40 in final game before break

A loss is still a loss, regardless of the point spread.

But when a struggling Class C-1 team battles down to the last second against a Class B opponent with a single loss, only to fall one point short, the defeat seems much larger.

“This is a difficult one to swallow,” said Gothenburg girls basketball coach Chris Lecher. “We were right there with a Division I Class B team and we just couldn’t pull it off.”

Despite a strong second half by the Swedes, the 7-1 Bison held on to beat 2-5 Gothenburg 41-40 in the final game before the holiday break on Dec. 18.

Lecher said he stressed four quarters of intense play.

“We have struggled to put together a whole game,” he said.

The girls did better, he said, but there were still lapses.

“When we had good times, they were really good,” the coach said. “We’ve got to eliminate the bad streaks, though.”

For example, the Swedes ended the first quarter trailing 10-6 and fell behind by as many as 11 points midway through the second period, making only one shot in the first six minutes.

Then a solid burst at the end of the first half that included buckets by Jacey Wiggins and Taylor Wolf with free throws from Brittyn Munster pulled Gothenburg back within five, behind 20-15 at the break.

The Swedes opened the third period with a run and took a 25-24 lead when Regan Geiken sank her third field goal.

“I think they’re slowly starting to see that maybe we could win some games,” Lecher said. “I challenged them to get back into the game and we did.”

At the end of the third quarter, the Bison led 28-27.

McCook pushed the lead to six points with 5:40 to play but the Swedes and Geiken wouldn’t go away.

Geiken scored nine of her game-high 20 points in the final period.

“We have to take the good things from it,” Lecher said. “We battled back. Now we know we can.”

But the Swede comeback wasn't quite enough.

Down 41-35 with 15 seconds left, Geiken was fouled on a made shot and sank the free throw to bring the Swedes within three at 41-38.

Gothenburg's press forced a turnover after the free throw and with 11.4 seconds on the clock, Lecher called a timeout and drew up a play for a three-pointer to tie.

The three wasn't there but Emily Franzen made a shot inside the paint, hoping for a foul.

It wasn't called and the Swedes' hopes for overtime were crushed.

Half of Geiken's 20 points came from free throws. She was a perfect 10-for-10 from the line.

Now after a short holiday break, the Swedes will attempt to refocus for the Cabela's Holiday Shootout in Sidney beginning Thursday.

Gothenburg faces Sidney in the first round at 5:30 p.m. MT.

Sidney, Lecher said, is another Division I Class B team with a single loss.

"The thing is, they're another beatable team," he said. "I've seen them on film and I didn't see anything that scared me."

The trick, he said, will be getting off to a good start.

For the past three games, Gothenburg has put only six points on the board in the first quarter.

“We’ve got to overcome that,” he said. “We’ve got to get in double digits,” he said.

Win or lose, the second-round game will be at 3:45 p.m. MT on Dec. 28.

The girls championship is set for 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 29.

Teams in the tournament include Gothenburg, Sidney, Love Christian, Cheyenne South, Douglas, Chase County, Hershey and Gering.