

With a tournament-tested group, North Polk is back in the Class 3A semifinals.

Sophomore Maggie Phipps scored 19 points and top-ranked North Polk led from the start in beating Estherville-Lincoln Central 59-47 in the 3A tournament opener.

Phipps, who already has committed to Drake, is among four starters back from the North Polk team that lost to eventual champion Crestwood in last year's semifinals. This year's edition made it back with a solid defensive effort, holding Estherville-Lincoln Central to 29.8 percent shooting.

Jaedon Murphy added 15 points and 11 rebounds for North Polk, while Katie Brown contributed 14 points and seven rebounds. Murphy had an especially efficient game, going 4-for-7 from the field and making all six of her free throws.

Estherville-Lincoln Central kept pace for much of the game and trailed 34-27 midway through the third quarter. North Polk then rattled off nine straight points to stretch the lead to 16, Phipps capping the run by banking in a short jumper.

The lead fell below double digits only once after that.

Estherville-Lincoln Central recovered from five straight losses late in the season to earn its first state tournament trip since 2013. Josie Condon led the Midgets with 21 points and 12 rebounds, while Kaitlyn Tendal scored nine points. The Midgets finish 14-11.

North Polk goes into the semifinals at 1:30 p.m. Thursday with a 22-2 record.