

Kirkwood drops spirited battle to Indian Hills

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood Eagles got into a horserace with a bunch of thoroughbreds from Indian Hills Community College Tuesday night at Johnson Hall.

The thoroughbreds won by a nose, 95-88.

"Man, a lot of horses in that stable," Kirkwood Coach Doug Wagemester whistled after the 40 minutes of mayhem had ended.

Indian Hills has five players who have signed scholarships to play at NCAA Division I schools next season and a few more who will join them this spring. Kirkwood doesn't have anybody like that yet, but it was a good battle nonetheless.

In the final analysis, the 10th-ranked Warriors won the game because they made five more 3-pointers than the Eagles and hit two more free throws.

Eleven players scored in double figures -- six for Indian Hills and five for Kirkwood. There were 62 fouls and 90 free throws. Five guys fouled out. There were two technical fouls for players celebrating a little too much after dunks.

Despite all those whistles, it was an enjoyable game and the refs did a good job keeping things under control.

Indian Hills (9-1) had too many horses, although Kirkwood doesn't have a bunch of nags by any stretch of the imagination.

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"They're so talented, they're so deep, they're well-coached, they know their philosophy, they play to their philosophy. It's a war of attrition," Wagemester said.

"We've got to find a way against those guys to get stops. Get clean stops without fouling, without giving up an offensive rebound."

Indian Hills nudged Kirkwood, 94-89, in their first meeting in Ottumwa a month ago. The Eagles had their chances in that game, just like they did Tuesday night.

Indian Hills pressed and trapped and attacked the basket for the entire game, but Kirkwood (6-5) handled the pressure most of the night and went on the attack itself despite being two or three inches shorter at almost every position.

"To play a team like that, knowing they're going to come in and press and fly around and are going to be real aggressive, you've got to come with it all the time," said Najeal Young, who scored 17 points for Kirkwood.

"As a whole, our team came out with the right mindset and played hard all the way through. We probably had a few mistakes that we shouldn't have made and that's on us, but that's the kind of thing that occurs when you play a good team like that."

Frank Williams popped in six 3-pointers and led Indian Hills with 20 points. He's a 6-foot-6 sophomore from Raytown, Mo., who is going to make somebody very happy when he signs a national letter-of-intent this spring.

Indian Hills is so deep, two of its five Division I signees came off the bench Tuesday night. If you saw them at an airport, you'd swear a Big Ten team was heading to a game somewhere.

"We have a lot of guys who can chip in," said Indian Hills Coach Barret Peery. "Anybody can have a great night. We have different leading scorers every night and different starting lineups."

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Dustin Hogue, a 6-5 sophomore who has signed with Iowa State, scored 14 points. Jameel McKay, a 6-8 sophomore who has signed with Marquette, had 12 points. Jelan Kendrick, a 6-6 guard who is headed to UNLV, contributed 11 points.

Richard Amardi, a 6-9 sophomore who has signed with Iowa State, finished with seven rebounds and six points before fouling out.

The Eagles also filled the boxscore. Young and J.C. Fuller scored 17 points apiece. Devan Douglas had 16 points. Gage Heffernan finished with 11 points and 11 rebounds. Kevin Hunter also scored 11 points.

Indian Hills led by two points at halftime, 39-37, which was only a taste of things to come. The Warriors outscored the Eagles, 56-51, in the second half and the race was on.

Indian Hills spurted to a 12-point lead at 56-44, but Kirkwood rallied within 61-58. Indian Hills made it a 12-point game again at 76-64, but the Eagles refused to disappear and pulled within six points at 80-74, 82-76, 84-78 and 90-84 before time ran out.

It was a spirited battle from start to finish.

"I know their guys have some talent, so you have to go out there and play harder," said Douglas, a 6-2 guard from Clinton who has great leaping ability. "We're a lot shorter, so we've got to get after it on the court.

"I think all the effort was there," he said. "They've just got a little advantage over us. Their whole team is really athletic."

Indian Hills competes at the Division I level of junior college basketball, whereas Kirkwood is a

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Division II club with less scholarship money and a smaller budget. Nonetheless, the Eagles more than held their own.

"You definitely know what you've signed up for when you play Kirkwood," said Peery. "They're going to give you a full 40 minutes.

"We've played each other four times now in my short time here and every single one of them have been nailbiters. It wasn't anything different tonight."

Wagemester doesn't like to lose, even when the opponent is bigger, deeper and has five major college signees on its roster.

"Oh, there are plenty of excuses," he said. "That's all good and fine and I'm proud of the kids, but it would be nice to reward ourselves once and find a way to get over the top. But all the credit goes to them. It wasn't for our lack of trying."

Indian Hills made only 11 of 23 free throws in the first half, but the Warriors found the mark in the second half and finished 33 of 50 at the foul line. Kirkwood made 31 of 40 free throws.

INDIAN HILLS (95): McKay 5 2-4 12, Stevens 0 1-2 1, Kendrick 4 3-5 11, Hogue 3 8-9 14, F.Williams 6 2-2 20, Amardi 2 2-4 6, White 1 1-2 4, G.Williams 1 11-15 13, Ross 3 1-4 10, Moss 1 2-3 4. Totals 26 33-50 95.

KIRKWOOD (88): Hunter 5 1-3 11, Heffernan 2 7-8 11, Fuller 6 3-4 17, Olson 0 2-2 2, Douglas 5 5-6 16, Young 6 5-7 17, Manego 0 3-4 3, Witt 0 0-0 0, Semler 2 2-2 8, Currie 0 3-4 3. Totals 26 31-40 88.

Halftime - Indian Hills 39, Kirkwood 37. 3-point goals - Indian Hills 10 (F.Williams 6, Ross 3, White 1), Kirkwood 5 (Fuller 2, Semler 2, Douglas 1). Fouled out - Kendrick, Amardi, Olson, Young, Manego. Technical fouls - McKay, Young.