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Berrien beats Bees in thriller

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BRIDGMAN -- In a game where baskets were as precious as diamonds, Matt Demler's 3-pointer weighed 24 carats.

Demler's pressure-packed trey with 1:26 remaining was the spark that ignited Berrien Springs in a stunning 38-36 victory over Bridgman in the Class C District championship game Saturday night.

The Shamrock sophomore's basket broke a 31-31 tie and set the stage for an amazing final minute before a packed house at Bridgman's gym.

When it was over, Berrien Springs (20-3) earned a trip to Wednesday's MHSAA boys basketball regional at Constantine, where the Shamrocks will face Gobles.

Tickets go on sale at Berrien Springs High School on Tuesday morning.

"I didn't really think about it. We were just trying to run our play and when the ball bounced out to me, I put it up," said Demler, who scored 14 points to lead the Shamrocks.

"It's the biggest basket I've made, that's for sure," said Demler, who rain-bowed his shot from the right side of the key as two Bee defenders closed on him.

Bridgman closes its great season at 21-2, and just like a year ago, the Bees finish one step away from their ultimate goal.

"That was a tremendous game between two 20-win teams, and we missed too many jump shots," said Bridgman coach Mike Miller. "It really doesn't require much more analysis than that."

The Shamrocks and Bees locked in a tight defensive struggle from the outset, one where shots were blocked as frequently as they were made.

Dan Kunde -- the only senior on Bridgman's team -- scored 15 points and pulled down 11 rebounds. No other Bridgman player was close to double figures.

Both teams took care of the ball -- Berrien Springs committed 12 turnovers and Bridgman had only six -- and combined, there were only 20 fouls called during the entire game.

But when it came to making baskets ... well, that was an adventure. Bridgman hit only 31 percent of its field goal attempts and Berrien Springs sank 36 percent.

Waving arms and in-your-face defenses had a lot to do with that.

"I thought our defense was outstanding," said Berrien Springs coach Steve Spenner, who remembered the lessons learned in two earlier losses to the Bees this season and forced them to shoot from the perimeter all night.

"We wanted to stick with our bread-and-butter, which is man-to-man defense, and I feel like we did an exceptional job of executing it, especially our seniors."

Ryan Little, who aided the Berrien Springs cause when he poked the ball away from Bridgman guard Dan Ponegalek as the Bees tried to race for a basket in the final 15 seconds, scored 10 points, including a huge 3-pointer that knotted the score at 31 with 7:06 remaining.

"I've been saying for weeks, Little is one of our most valuable players," said Spenner.

Bridgman led most of the game, but never by more than six points.

After Demler sank his trey, **Kunde answered with a running layup for Bridgman at the 1:11 mark.**

Shelby Wood sank a pair of clutch free throws for Berrien Springs with 38 seconds left. Kolby Wood did the same at the 16 second mark.

With less than two seconds remaining, Bridgman's Todd Hendricks sank a half-court 3-point basket to draw the Bees within two. However, Bridgman was unable to steal the Shamrock inbounds pass, and Shamrock fans flooded the floor in celebration.

BERRIEN SPRINGS 38, BRIDGMAN 36

BERRIEN SPRINGS (38): Dowin Coffy 1 0-1 2, Shelby Wood 1 2-2 4, Jeremy Cummings 0 0-2 0, Ryan Little 4 0-0 10, Matt Demler 6 0-0 14, Kolby Wood 2 4-4 8, Anton Lockett 0 0-0 0. TOTALS: 14 6-9 38.

BRIDGMAN (36): **Dan Kunde 7 0-1 15**, Nick Sweet 1 1-2 4, Craig McNees 2 0-0 4, Todd Hendricks 2 0-0 6, Dan Ponagelek 2 0-0 4, Zac Nemitz 1 0-0 3. TOTALS: 15 1-3 36.

Berrien Springs	7	16	26	38
Bridgman	8	18	27	36

Three-point shooting: Berrien Springs 4-9 (Little 2-3, Demler 2-4, K. Wood 0-1, S. Wood 0-1), Bridgman 5-18 (Kunde 1-5, Sweet 1-3, Hendricks 2-2, Nemitz 1-5). Total fouls: Berrien Springs 9, Bridgman 11. Fouled out: none. Technical fouls: none. Field goal shooting: Berrien Springs 14-39 (36 percent), Bridgman 15-49 (31 percent). Rebounds: Berrien Springs 30 (Cummings 9, K. Wood 5), Bridgman 21 (**Kunde 11**, McNees 6). Turnovers: Berrien Springs 12, Bridgman 6. Officials: Mike Hinga, Dave Sprague, Dave Buck. Varsity records: Berrien Springs 20-3, **Bridgman 21-2**

CLASS C

Shamrocks use defense to upset Bees

Berrien's 1st victory over Bridgman in more than 3 years

By DARREN PHILLIPS
H-PSports Writer

RIGHT: **BRIDGMAN'S DAN KUNDE** eyes the basket while being guarded by Berrien Springs' Jeremy Cummings (left) and Kolby Wood during Saturday's Class C district championship game.

BRIDGMAN — Senior Shelby Wood and his Berrien Springs teammates knew what it would take to beat fourth-ranked Bridgman in the Class C district final Saturday night.

"We'd played them twice already and came up on the short end," Wood said. "We knew that to beat them we had to play better defense." That task was accomplished, and with that came the district title. Berrien Springs held Bridgman to 31 percent shooting and won, 38-36.

Berrien Springs (20-3) hadn't beaten Bridgman since its four senior starters —

Wood, Jeremy Cummings, Dowin Coffy and Ryan Little — were freshmen.

The seniors got considerable help from the underclassmen.

Sophomore Matt Demler led the Shamrocks with 14 points, including a 3-pointer with about 1:25 remaining that gave Berrien Springs the lead for good.

Later, junior Kolby Wood hit both ends of a one-and-one situation with 16.2 seconds left to provide a 38-33 lead.

Berrien Springs was 4-of-4 on two one-and-one situations in the final 45 seconds. Shelby Wood also hit two free throws, providing a 36-33 lead.

Kolby Wood went to the line after Bridgman's Nick Sweet missed a potential game-tying 3-pointer.

"When we get in that situation we always try to keep it in somebody's hands who's a good free throw shooter," said Berrien Springs coach Steve Spenner. "Kolby, Shelby and Little are all good free throw shooters." Bridgman (21-2) missed a shot after Kolby Wood's free throws, but got another chance when the outlet pass on the rebound went out of bounds.

The possession ended remarkably when, after a near-steal by the Shamrocks knocked the ball to the back court, Bridgman's Todd Hendricks recovered and hit a halfcourt shot with 1.7 seconds left.

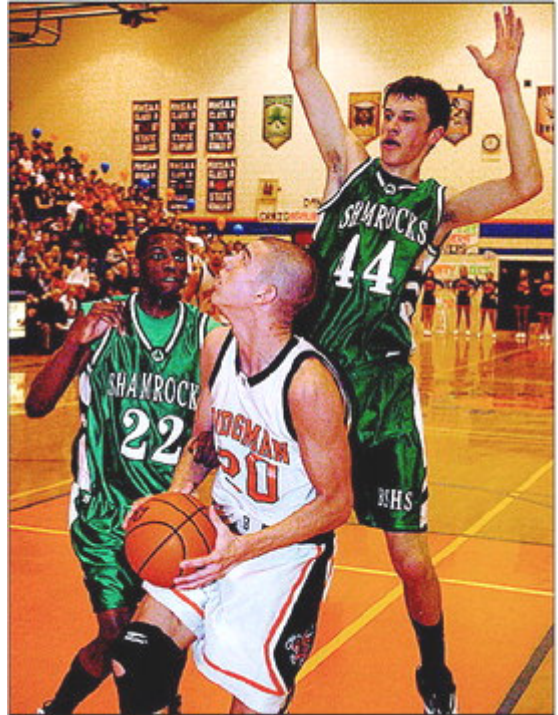
Hendricks also hit a game-opening 3-pointer. In between, the Bees were 1 of 15 on 3-pointers.

"We missed some jump shots," said Bridgman coach Mike Miller. "They hit more shots than we did. I don't think you can analyze it more than that."

Bridgman called a timeout after Hendricks' heave, but Berrien Springs got the inbound pass to Demler and ran out the clock.

Berrien Springs will play Gobles at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the regional at Constantine.

After a back-and-forth first quarter Saturday, Bridgman went on a 7-0 run in the second to take a 15-9 lead.



That was the biggest lead either team would hold, though Bridgman stayed in front into the fourth quarter.

Berrien Springs took the lead, 28-27, on a Demler basket to start the fourth. A Little 3-pointer pushed the edge to four points, but the Shamrocks then went more than five minutes without scoring. **Two baskets by Dan Kunde, who led all scorers with 15 points, tied it at 31.** The tying score came with 2:17 left and was answered by Demler's 3-pointer.

Bridgman, three nights after shooting 27 percent in a win over Watervliet, was 15 of 48 from the field. Cummings blocked six Bridgman shots and altered several others.

"We just stayed with our bread and butter, which is our man-to-man defense," Spenner said. "They have so many good shooters, we had to get out on everybody." Berrien Springs was 14 of 43 from the field but hit 4 of 9 on 3-pointers.