IRON RIVER—Call it a dress rehearsal, if you want.

West Iron's boys team took on Iron Mountain Feb. 19 in a clash of teams that will meet again March 4 in the District 95 tournament at Norway. __PUBLIC__

The first skirmish went to the Mountaineers, who outscored the Wykons 12-7 in the fourth quarter to earn a 44-41 win. West Iron got back on the right track Feb. 21 by avenging an earlier loss, defeating Hancock 52-41 on the road.

WIC's regular season ends Feb. 26 at home against nonconference Ishpeming. The Wykons go into that game with a 13-6 season record. They finish their West Pac season with a 6-2 mark and still had a chance to tie for first place as of Monday.

At Iron Mountain: Three-point shots by Adam Newby and Austin Waara and two hoops from Joe Pisoni helped West Iron to a 10-6 first quarter lead vs. the Mountaineers. The Wykons led by two at halftime and after three quarters.

In the fourth quarter, though, the Mountaineers limited WIC's offense to seven points (five by Andy Ridolphi), while Luke Zambon scored five and Taylor Huotari put in four to take over a tight game.

: The Wykons were two players short at Iron Mountain and Tyler Stafford only played limited minutes. That threw off Coach Dan Schive's normal rotation of players. "But we played well. We did our job."

Worn down "No excuses, but we had just played four games in eight days, and I think they were a little leg-tired." IM had played the night before, "but we just seemed a little mentally fatigued. When we got into even a little bit of a pressure situation, we started forcing stuff." That's out of character for this team.

In the fourth quarter, he said, "We gave up one quick [IM scoring] run, and that was it." The Wykons then had to foul, and IM made 4 of 8 free throws in the quarter. West Iron also missed too many close-in shots. "We just couldn't get anything going offensively."

But the coach didn't sound too upset about the loss, noting that IM had a full crew while the Wykons were short-handed. "We have to clean a couple things up and help defense a little bit and watch some film.

"We just have to take care of the ball and make some shots."

Numbers: WIC team: 16-43 (37%) FG, 5-8 (63%) FT, 4x3, 16 fouls. IM team: 9-16 (56%) FT, 1x3, 11 fouls.

WIC stats: Adam Newby, 16 points, 3x3; Andy Ridolphi, 9 pts, 6 rebs; Austin Waara, 8 pts, 9 rebs, 2 stls, 6 asts. IM stats: Taylor Huotari, 18 pts; Luke Zambon, 18 pts.

Wykons	10	10	14	7	--	41
M'tneers	6	12	14	12	--	44

At Hancock: The snowy ride home from Hancock lasted over two hours, but it was a happy ride. After the Bulldogs chomped West Iron by 20 at the Greenlund Gym in mid January, West Iron won by 11 in the doghouse.

That was due in large part to an incident late in the second quarter, when star Bulldog center Alex Almquist injured a hand while battling for a rebound. He left the game and never returned.

While Almquist was in, Stafford and Pisoni defended him. "They did a wonderful job," Schive said. "He's 6-7, he's talented and he's going to score—but they played him really well." Almquist scored six points before exiting. He had 18 at West Iron.

Bulldogs early: Shane Raasio was a different story—he scored nine in the first quarter to give

the Bulldogs a 15-10 lead after one. The lead grew to 19-10 in the second frame. “Then we got our legs together,” Schive said, “and I think we were down 19-16 when Almquist got hurt.” Waara hit a three as the half ended to tie it at 24-24.

While Almquist was around, the Wykons played a deliberate half-court game. In the second half, WIC went to its speed and put together an 11-2 run. Adam Newby scored seven in the third quarter, and Waara struck for 11 in the fourth frame.

As for Raasio, Newby (helped by Anthony Rule, Pisoni and Ryan Rogers) held him to five points in the second half. With Almquist gone, Raasio was Hancock’s only major threat. Schive also put Waara on Matt Yao, who scored 12 in the first game. This time, Yao was shut out.

Newby led WIC with 17 points, and Waara had 16. Stafford added nine.

Numbers: WIC team: 3x3, 7-13 (54%) FT, 10 fouls. Hancock, 3x3, 5-10 (50%) FT, 12 fouls.

WIC stats: Newby, 17 pts, 5 rebs; Waara, 16 pts, 2x3, 4 rebs, 3 stls, 4 asts; Stafford, 9 pts, 9 rebs; Ridolphi, 6 pts, 8 rbs; Joe Pisoni, 5 rebs; Ryan Rogers, 5 rebs. Hancock stats: Shane Raasio, 14 pts; Brian Kass, 7 pts; Adrian Scherson, 7 pts; Alex Almquist, 6 pts.

Wykons	10	14	11	17	--	52
Bulldogs	15	9	7	10	--	41

Coming up: The Wykons host Ishpeming on Feb. 26 to end the season. After that, they get ready for that March 4 district semifinal game against Iron Mountain at Norway.

“They want to win it,” Schive said. “It’s been our goal since summertime.” The title game is March 6 against either Norway or Stephenson.