

Swede boys' rally falls short

Written by Austin Benson

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Fourth quarter comeback not enough

The Gothenburg boys basketball team couldn't escape a mid-game funk in time to come back and beat the Badgers Friday.

Valentine shot 14-18 from the free throw line in the fourth quarter of its 58-51 win over Gothenburg.

Both teams clicked early on offense as the Badgers held a 15-14 first-quarter advantage. But head coach Roger Koehler could tell his guys were in a funk.

"We were knocking shots down and getting some looks, but we were struggling to get in our offensive sets," he said. "From the first quarter on we struggled."

The Swedes were outscored 14-8 in the second quarter which gave Valentine a seven-point lead at intermission.

Koehler said maybe the long trip north had something to do with the physical and mental state of his players, but he said he doesn't know for sure.

"I would like to think our guys are mentally tougher than that," he added.

Gothenburg came out after halftime trailing 29-22 and continued to play sluggish.

The Swedes managed only seven points in the third while allowing the Badgers to score 15 extending their lead to 44-29.

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Koehler said he called a timeout near the end of the third and made a defensive adjustment to get the Swedes back in the game.

"We picked them up full court," he said. "Sometimes it was man-to-man and other times it was zone trap."

Gothenburg sped up Valentine and forced turnovers that it capitalized on in the fourth period. The Swedes came back to life and scored 22 points in the final quarter.

Blake Ristine was a catalyst for the Swedes knocking down five mid-range jumpshots in a row during the Swedes' surge, Koehler said, as Gothenburg chipped the Badger lead down to four points.

Instead of trying to run with Gothenburg, the Badgers stalled in the final minutes and kept the ball in the hands of their shooters.

All of Valentine's points came from the charity stripe in the fourth period. It was enough to slow the Swedes down and keep them from shrinking the deficit.

"We took care of the ball better and we needed to," Koehler said. "I still think we can shoot better as a team. We may be rushing shots once we get in the games."

Ristine led Gothenburg in scoring with 18 points while Dawson Graham pitched in 15.

Quin Conner paced the Badgers with a double-double. Conner scored 24 points and snared 10 rebounds.

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