

# Bridgman's hot start

Bees improve to 7-0 with Lakeland Conference victory over Berrien Springs

By DARREN PHILLIPS  
Herald Palladium Sports Writer

BERRIEN SPRINGS — Berrien Springs couldn't overcome Bridgman's hot start Friday night.

Bridgman scored on six of its first seven possessions to take a big early lead and went on to win the battle of Lakeland Conference unbeaten, 63-49.

The Bees (4-0 Lakeland, 7-0) led 16-6 after the early offensive blitz and built the lead to 19 at 31-12 midway through the second quarter. Bridgman hit four 3-pointers among its first six baskets, two by Nick Sweet [one by Dan Kunde].

Bridgman was 6 of 12 on 3-pointers and 15 of 27 overall from the field in the first half.

"We weren't great in the first half on defense, and they're a very good perimeter basketball team," said Berrien Springs coach Steve Spenner.

The Shamrocks also played the first quarter without normal starters Shelby and Kolby Wood, who missed several practices over the holidays while visiting their father in Oregon.

Both entered to start the second quarter, and Shelby Wood finished with 10 points.

**Dan Kunde, a 6-foot-7 senior, led Bridgman's early onslaught. He hit a 3-pointer to start the game and scored 14 of his 24 points in the first half. He also had 11 rebounds. "He's a good player and they run multiple screens for him," Spenner said. "He's a tough matchup for anybody."** Bridgman kept its lead in double figures until the fourth quarter, when a Berrien Springs run cut the margin to six.

The Shamrocks (2-1, 4-1) scored on five of six possessions early in the quarter and trailed by six at 50-44 and 52-46. Jeremy Cummings scored six of his eight points in the stretch and Shelby Wood hit a 3-pointer.

"If we play with the same intensity we played with in the third and fourth quarters we'll be fine, and it may have been a different ballgame tonight," Spenner said.

Bridgman answered the Shamrocks' run by putting the game away at the free throw line. The Bees scored on their final seven possessions and were 14 of 16 at the line in the fourth quarter.

"We returned five of our top six players from last year," said Bridgman coach Mike Miller.

"We pulled away because of the experience of those five guys we had on the court at the end." Bridgman nearly put four players in double figure scoring, as Sweet scored 13 and Dan Ponegalek and Zac Nemitz had nine each. **Kunde and Nemitz each hit three 3-pointers** and Sweet had two.

Ponegalek was 7 of 8 at the free throw line in the fourth quarter. He hit two free throws with 3:06 left after Berrien Springs had first cut the lead to six points.

Sophomore Matt Demler led Berrien Springs with 22 points. He hit 4 of 6 shots from 3-point range, including two late in the third quarter after Bridgman had stretched its lead to 18 points at 47-29.

His 3-pointer in the final minute of the quarter started Berrien Springs' 12-3 run to trim the lead to six.

"Matt Demler is the best basketball player we've played against so far this year," Miller said. "With him playing well, to win on the road I'm happy." Berrien Springs finished 21 of 54 from the field, including a 3 of 16 first-quarter effort. The Shamrocks were a respectable 12 of 25 in the second half, including 5 of 9 on 3-pointers.

Bridgman finished 19 of 39 from the field. The Bees were 17 of 25 at the line while the Shamrocks were just 1 of 5.

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## Bridgman rolls

Fast start leaves Berrien reeling

BOB OPPENHEIM

South Bend Tribune Staff Writer

BERRIEN SPRINGS -- Bridgman, the defending Lakeland Conference boys basketball champion, seems intent on maintaining possession of the league title. Berrien Springs could point to several factors that led to its demise in a 63-49 loss Friday night to the visiting Bees. The outcome puts Bridgman alone at the top of the conference at 4-0, while the Shamrocks slip to 2-1.

Behind 63 percent shooting (15-of-24) and six 3-pointers in the first half, Bridgman took a 36-20 lead into halftime. The Bees sealed the game at the free throw line, going 14-of-16 in the fourth quarter to hold off the Shamrocks. Despite those impressive statistics, Bridgman coach Mike Miller didn't initially applaud his team's overall play.

"We had a lot of defensive errors tonight," said Miller. "I was really disappointed in our defense in a lot of ways tonight. However, to win on the road in the Lakeland Conference is tough. And (Berrien Springs) has got a very good basketball team."

Dan Kunde scored 24 points and grabbed 11 rebounds to lead the Bees. Nick Sweet added 13 points. Both finished with three 3-pointers. [correction: Kunde and Nemitz both had three 3-pointers. Sweet had 2].

"We run a lot of different offensive sets and the kids make decisions," Miller said. "So if you got a 3, you take a 3 and if you got a drive or a post, take that."

Berrien Springs began the game without starters-Shelby Wood and Kolby Wood. The brothers were out of town during the holiday break visiting family and weren't allowed to play by the coaching staff in the first quarter.

Shelby Wood came into the game averaging a little over 10 points a game. He was the Shamrocks' top scorer (16.4 ppg.) last year.

"We didn't have the Wood brothers for two weeks because they were seeing family in Oregon," said Berrien Springs coach Steve Spenner. "They get one opportunity a year to see their dad and I'm not going to tell them they can't go see their dad."

Berrien Springs seemed out of sync early and fell behind 18-6 after one quarter.

The Shamrocks also might have been affected by a long layoff. Berrien Springs last played on Dec. 20 against Buchanan.

"We haven't played a basketball game in about 18 days," Spenner said.

Spenner was disappointed the most in his team's execution and intensity in the first half.

Despite the obstacles, Berrien Spring put themselves in position to win the game in the fourth quarter. Bridgman saw its lead sliced down to six points twice at 50-44 and 52-46 in the final minutes. "If we play with the same intensity that we played with in the third and fourth quarter it maybe would have been a different game," Spenner said.

Bridgman's experience was the difference in the final two minutes as the Bees calmly drained free throws to secure the win. "We have five returnees from last year's team that played major minutes," Miller said. "Guys on the court at the end have been through this. We won a lot of close games last year."

Berrien Springs got a great performance from Matt Demler, who scored 22 points, including four 3-pointers, and grabbed six rebounds. Shelby Wood added 10 points, while Jeremy Cummings had eight points, six rebounds and four blocked shots.

BRIDGMAN 63, BERRIEN SPRINGS 49

At Berrien Springs

BRIDGMAN (63): Dan Kunde 8 5-8 24, Craig McNees 2 0-0 4, Todd Hendricks 1 0-0 2, Dan Ponegalek 1 7-8 9, Nick Sweet 3 5-7 13, Jon Malm 1 0-0 2, Zac Nemitz 3 0-0 9. TOTALS: 19 17-23 63.

BERRIEN SPRINGS (49): Shelby Wood 4 0-0 10, Ryan Little 0 0-0 0, Matt Demler 9 0-1 22, Jeremy Cummings 4 0-0 8, Dowin Coffy 3 0-2 6, Matt Jasper 0 0-0 0, Anton Lockett 1 0-0 2, Kolby Wood 0 1-2 1. TOTALS: 21 1-5 49.

Bridgman	18	36	49	63
Berrien	6	20	35	49

3-point goals: Bridgman 8 (Kunde 3, Nemitz 3, Sweet 2), Berrien 6 (Demler 4, S. Wood 2). Total fouls (fouled out): Bridgman 12 (none), Berrien 14 (none). Shooting: Bridgman 19-of-35 for 54 percent, Berrien 21-of-55 for 38 percent. Rebounding: Bridgman 25 (Kunde 11), Berrien 22 (Lockett, Cummings, Demler 6 each). Turnovers: Bridgman 13, Berrien 12. Varsity records: Bridgman 7-0 overall, 4-0 Lakeland Conference), Berrien 4-1 overall, 2-1 Lakeland Conference).

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## Bridgman prevails in Lakeland showdown with Shamrocks

By David Johnson, News editor – Harbor Country News

Bridgman's Dan Kunde (right) looks to shoot over Shamrock defender Jeremy Cummings. - photo by David Johnson

BERRIEN SPRINGS - The Bridgman High School basketball team owned the first three quarters of a Jan. 6 battle of the unbeaten at Berrien Springs. And when the host Shamrocks roared back into contention in the final stanza, the Bees held them off by hitting their free throws to win 63-49.

Bridgman coach Mike Miller said he was glad to get the win against a tough Berrien Springs squad.

"They're an outstanding basketball team, and to win on the road in the Lakeland Conference is tough," he said.



It was raining Bridgman three-pointers in the early going. Dan Kunde and Zac Nemitz both connected from the three-point zone while Nick Sweet knocked down twin treys to help open up a 10-point advantage (16-6) with the first quarter less than half gone. Kunde also went strong to the basket and Dan Ponegalek raced coast-to-coast for two after picking off a Berrien Springs pass. Craig McNees accounted for the only two points after all that, and the Bees were riding an 18-6 wave 8 minutes into the game.

Kunde then dominated the paint during quarter number two, tallying 11 points (the last three from way outside) as Bridgman expanded its lead to 16 points (36-20) by the half.

"My teammates really helped out getting me open and setting good picks for me," Kunde later said.

Nemitz knocked down another three-pointer during the second period to help the Bee cause.

The Shamrocks came out revved up and ready to go in the third stanza. Matt Demler notched two quick buckets, but Bridgman (7-0 overall, 4-0 Lakeland Conference) answered with a flip shot by Kunde and Nemitz's third trey of the evening.

Berrien Springs (4-1 overall, 2-1 Lakeland) kept firing away (Jeremy Cummings scored inside and Shelby Wood sank a three-pointer), but Kunde made his three point shot and (22 Jon Malm) tossed in a basket to keep Bridgman well out in front.

Demler provided a preview of coming attractions, however, by swishing two attempts from three-point land in the late going of the third quarter.

Cummings scored the first four points of the fourth period to pull the Shamrocks within 10 (49-39). Shelby Wood fueled the fire with 4:06 left in regulation by canning a three-point shot, and Cummings sent the Berrien Springs faithful into a frenzy 32 seconds later when his fall-away jumper cut the lead down to six points (50-44).

From that point on it was simply a free-throw shooting contest for the Bees, and they came through like champions.

Ponegalek was the first Bee to face the charity stripe, and he made both opportunities.

Dowin Coffey of Berrien Springs scored 26 seconds hence (at the 2:40 mark) to keep the pressure on. Kunde was next up for Bridgman, and with 2:08 to go he also went 2-for-2.

Shelby Wood traveled with 1:45 showing on the clock, and Ponegalek was fouled six seconds later. Another perfect showing at the foul line by the senior guard opened up a 10-point advantage for the Bees.

The Shamrocks lost the handle on their next possession and Sweet dove to the floor to gain possession while teammate Todd Hendricks called time before any type of traveling call or tie-up could occur.

"I heard Todd yell at me to dive on the ball, so I dove. I was just hoping someone would call time - I wasn't letting go of the ball," Sweet said.

Sweet ended up drawing the next foul, and he kept the crunch-time streak alive by making both shots to open up a 58-46 lead.

Demler knocked down one last hurrah in the form of a three-pointer with :49 showing on the clock. Ponegalek went on to go 3-for-4 from the stripe while Sweet tacked on two more makes. All of this left the Bees with a stellar 14-for-16 free-throw shooting showing in the fourth quarter.

“They just happened to foul me. I went up there and put 'em down like I do in practice,” Ponegalek noted.

“Last year he made clutch free throws, and he continues to do that this year,” Miller said of Ponegalek.

Kunde finished with 24 points and 10 [14] rebounds. Sweet scored 13 points, Ponegalek had 9 points and 4 assists, Nemitz contributed 9 points and Hendricks dished out 6 assists.

Demler led the Shamrocks with 22 points. Shelby Wood added 10 points.

Miller said he was proud of the way his players responded to Berrien's fourth-period surge.

“We didn't fall apart. We stayed mentally tough and finished the game.”

Miller noted that Ponegalek had the tough job of defending against Demler, and held the explosive sophomore to just three fourth-quarter points. Miller also singled out Sweet for putting the clamps on Shelby Wood.

The Bees are scheduled to visit South Bend Adams on Saturday, Jan. 14, to play at Coloma on Friday, Jan. 20, and to host Buchanan on Tuesday, Jan. 24.