

Sometimes the players who aren't considered the stars are the ones who come through and that was the case for Southeast Polk in the Class 5A semifinals.

Jessica Stuart, a 5-foot-9 junior who averages 4.9 points, was right in the middle of things down the stretch as Southeast Polk finished with a flurry to beat Dowling Catholic 72-61 and earn a trip to Friday night's title game.

The third-ranked Rams scored the game's final 12 points after Dowling took a 61-60 lead with 3:38 left. As those final minutes ticked off, Stuart made a layup, stole the ball and fed teammate Grace Larkins for a layup, made a free throw after another steal and grabbed a couple of rebounds after Dowling misses.

When it was over, Stuart had 16 points, eight rebounds and three steals. Larkins led the Rams with 24 points and Iowa State recruit Maggie McGraw added 17 points, including 10 in the decisive fourth quarter that sent the Rams into the championship against West Des Moines Valley at 6 p.m. Friday. Southeast Polk, now 21-3, beat Valley twice during the regular season, winning by double figures both times.

Caitlin Clark, the Dowling junior who is considered one of the nation's top college prospects, led the Maroons with 31 points after scoring 42 in a quarterfinal victory over second-ranked Waukee. Southeast Polk held her without a basket over the game's final 6 minutes, a big factor in the Rams' comeback. Ella McVey and Grace Gaber each scored nine for Dowling, which finishes 17-8.

Trailing 54-47 early in the fourth quarter, Southeast Polk went on 13-2 run grab a 60-56 lead on McGraw's drive to the basket with 4:40 remaining. Dowling regained the lead at 61-60 on Emma Gripple's driving layup, but that was the Maroons' final basket and Sami Albertson's drive to the hoop put the Rams ahead for good.

Southeast Polk is going after its second state championship after winning in 2013. The Rams have finished second three times, most recently in 2014.