

Olson helps Eagles top prep school

Written by Carl Gonder

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Taylor Olson led the Mississippi Valley Conference in floor burns during his playing days at Cedar Rapids Jefferson High School. He's doing the same thing for the Kirkwood Eagles.

The 6-foot-2 sophomore did a pretty good job filling out a stat line Wednesday night at Johnson Hall, leading the Eagles to a 67-55 win over ABCD Prep Academy of Des Moines with 12 points, six assists, four steals and untold hustle plays.

Olson takes pride in his work ethic and hustle.

"I try to be," he said. "Especially in games like that. We needed a spark from somewhere and I felt like I needed to step up and do that tonight."

Helping his high school team to three straight state tournament appearances (2010-2011-2012), Olson was a second team all-state selection for the J-Hawks his senior year when he averaged 18.4 points per game. Jarrod Uthoff was the star of the team in 2010 and 2011, but Olson was always the glue-guy and a spirited competitor. He still is.

"He competed and he set the tone for us in the second half," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "If he didn't come to play like he did in that second half, we might have lost this game. I was really pleased with his effort."

Olson has offers from Idaho State and interest from Drake, the University of New Hampshire and several other mid-major programs. "I'm hoping to continue to play somewhere," he said.

Olson hit a pair of 3-pointers and made two huge plays to seal the game with less than 90 seconds left, driving the lane and dishing to forward Joseph Tagarelli who scored point-blank lay-ins. Olson's penetration and assist at the 1:12 mark gave the Eagles a 65-54 lead.

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“He made a couple of nice plays with some passes down low in the second half when we needed something,” Petersen said of Olson’s late-game heroics.

ABCD Academy, Iowa’s only prep school, plays a rigorous 45-plus game schedule throughout the country and has a talented roster of former high school stars, including Merrick Marble, the half-brother of University of Iowa player Devyn Marble.

“He had class and couldn’t make it tonight,” Merrick Marble said of Devyn. “We talk all the time and it was fun to play here tonight.”

Most of the ABCD Academy players take classes at Des Moines Area Community College. Coach Glendon Alexander was forced to dress only six players due to injuries.

“I’ve got some guys injured, but the first half we controlled the tempo and some shots were falling,” Alexander said of his team’s 33-30 lead at halftime. “Kirkwood has a good group. They are very poised. They are a very good ballclub.”

In just its second year based in Des Moines and fourth year overall, ABCD Academy has played games this season in Wyoming, Idaho, California and throughout the Midwest. The 12-player roster flies to Las Vegas next week. Emmanuel Malou, the team’s best player at 6-feet-9, did not play and reportedly will sign with Iowa State this spring.

Alexander was a McDonald’s All-American in 1996 and played at Arkansas and Oklahoma State. He still holds career high school scoring records in the state of Texas. His main goal is to help kids get college scholarships.

“We have some very talented kids,” he said. “We can compete with a lot of good schools.”

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ABCD Academy led by as many as seven points in the first 20 minutes, but shot just 30.6 percent for the game and 4-for-23 from 3-point range. They hit 21-of-26 free throws to keep things close.

Kirkwood (14-6) hit 40 percent from the floor, but just 6-of-25 from behind the arc. Tagarelli had 14 points and nine rebounds and netted 6-of-9 field goals. Matt Lassen, Chris Ward and Myzeah Batie-Gady added eight points apiece. Joseph Weeks had nine rebounds for the Eagles, while Batie-Gady had eight boards.

Petersen was not very happy with his team overall.

"We are in the middle of our conference season, so you kind of throw this one in there because we had an open date," he said. "It's not a league game and they are a prep school team, but we still have to come with a better mind-set than we did."

Petersen sees opportunities ahead.

"We need to get some things on track," he said. "We need to become a better basketball team to finish this season out."

The Eagles play at Iowa Central Community College Saturday in Fort Dodge.

ABCD ACADEMY (55): Terrel Duck 2 0-0 6, Charles Tucker 3 3-3 9, Andre Williams 4 3-5 11, Zach Charles 2 5-5 9, Merrick Marble 1 4-5 6, Alec Mabie 3 6-8 14. Totals 15 21-26 55.

KIRKWOOD (67): Ajay Lawton 2 0-2 5, JC Fuller 2 1-2 5, Joseph Weeks 1 2-2 4, Taylor Olson 3 4-4 12, Joseph Tagarelli 6 2-3 14, Matt Lassen 3 0-0 8, Austin Swank 1 0-0 3, Myzeah Batie-Gady 2 4-4 8, Chris Ward 4 0-1 8. Totals 24 13-18 67.

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Halftime - ABCD Academy 33, Kirkwood 30. 3-point goals - ABCD Academy 4 (Duck 2, A. Marble 2), Kirkwood 6 (Olson 2, Lassen 2, Lawton 1, Swank 1).