

Harbor Country News - Sports

December 15, 2005

Bridgman cagers overpower Cass

By David Johnson, News editor

BRIDGMAN - The Bee varsity boys' basketball team was locked in a close battle with Cassopolis at the start of the third quarter last Tuesday. But by the time the fourth period rolled around, Bridgman had built a commanding 18-point lead.

The host Bees went on to claim a 62-46 victory in the Lakeland Conference opener for both squads.

It was all Bridgman in the early going. Dan Kunde knocked down a three-pointer and cashed in a pair of offensive rebounds for field goals as the Bees romped out to a 9-0 advantage.

Rodney Lewis hit a runner in the paint with 2:33 remaining in the first quarter to tally the Ranger's first points. Dan Ponegalek and Nick Sweet answered with buckets of their own to make it a 13-2 ballgame.

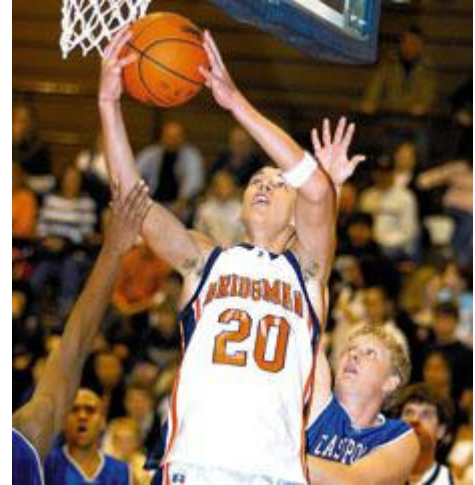
Cassopolis got precious points from Will Loux, Paul Curtis and Lonnie Williams, but Ponegalek had the last laugh of the first period in the form of a buzzer-beating lob out of a crowd to hand the Bees a 17-8 lead.

The first four baskets of the second quarter were launched from three-point land - and the Rangers made three of them.

Williams got things rolling at the 7:45 mark. Jon Malm provided the Bridgman response 11 seconds later by sinking a trey of his own, but Williams and John Young buried consecutive three-pointers after that to pull Cass within three points of the lead (20-17).

Scores by Zach Welsher, Kunde and Craig McNees helped Bridgman regain some breathing room in the form of a 28-21 lead, but the Rangers crept back into contention thanks to Neal Bullocks' offensive board and put-back followed by a 2-for-2 trip to the foul line by Williams.

The Bees finished the first half in style as Zac Nemitz sank a three-point shot and Ponegalek stole the ball, missed a lay-up, grabbed the carom and stuck it in the hoop to forge a 33-25 advantage.



Dan Kunde of Bridgman (center) looks to add to his team's lead on Dec. 13. - photo by David Johnson

Cassopolis turned the tables at the start of quarter number three as Young made three free-throw opportunities and Curtis scored off a turnover to again pull the Rangers within three (33-30).

But that was as close as they would get.

Bridgman's decisive 18-3 rampage began with a jumper by McNees. Ponegalek's bank-shot, another McNees bucket and Kunde's spin-around toss-in had upped the margin to 10 points (41-31) with 2:24 left in the third stanza.

Then Nemitz joined the fun. The junior buried a three-point shot at the 1:49 mark, and 36 seconds hence he did it again. Kunde tallied the final four points of the third quarter, and the Bees were riding high with a 51-33 advantage.

Kunde said it all began on the defensive end.

"We just started digging deep and stepped up the defense. If we give it all we have on defense, then the offense will maybe come to us later," he said.

It certainly did.

Ponegalek said the Bees picked up all aspects of their game as the third period went on. He also credited Nemitz's three-point shots with helping the Bees pull away.

Nemitz said he was just trying to find an opening in Cass's zone defense.

"We were on a big run there, playing really good defense. I just found those holes and the shots went down," he said. "It helped a lot - gave us a lot of momentum."

McNees led off the final period with a basket that opened up a 20-point lead (53-33). The margin would go as high as 23 points before Ranger reserve players P.J. Smith and Ryan Anderson knocked down a pair of late treys to tighten things up a bit.

Kunde finished with 17 points and 16 rebounds. Ponegalek tallied 15 points, Nemitz scored 11 points and McNees contributed 10 points. Todd Hendricks and Sweet each dished out 6 assists.

Williams paced the Rangers (1-1) with 12 points.

Bridgman coach Mike Miller said his squad played well early, but once they had built up a sizable lead they began to rest on their laurels.

"I was very disappointed in our intensity to end the first quarter and to begin the second quarter," he said.

Miller noted that Cassopolis scored six points on their last three possessions of the first period, and opened the second stanza by racking up nine points on just three possessions.

“I think we relaxed because we had a big lead, and that's something we really have to improve upon,” he said. “But I am pleased with our third-quarter effort.”

The Bees are scheduled to visit Edwardsburg on Friday, Dec. 16, to host River Valley on Thursday, Dec. 22, and to host a Holiday Tourney for freshman, JV and varsity teams on Dec. 27 and 29.