

Bee cagers stave off Valley rallies

By David Johnson, News editor – Harbor Country News

Right: River Valley guard Robert Lantis (left) tries to leap past Bee defender Zach Welsher (right) on Feb. 17. - photo by David Johnson

THREE OAKS - The River Valley High School basketball team had every reason to give up after falling behind seventh-ranked Bridgman by 21 points at the half-way point of Friday's Lakeland Conference contest.

Instead, the host Mustangs battled back into contention before falling 66-50.

"I was happy with the effort to get back in it and not just quit," said River Valley coach Casey Caid. "These guys have got some fight in them."

Bridgman upped its league-leading record to 11-0, but the points didn't come easy in the early going. The Bees were clinging to a 4-1 advantage before Seth Coffing connected from three-point land with 3:29 left in the first quarter. The trey seemed to unleash the proverbial floodgates as far as Bridgman's offense was concerned. Zac Nemitz hit a three-pointer 19 seconds later and **Dan Kunde notched his sixth point of the period by finishing a fast break to open up a 12-3 lead.**



"They were playing great post defense - they had like five guys in the lane," noted Nemitz. "So the post guys started kicking the ball out. I had some open looks, started knocking them down ... everything kind of progressed from that."

Jeremy Schaeffer tallied Valley's second bucket of the game with :47 left in the opening stanza to make it 12-5, but the Mustangs continued to struggle mightily with Bridgman's tough defense throughout the second quarter.

Kunde continued to heat up like a microwave as the first half rolled on, pouring in 14 second-period points - six on a pair of three-point shots. "Everything seemed to be working well," the senior said. "We're just unselfish players, and we were swinging the ball well and got open shots for everyone."

Nemitz applied the finishing touch to a nearly perfect 16 minutes of basketball for the Bees by draining a trey, and the halftime score stood at 34-13.

"I thought we played outstanding defense the whole first half," said Bridgman coach Mike Miller. "Then in the second half, I think because of the score, we relaxed and became complacent. But River Valley deserves credit. Those kids played hard."

Mustang point guard Chad Kuntz led his team's third-quarter charge by knocking down a pair of tough shots. A strong drive to the hoop by Schaeffer and Caleb Dryden's three-pointer had pulled River Valley within 13 points of the Bees (38-25) with 3:44 remaining in the third, but Nemitz answered by nailing a pair of momentum-killing connections from beyond the three-point stripe. Craig McNees scored the last four points of the period to send Bridgman into the

final quarter safely on top by 19 points (48-29).

Undaunted, River Valley made a fourth quarter charge. Kuntz was at the center of things again, hitting a free throw and knocking down a three-pointer. Dryden followed with a trey and a shot while being fouled, and the margin had been whittled down to 12 points (52-40) with 4:06 to go.

Two-for-two trips to the foul line by Kuntz and Andrew White had made it a 10-point game (54-44) with 2:28 showing on the clock, but Bridgman refused to allow the double-digit barrier to be broken. Instead, the Bees got three points at the free-throw line from Todd Hendricks **and an offensive board and put-back from Kunde to re-establish a 15-point advantage (59-44)**. Five more makes at the charity stripe (one by Jon Malm and four by Hendricks) had pumped the lead up to 20 (64-44) with less than a minute remaining.

Kunde led the Bees (16-1 overall) with 26 points and 8 rebounds. Nemitz finished with 12 points while McNees added 11.

Kuntz scored 14 points for the Mustangs (7-10 overall, 5-7 Lakeland Conference). Dryden contributed 12 points while White had 11 points and 6 boards.

BRIDGMAN 66, RIVER VALLEY 50

BRIDGMAN (66)

Todd Hendricks 0 7-8 7, **Dan Kunde 10 4-4 26**,
Jon Malm 0 1-2 1, Zac Nemitz 4 0-0 12, Craig
Mc Nees 4 3-4 11, Dan Ponegalek 1 0-1 2,
Casey Berli 1 0-0 2, Seth Coffing 1 0-0 3, Zach
Welsher 1 0-0 2. Totals: 22 15-19 66.

RIVER VALLEY (50)

Caleb Dryden 5 0-2 12, Andrew White 2 7-8 11,
Jeremy Schaeffer 2 0-0 4, Chad Kuntz 4 4-6 14,
Nate Swords 2 0-0 4, Chris Leidolf 0 1-3 1,
Ricky Zeiger 1 0-0 2. Totals: 16 12-19 50.

Bridgman 12 22 14 18 — 66

River Valley 5 8 16 21 — 50

3-point goals — Bridgman 7 (Nemitz 4, **Kunde 2**,
Coffing); River Valley 4 (Kuntz 2, Dryden 2).

Total fouls — Bridgman 17, River Valley 17.

Records — Bridgman 11-0, 16-1; River Valley
5-7, 7-10.