

Unbeaten Central Decatur survived Aplington-Parkersburg' early flurry to keep its championship hopes alive.

Down by as many as 14 points, the second-ranked Cardinals rallied to beat the Falcons 57-49 to reach the semifinal round for the second straight year, this time in Class 2A.

It was an impressive example of staying the course for a team that found itself trailing 16-2 less than 5 minutes into the game. And at the decisive point, the Cardinals' two stars came through.

Central Decatur took its first lead at 32-31 on Erica Kauzlarich's 3-pointer from the right corner midway through the third quarter. After five lead changes, the Cardinals trailed 41-40 with 5 minutes remaining. That's when senior guards Ali Masters and Emma Atwood took over.

The right-handed Masters scored on a left-handed scoop and Atwood got a bucket on a slick drive from the right side for a 44-41 lead. After an Aplington-Parkersburg basket, Atwood converted a three-point play off a baseline drive and then found Alaina Applegate racing down the floor for a breakaway layup.

That made it 49-43 with 2:34 to go and the Cardinals did the rest with free throws, Masters making six straight in the final 1:03 to finish with 21 points. Atwood scored 15 points and Applegate added eight.

Megan Johnson led Aplington-Parkersburg with 17 points, while Sophia Jungling and Jenna Bruns each scored eight.

Aplington-Parkersburg built a 23-11 first quarter lead on torrid shooting, sinking five of six 3-point shots and going 9-for-15 overall. But Central Decatur limited the Falcons to one 3 and eight baskets from then on.

Central Decatur, which played in the Class 1A field last year, moves on with a 23-0 record in their fourth consecutive trip to state. The Cardinals are 95-4 in that span.

Aplington-Parkersburg set a school record for victories this season and finishes 23-3.