

Seven is proving to be enough for Exira/Elk Horn-Kimballton, even in state tournament play.

Reduced to seven players after an ACL injury sidelined the team's only senior, the fourth-ranked Spartans have kept winning and now they're headed to the Class 1A semifinals after a 60-55 victory over MMCRU.

It wasn't easy getting there for the unbeaten Spartans. They took a 10-point early in the second half, fell behind by five points, then rallied behind sophomore guard Quinn Grubbs. Grubbs scored 12 points in the final 6:05 and finished with 25 to lead her short-handed team, which will play top-ranked Bishop Garrigan at 2 p.m. Friday for a chance to reach the state championship game.

Shay Burmeister added 14 points for the Spartans on 6-for-7 shooting, Mollie Rasmussen scored 11 and Macy Emgarten had 10 plus five rebounds. The fifth starter, Alisa Partridge, did not score but contributed in other ways with eight rebounds, three assists and three steals.

MMCRU is a combination of Marcus/Meriden-Cleghorn and Remsen Union and made its first state tournament appearance in that grouping. Emily Dreckman led the Royals with 20 points and eight rebounds, while Ellie Hilbrands scored 17 on 8-for-13 shooting and grabbed nine rebounds. They finish with a 21-3 record, with all three losses coming to state tournament qualifiers.

Exira/EHK appeared to take control of the game when it made 9-of-11 shots in the second quarter to open a 30-21 halftime lead. The Spartans finished the half with eight straight points and stretched the lead to 33-23 on Grubbs' 3-pointer early in the third quarter.

MMCRU then found its shooting touch and stormed back, running off nine straight points to take a 45-40 lead late in the third quarter. They led 49-45 when Grubbs took over for the Spartans. She scored twice on drives down the lane, then buried a 3-pointer from the left wing to put her team ahead to stay at 52-49.

Rasmussen's layup after the Spartans broke the press put them up by four with 1:27 remaining and Grubbs did the rest by making 5-of-6 free throws in the final 61 seconds.