

Freshman Payton Petersen led Dike-New Hartford to a state volleyball championship last fall and now will get a chance to do the same in basketball.

Petersen scored 19 points and the second-ranked Wolverines overwhelmed West Branch on the boards, winning 57-47 to advance to the Class 2A championship game. They'll face a showdown with top-ranked Maquoketa Valley for the title at 4 p.m. on Saturday. Both teams are 25-0.

Dike-New Hartford outrebounded the Bears 50-22 and grabbed 21 offensive rebounds, which led to 19 second-chance points. Petersen, the all-tournament volleyball captain, had nine offensive rebounds herself and finished with 16 in all for her second double-double of the tournament.

Paula Gonzalez added 16 points and eight rebounds for the Wolverines, while Ellary Knock and Sophia Hoffman each contributed 10 points and eight rebounds. Knock also blocked four shots, including two in the final minute, and Hoffman made four steals. Rylan Druecker led West Branch with 17 points on 7-for-9 shooting and Sasha Koenig scored 11 to go with seven assists and two steals. Taya Young had eight points, four rebounds and four steals for the Bears, who stayed within striking distance to the end but could not string together the baskets they needed to tie it or get the lead.

Dike-New Hartford built a 25-13 lead late in the first half with a 13-3 run, then found itself fending off repeated West Branch comeback attempts.

West Branch trailed just 39-35 heading into the fourth quarter and pulled to 39-38 on Druecker's third 3-pointer of the game 18 seconds into the final period. But Dike-New Hartford had an answer.

Petersen and Gonzalez combined for all the points in a 10-2 run that stretched the lead to 49-40. The Bears charged back again and drew to 51-47 before the Wolverines clamped down and held West Branch scoreless the rest of the way. Knock blocked shots by Koenig on successive possessions and the Wolverines finished it with free throws -- three by Hoffman and one by Gonzalez.

Dike-New Hartford is in the championship game for the first time, though before the merger, Dike won the six-player title in 1988. West Branch reached the semifinals for the first time and finished 21-2.

