

Cherokee is still unbeaten, but the top-ranked Braves had to work to stay that way. Unranked Davenport Assumption matched Cherokee step for step for three quarters and trailed by just two points in the first minute of the fourth quarter. But the Braves scored the game's final 18 points and won 63-43 to open the Class 3A portion of the state tournament.

Cherokee improved to 23-0, with all but one of those victories coming by at least 10 points. The Braves, in the tournament for the first time since 2017, will play in the semifinals at 2 p.m. on Thursday.

Alexis Pingel led Cherokee with 23 points, knocking down 4-of-5 shots from 3-point range and 8-of-13 overall. She also grabbed nine rebounds and made four steals. JeMae Nichols had a double-double with 14 points and 10 rebounds for the Braves and came up with five steals. Grace Anderson added 10 points as the Braves displayed their usual balance.

Sophomore Ava Schubert led Assumption with 12 points and five rebounds. Dawsen Dorsey added eight points for the Knights, who played a schedule filled with Class 5A and 4A teams. They lost their final five regular-season games before righting things in regional play and reaching the state tournament for the 17th time. They finish with an 8-12 record.

Both teams played aggressive defense, resulting in numerous steals and turnovers. Assumption finished with 13 steals and forced 20 turnovers. Cherokee had 16 steals while forcing 19 turnovers.

But Cherokee's defense was stronger down the stretch, enabling the Braves to pull away.

Assumption led by as many as seven points in the first half and was up 32-29 at halftime. Cherokee used a 5-0 run to take the lead for good late in the third quarter and was clinging to a 45-43 lead after Schubert made a layup with 7:29 left. But that would be the Knights' final basket.

Cherokee scored eight points in just 36 seconds to open a 53-43 lead and added to it from there as the Knights kept missing shots. Cherokee held the Knights to 30.5 percent shooting and outscored them 18-2 on free throws.

