

February 11, 2006 6:59AM

Poise over panic

Slow start no matter for Bees

HIGH SCHOOL BASKETBALL

BOB OPPENHEIM
Tribune Staff Writer

RIGHT: Bridgman's Dan Kunde dunks against Berrien Springs on Friday night.

BRIDGMAN -- Adversity arrived early for the No. 3 ranked (Class C) Bridgman boys basketball team in a critical Lakeland Conference game Friday against Berrien Springs.

After the first two minutes, the Shamrocks led 11-0.

Instead of panicking, the Bees stuck to their game plan of hitting the open man on offense and playing tough man defense. The reward was a hard-earned 54-48 win over Berrien Springs.

With the victory, the defending league champion Bees stand at 10-0 in the league with a two-game lead over the second-place Shamrocks (8-2).

"What was in my mind (after the bad start) was how were we going to react to that," said Bridgman coach Miller. "I was just reading the boys' faces and I thought we reacted very well to that. I was very pleased with the way we kept our composure."

Offensively, Bridgman received a spark off the bench from Zac Nemitz, who scored 11 points, nine in the first half.

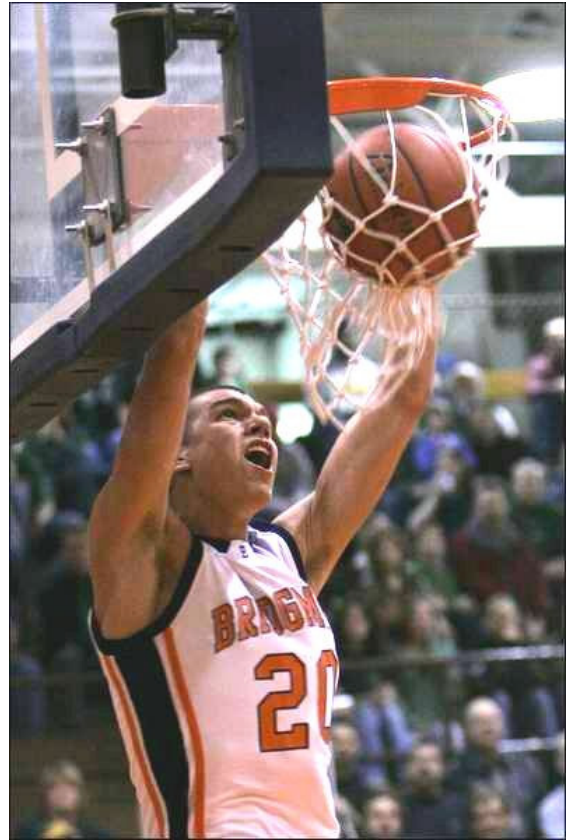
Nemitz's 3-pointer gave Bridgman its first points of the game and set the tone for the Bees. The hosts connected on seven 3-pointers in the first half with Nemitz making three.

"Zac Nemitz came in and hit some clutch shots," Miller said. "We did a nice job of finding him with the basketball."

Nemitz's 3-pointer in the final minutes of the first half gave Bridgman a 28-23 halftime lead.

"To their credit (Bridgman) hit seven 3's in the first half," said Berrien Springs coach Steve Spenner. "What do you do? Some of those were contested and with some of them we didn't have the right (defensive) assignments on. That's our fault. You got to make sure that your match-ups are set and sound against that team because if you leave somebody open they're going to make a shot."

The game was tied at 38 after three quarters with Nemitz getting a steal and lay-up as time expired. There were five ties and eight lead changes through three quarters.



After taking a 41-38 lead on a 3-pointer from Kolby Wood, Berrien Springs went cold. The Shamrocks went scoreless over six minutes as the Bees went on a 10-0 run to take a 48-41 lead with 1:20 left in the game.

Bridgman sealed it by going 6-of-8 from the free-throw line in the final minute.

"We didn't execute there at the end," Spenner said. "We got a little bit impatient and made some costly mental errors and we just didn't make shots."

The Shamrocks shot only 31 percent (4-of-13) from the field in the fourth quarter.

Miller thought that his team's defense played a big part in Berrien Springs' shooting woes.

"I think the key to the game was our team defense," he said. "I thought we played outstanding defense. All five guys on the court continuously did a real nice job of executing our man-to-man defense.

"We played one possession of a triangle-and-two and it didn't work out well."

Craig McNees and Dan Ponegalek each scored 13 points to lead Bridgman. Dan Kunde added 10 points and 10 rebounds.

McNees scored six points in the fourth quarter. His rebound basket after a missed free throw gave Bridgman a 48-41 lead with 1:20 left in the game. Ponegalek went 4-of-4 from the foul line in the final minute.

Shelby Wood scored 12 points-nine in the first half-and Matt Demler added 10 to lead Berrien Springs.

BRIDGMAN 54, BERRIEN SPRINGS 48

At Bridgman

BERRIEN SPRINGS(48): Shelby Wood 5 0-0 12, Jeremy Cummings 3 2-2 8, Dowin Coffy 3 0-0 6, Ryan Little 3 0-0 7, Matt Demler 4 1-1 10, Kolby Wood 2 0-0 5, Randolph Shaw 0 0-0 0, Robert Walker 0 0-2 0, Anton Lockett 0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 20 3-5 48.

BRIDGMAN (54): Dan Kunde 3 2-4 10, Nick Sweet 2 0-0 6, Craig McNees 5 3-6 13, Dan Ponegalek 4 4-4 13, Todd Hendricks 0 1-2 1, Zac Nemitz 3 2-2 11. TOTALS: 17 12-18 54.

Berrien	15	23	38	48
Bridgman	15	28	38	54

3-point goals: Berrien 5 (S. Wood 2, K. Wood, Little, Demler), Bridgman 8 (Nemitz 3, Kunde 2, Sweet 2, Ponegalek). Total fouls (fouled out): Berrien 15 (none), Bridgman 8 (none). Shooting: Berrien 20-of-44 for 45 percent. Bridgman 17-of-32 for 53 percent. **Rebounding:** Berrien 16 (Little 5), Bridgman 24 (Kunde 10). Turnovers: Berrien 8, Bridgman 13. Varsity records: Berrien 11-3 overall (8-2 Lakeland Conference), Bridgman 14-1 overall (10-0 Lakeland Conference). J.V. score: Bridgman 53, Berrien 41.

Bee cagers survive Berrien blitz

By David Johnson, News editor – Harbor Country News

BRIDGMAN - The Bee basketball team took a big step toward securing a second straight Lakeland Conference title on Friday, Feb. 10, by besting second-place Berrien Springs 54-48.

Bridgman's victory seemed like an unlikely outcome two minutes into the contest as the visiting Shamrocks roared out to an 11-0 lead.

Derek Eden got things rolling with the game's first hoop. The Bees proceeded to turn the ball over three straight times, and Berrien Springs made each miscue hurt. The first led to Shelby Wood's fast-break lay-up, the second to a Matt Demler bucket, and the third to Shelby Wood's long-range three-pointer. Dowin Coffy then fought through a double team to score, and the Shamrocks had made their first five shots to bury the Bees under an 11-point landslide.

But Bridgman coach Mike Miller said he was wondering how his team would react, and he got his answer during a time-out.

"I was just reading the boys' faces, and I thought we reacted very well to that," he said. "I was very pleased with the way we kept our composure with that slow start."

Zac Nemitz came off the bench to lead Bridgman's comeback. It began at the 5:09 mark of the opening stanza when the junior connected from three-point land. He did it again with 3:53 showing on the clock. **Forty-two seconds later Dan Kunde knocked down a trey of his own to pull Bridgman within four points of the lead (13-9).**

"Berrien came out hot - give it up to them," Nemitz later noted. "When I come off the bench like that, people usually have trouble matching up. I found some open spots, shot them down."

A Craig McNees free throw and Dan Ponegalek's three-point bucket made it a brand-new game (13-all) with 1:18 remaining in the first quarter. Kolby Wood temporarily got the lead back for Berrien with a hoop, but McNees went airborne for a tip-in to forge a 15-15 tie, **and Kunde blocked Ryan Little's late try before the first eight minutes were in the books.**

Shelby Wood tallied the first four points of the second period, **but Kunde answered with a dunk that fired up the Bridgman fans.** Nick Sweet and Kunde both sank three-pointers to counteract baskets by Little and Demler.

The Bees broke on top by a deuce (25-23) thanks to a reverse lay-up from McNees and carried a 28-23 advantage into the locker room at halftime when Nemitz air-mailed in his third trey of the evening.

Demler opened quarter number three with a three-point play and Coffy followed by snagging an offensive rebound and scoring to pull the Shamrocks even at 28-all. Little and Demler went on to connect from the three-point zone while Eden dunked, but Ponegalek came up with three baskets - the grand finale a steal and buzzer-beating lay-up - to leave the score knotted at 38-38 heading into the final period.

Kolby Wood opened the fourth-quarter scoring with a three-pointer, but Sweet did the same with 6:36 left in regulation.

McNees then came through with a 4-0 run that would loom large. He sank a pair of foul shots at the 5:45 mark and drove to the rim with 4:48 to go to open up a four-point lead (45-41).

The Shamrocks missed several shots - two excruciating rim-outs - and with the clock ticking down past the two-minute mark the Bees were happy to just keep passing the ball.

Todd Hendricks finally got sent to the free-throw line with 1:23 remaining, and he made the first one to open up a 46-41 margin. The second shot wouldn't fall, but McNees managed to snag the carom and stick it in for a huge bucket that upped the Bridgman advantage to seven points (48-41).

"I kind of just slid in and pushed the guy underneath the rim and then it just came to me," McNees said of the crucial rebound. "A little bit of jostling, a little bit of luck."

Little finally scored to break the ice for Berrien Springs, but it was a case of too little too late. The Bees (10-0 Lakeland Conference, 14-1 overall, ranked seventh in the Feb. 14 Class C poll) went on to make 6-of-8 opportunities at the line to more than offset Shelby Wood's late trey and a last-gasp basket by Coffy.

McNees finished with 13 points and 10 rebounds. Ponegalek also tallied 13 points. **Kunde contributed 10 points and 10 boards**, Nemitz scored 11 points, and Sweet collected 6 points, 6 assists and 6 rebounds.

Shelby Wood paced Berrien Springs (8-2 in the league, 11-3 overall) with 12 points. Demler added 10.

Although the first-quarter's epic momentum swings probably drew most of the attention, Bridgman coach Mike Miller said defense ultimately made the difference.

"I think tonight's game was won on defense, and it was a team effort. All five guys on the court continuously did a really nice job of executing our man-to-man defense."

Coffy played tenacious defense on Kunde for much of the game, a match-up that got quite intense at time and left both players in foul trouble (although neither fouled out).

Kunde later said that he and Coffy are classmates in an anatomy course at Lake Michigan College.

"We're pretty good buddies, but when you're out on the court you've just got to play the game," he added.