

Maquoketa Valley found itself in the unusual position of playing from behind and it didn't matter at all. The top-ranked Wildcats are still unbeaten.

Led by its senior trio of Ella Imler, Emerson Whittenbaugh and Taya Tucker, Maquoketa Valley overcame a 10-point deficit in the first quarter and beat Rock Valley 51-35 in the opening game of the Class 2A bracket.

The Wildcats chipped away at the lead in the second quarter, charged in front with a big run in the third quarter and pulled away in the closing minutes with its free throw shooting.

Playing in the state tournament for the first time since 2013, Maquoketa Valley improved to 22-0 and will play in the semifinal round at 10 a.m. Friday.

Imler knocked down three 3-pointers in a span of a little more than 3 minutes to send the Wildcats into the lead and finished with 20 points. Whittenbaugh scored 12 points and Tucker finished with 10.

Rock Valley made the state tournament for the first time since 2004. Lexie VanKekerix had 18 points and six rebounds to lead the Rockets, who finish 16-10. Abby Heemstra added eight points and seven rebounds. Both finished their careers with more than 1,000 points.

Rock Valley jumped to a 15-5 lead as Maquoketa Valley struggled to get into a flow offensively. Three 3-pointers helped the Wildcats cut into the lead in the second quarter and they trailed just 21-20 at halftime after neither team scored in the final 4:28 of the quarter.

Heemstra's putback increased the Rockets' lead to 23-20 in the opening minute of the second half, but it was all Maquoketa Valley after that. The Wildcats finished the quarter with a 17-3 run that included 11 points from Imler and added four points at the start of the fourth quarter to go up 41-26.

Maquoketa Valley's last field goal came on Whittenbaugh's bucket inside on a lob pass from Kylie Chesnut with 5:57 left. The Wildcats finished it up at the free throw line, making 10 of 15 as Rock Valley continued to misfire at its end.

Chesnut scored only three points but grabbed 10 rebounds, handed out three assists and made two steals.

Maquoketa Valley shot 54 percent over the final three quarters after going 2-for-8 in the first 8 minutes.