

Defense finds its place for Bees

No. 4 Bridgman gets past Watervliet, earns spot in championship game

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BRIDGMAN — Fourth-ranked Bridgman never found its shooting touch in Wednesday's Class C district game against Watervliet.

Fortunately for the Bees, they found their defense in the second quarter.

Bridgman overcame 27 percent shooting by forcing 24 turnovers in a 51-35 win.

The Bees will face the winner of today's Berrien Springs-Buchanan game in the championship at 7:30 p.m. Saturday.

Bridgman (21-1) used defensive pressure to rally from a 23-13 second quarter deficit.

After a Jon Anderson basket gave the Panthers their 10-point lead, Watervliet went scoreless over the final four possessions of the first half and the first seven trips of the third quarter.

The Panthers (8-13) had seven turnovers in that stretch, including five in a row to start the second half. Bridgman, meanwhile, reeled off 16 straight points to lead 29-23.

"My kids were tired," said Watervliet coach Randy Bradford. "I don't have a deep bench and the kids got tired, and that's when turnovers start to happen. "Then in the second half we came out way too tentative."

Zach Welsher and Seth Coffing, subs who often see only limited duty for the Bees, helped key Bridgman's full court pressure in that stretch.

Coffing had a steal and scored all five of his points during Bridgman's 16-0 run.

"We were in foul trouble at that point," said Bridgman coach Mike Miller. "Seth Coffing and Zach Welsher stepped up and gave us a spark." Watervliet had little trouble with the Bridgman defense in the first quarter, hitting 8 of 15 shots while taking a 17-12 lead.

Joe Bolin led the Panthers with eight points on 4 of 5 shooting in the period, but he was held to just two more points the rest of the way. Bolin missed all 10 of his 3- point attempts, but he was far from the only player to struggle from behind the arc.

Bridgman, which had eight players hit 3-pointers in Monday's win over Brandywine, was just 3 of 23 while Watervliet was 1 of 16.

Overall Bridgman was 7 of 32 from the field in the first half and 15 of 56 for the game.

"I'm not worried about that," Miller said. "We're a good shooting team. Shooting is percentages. A .300 hitter in baseball will go 0 for 7 sometimes." Bridgman put the game away in the fourth quarter at the free throw line.

Anderson scored early in the quarter for Watervliet to cut the Bees' lead to three at 36-33. After four scoreless possessions, Bridgman got four points in one possession to build a cushion. Welsher hit two free throws after an intentional foul was called on Bolin and Craig Mc Nees added a basket to make it 40-33.

Bridgman then hit 11 of 12 free throws on its next six possessions while Watervliet scored just once.

Anderson led the Panthers with 18 points and 12 rebounds. "He's an outstanding post player," Miller said. "We knew that coming in." Nick Sweet led Bridgman with 14 points and six rebounds. Mc Nees scored 10.

Watervliet out rebounded Bridgman 42-29. The Panthers were just 2 of 4 at the free throw line to Bridgman's 18 of 25 and the Bees had just eight turnovers compared to the 24 for Watervliet.