

The fifth-ranked Natchitoches Central Boys' basketball team advanced to the semifinals for the seventh time in 12 years with a 72-58 win over the fourth-ranked Denham Springs Yellowjackets Friday night on the road in the quarterfinals.

The Chiefs (28-7) came storming out of the gate taking a 24-15 first quarter lead. NCHS maintained a comfortable lead as they pushed it to 38-27 at halftime before exploding in the third quarter to a 55-33 lead.

Denham Spring (28-7) tried to make a push as they cut the Chiefs' lead to nine with under a minute to go. But NCHS converted 20-for-26 at the free throw line as the comeback bid by the Yellowjackets was well short.

"I'm so proud of these guys," said NCHS boys' basketball head coach Kolton Sepulvado. "To endure what we did last year and win 11 games and to turn around this year and do what we have done. There's only one way that happens and that's if the players sacrifice a lot to make it happen and they have responded to it. A lot of people now days don't respond very well to the pressure we put the players here through and that's why they're still playing. This is an unbelievable group, and they still have room to grow. They know what the legacy of NCHS is and they want to be a part of it."

NCHS shot 24-for-46 from the field for 54 percent to help punch their ticket to the semifinals. Logan Smith led the way with 24 points and seven rebounds while Jaden Braden added 15 points and six assists. Ja'Corien Beard had 13 points and tore down 17 rebounds while Ja'Dell Demery had 12 points.

The Chiefs advance to the familiar territory of Burton Coliseum in Lake Charles where they claimed the 2014 and 2016 5A state championships under former head coach Micah Coleman. NCHS will take on eighth-ranked Ruston in the semifinal round at a date and time to be announced.