

Sailors from 1B

playing up to the standards you can play," he recalled. "I challenged them to come back out and not give Triangle Lake any hope of a comeback — and I feel like we did that."

The biggest improvement of the second half was that the Sailors were able to get inside more.

"Once we did that, everything else opened up," Wolgamott said. "They were a lot more patient. They listened better."

Three-pointers started connecting, "and once you do that, it makes everything a little bit easier," Wolgamott said. "We were able to do that and extend Triangle Lakes defense, where we were then able to get it inside. That helped us out, gave us some easy layups and increased the lead to where it was never really in doubt."

Despite the win, Wolgamott said there was still room for improvement. "We still need to put

together four quarters of basketball," he said. "We played two really good quarters, and two so-so quarters. But hey, that's why we practice. It's still early in the year and I still think we can get better."

Standouts of the game included Justyce Wierichs, who scored 19 points for the Sailors.

"He's the point guard we've been needing," said Wolgamott. "He's able to calm everyone else down. He makes everyone else around him better, and his motor is nonstop. He goes 110 percent."

Sometimes, though, it can get him into trouble — particularly at the beginning of the game when, Thursday, Wierichs quickly received three fouls.

"But I would rather have to calm a player down than to try and rev him up," Wolgamott said. "He's one of the top point guards in the league. He's proven that game in and game out."

JJ Neece also made a strong showing on Thursday, also with 19 points against

The Lakers.

"He brings a whole different level and look," Wolgamott said. "He can play above the rim. He tried to dunk it today. A little unsuccessful, but he was close. He got one last year, and I'm sure he'll get one this year."

And he's a smart player. "When he makes a mistake, he corrects it and doesn't make the same mistake," Wolgamott said.

Nate Neece had six points and was the lead rebounder. "He still hasn't had his best game yet, and I'm saying that as a positive," said Wolgamott. "When he is on, I don't know if there's anyone as physical as he is in the league, and someone who can just take it to the basket. He has no fear."

Other standouts of the game included junior guard AJ Moso, who is finding his footing on offense becoming an outside shooter.

"He's taking pride in rebounding as well. It's not the points that always matter, it's getting the steals. He's starting to realize that, and

becoming a smarter player because of it," Wolgamott said.

Also of note was Cody Wierichs, who hit a 3-point-er in the first quarter. He missed a few as well, but "You have to make the defense respect you. That's not going to happen unless you take them. He's a freshman, but his biggest thing all year is his defense. I've been really impressed with his defense."

The Sailors are finishing up the first month of the season, playing a total of seven games since Dec. 4, winning two of those matchups.

"It's been a grind," Wolgamott said. "When they come back, it's the heart of league play and we have to keep on going if we want to make noise. We're a top-three team in the league. Where we fall in that top three depends and how we do coming back. I definitely feel like we could be top three if we give it everything we've got."

Wolgamott believes that Sailor basketball, and the

sports program in general, has a reputation to look after now that the football team made it to the playoffs.

"Football has set a tone that we don't just want to be mediocre. We want to strive for greatness. We want to be a team that's looked at as an elite town throughout the

playoffs and our league," he said. "I feel like football has changed the perception of what we can accomplish. And now, getting wins, we want to get more and more in and not just be satisfied with winning a few games. We want to take this."



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points. "She made a couple of back to back in there, got some shots. But I think all that starts with our defense. When you play good defense, it leads to good offense."

The energy in the Mapleton gym was high as the Sailors looked to extend their lead in the fourth quarter, but a couple of well-placed shots at the beginning followed by two free-throws put the Lakers back on top. The game seesawed for a few minutes, but the Lakers pulled away in the final minutes, with the Sailors were unable to recover.

"We got a little tired and things slacked off," Gray said. "But for the most part, our defense was really solid. We saw some really good things out of the girls. A little better court awareness, bringing the ball up against the press."

As for things to work on, the defensive rebounding put the team in a hole on Thursday.

"That was really the difference of the game. They would get an offensive rebound and would end up either getting it back or we would end up fouling them and putting them on the free throw line."

The Sailors are finishing up their seventh game in three weeks, which Gray called a "brutal" schedule.

"It's going to slow down, and the girls will be able to catch their breath. We'll be able to have decent practices," Duffy said. "That's been an issue for us, because we have one gym for all of the middle school and high school. When we have a middle school game, we can't really practice here. So, we don't get as good as quality of practice time as we need."

But as the schedule normalizes after the holiday break, the practices will be easier to schedule and Duffy believes this will only improve on what's been a season of progress of the Sailors.

"To be honest, we don't have anywhere to go but up. We will get better with every game," she said. "They're playing with more passion, more heart. And I like to see that."



Mapleton junior guard Briena Jensen takes it into the paint against Triangle Lake.

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