

# SPORTS

Park Rapids Enterprise

**B1**  
Saturday, March 9, 2019



Photos by Vance Carlson / Enterprise

The Menahga bench — including (from left) Tara Hendrickson, Kate Hendrickson, Maryn Pinoniemi, Lela Peterson, Allie Pfeifer and Anita Lehto — celebrated after Cierra Ahlf hit a 3-pointer to give the Braves a 48-38 lead with 6:28 to play in a Section 5A playoff game against Pine River-Backus on Tuesday, March 5, at the Park Rapids Century School gym. Menahga held on for a 58-57 victory to earn a return trip to the section championship game.

## Braves hold off Pine River-Backus to return to Section 5A title game

**By Vance Carlson**  
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Head coach Cody Pulju expected a battle when the Menahga girls basketball team played Pine River-Backus for the Section 5A North championship Tuesday night (March 5) at the Park Rapids Century School gym. Menahga edged the Tigers 62-57 in a regular-season meeting on Dec. 11. With a trip to the section title game on the line, Pulju was counting on another close contest in the rematch.

Despite battling foul trouble, the No. 1-seeded Braves were able to build a 49-38 lead with 4:42 to play before holding off a late charge by the No. 2 seed for a 58-57 victory.

"It was exactly the game that we were expecting. Pine River-Backus is as good as it gets. They

are really experienced and loaded with talent at all positions," said Pulju. "We needed to play elite team defense and we tried to take away what they like to do offensively. They like to play inside out and are extremely good outside shooters. We did a great job all night long as we held them to only two 3-pointers. Our girls showed amazing heart and went out and wanted this game bad."

Both teams struggled offensively at the start as two layups by Tara Hendrickson, a jumper by Alyssa Peterson, a layup by Greta Hillukka and a 3-pointer by Annika Aho gave Menahga a 14-9 lead with 8:19 to play in the first half.

A layup by Rylie Hirschey and a layup and jumper by Alyssa Semmler gave the Tigers a 15-14 lead at the 7:07 mark before a 3-pointer by Hillukka put Menahga

in front 17-15 at the 6:30 mark. Two free throws and a layup by Peterson kept the Braves in front 21-19 with 3:29 to play in the first half before a 3-pointer by Hendrickson and a layup by Peterson gave Menahga a 26-22 lead at the break. Cierra Ahlf and Hillukka saw limited playing time after picking up three fouls in the first half for the Braves.

Pine River-Backus opened the second half on a 9-2 run as Semmler and Gabby Rainwater hit jumpers, Olivia Adkins hit a 3-pointer, and Semmler had a layup for a 31-28 lead with 14:54 to play. A three-point play by Hendrickson and a layup by Peterson gave Menahga a 34-31 lead with 13:20 to go before a layup by Hirschey and a basket off a

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Pine River-Backus' Bailey Wynn (1) looked to deliver a pass to Alyssa Semmler as Menahga's Maryn Pinoniemi defended during a Section 5A playoff game Tuesday, March 5.

## Pirates take charge down stretch to eliminate Panthers from playoffs

**By Vance Carlson**  
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Park Rapids and Crookston entered the Section 8AA girls basketball tournament on different paths since meeting during the regular season. Park Rapids defeated the Pirates 64-56 on Jan. 22 to open the season with an 11-3 record while that loss started a seven-game losing streak for Crookston.

The Pirates ended the regular season on a high note, starting with an 84-78 overtime loss to Roseau, the No. 1 seed in the section that defeated Park Rapids 89-47. Crookston ended the regular season on a four-game winning streak while the Panthers earned the No. 1 seed in the South despite entering post-season play with a 3-8 record in their final 11 games.

Both teams opened the playoffs with impressive wins as Park Rapids eliminated Long Prairie-Grey Eagle 72-50 while the Pirates defeated Dilworth-Glyndon-Felton 64-47 to avenge a 46-35 loss to the Rebels during the regular season.



Robert Williams / Forum News Service

Park Rapids' Rilee Michaelson (15) blocked a shot by Crookston's Kasey Cwikla during a Section 8AA playoff game at Concordia College on March 2.

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## Braves open playoffs by eliminating Bears

**By Vance Carlson**  
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After defeating Bertha-Hewitt twice during the regular season, the Menahga boys basketball team was looking to get off to a fast start to avoid an upset when these two teams met in the first round of the Section 5A tournament Monday (March 4) at Menahga.

Sparked by a 3-pointer by Wade Berttunen and two 3-pointers by Gavin Hillukka, the Braves used a fast start to spark a 64-33 victory.

An offensive putback, jumper and layup by Zach Floyd, a jumper by Berttunen, a layup by Tristan Aho, and two layups by Hillukka combined with the three 3-pointers to give the Braves a 24-9 lead with 7:52 to play in the first half. Hillukka closed the half with another layup as Menahga led 31-19 at the break.

Two layups by Berttunen and layups by Jonah Howard and Aho gave Menahga a 41-23 lead with 11:37 to play before a layup, three-point play and two free throws by Howard along with a 3-pointer by Charlie Hodge pushed the lead to 51-29 with 6:55 left. Victor Aho scored off a rebound before layups by Mason Hotakainen, Hillukka, Berttunen



Vance Carlson / Enterprise

Bertha-Hewitt's Jared Kirscht (on floor) and Menahga's Thomas Litzau scrambled after a loose ball during a Section 5A playoff game Monday, March 4.

and Patrick Simmons concluded the Braves' scoring.

Hillukka's 17 points and six rebounds, Berttunen's 11 points, Howard's nine rebounds and Hodge's six rebounds led the Braves, who defeated B-H 62-42 and 73-61 during the regular season. The win lifted Menahga to 12-14 on the season.

The Bears, who missed all 15 3-point attempts, ended the season with a 17-game losing streak and 1-24 record.

BERTHA-HEWITT: Baumgartner 2 3-3 7, Christenson 0 0-0 0, Jo. Kirscht 2 0-0 4, Ja. Kirscht 1 0-0 2, Kvamme

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