

No. 19 Eagles slam No. 9 Iowa Central

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 17 April 2016 06:48 -



The Kirkwood Eagles enjoyed a grand day at the ballpark Saturday.

Matt Paciello began the doubleheader with a grand slam and JT Sole finished the twin-bill with another four-run homer as the 19th-ranked Eagles swept No. 9 Iowa Central, 11-1 and 11-6, in an ICCAC double-dip at the Kirkwood field.

Nick Drahozal tossed a two-hitter in the first game, Brandon Brittain delivered the game-winning hit in the second game and everybody who played made a contribution to the big victories.

The sweep lifted Kirkwood into sole possession of first place in the ICCAC with an 11-3 record at the mid-point of the conference race, one full game ahead of NIACC and Southeastern and two games ahead of Iowa Central.

The Eagles (25-13) had dropped 5 of 6 games heading into Saturday's action, but Paciello steered them in the right direction when he socked his grand slam with two outs in the bottom of the first inning of the opener.

Kirkwood loaded the bases with nobody out, but the next two batters were retired before Paciello lined a 3-2 pitch over the fence in left field for an early 4-0 lead.

"It was a slider that was just hanging over the plate and I got fortunate to drive it," said Paciello, a sophomore right-fielder from Lake Worth, Fla. "It's a huge momentum shift. There was a spillover effect.

"When one good thing happens, everybody catches it and it just goes on. And that's what we did here today."

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Colin Kreiter, Brittain and General McArthur all clobbered home runs in the third inning as Kirkwood bolted to an 8-0 cushion in the opener. The Eagles scored three more times in the fourth inning and captured the game by the 10-run rule in the fifth.

Drahozal, a southpaw from Xavier, allowed one unearned run in the 11-1 triumph and lowered his sparkling ERA to 1.76 for the season. He struck out six batters and surrendered only two singles.

"He was unbelievable," said Coach Todd Rima.

Kirkwood trailed 5-3 heading into the bottom of the eighth inning in the nightcap, but the Eagles exploded for eight big runs to take command. Brittain gave Kirkwood a 6-5 lead when he laced an 0-2 fastball to right-center for a two-run single.

Four batters later, Sole socked his grand slam to give Kirkwood an 11-5 lead and room to breathe.

"The grand slam is nice, but it's better to come out with a big sweep. We really needed it," said Sole. "It's going to be a big momentum going into tomorrow to hopefully finish it off."

Kirkwood hosts Iowa Central (20-6) in another double-header Sunday at 1 p.m.

Sole, a sophomore catcher from Cedar Falls, transferred to Kirkwood this season after beginning his college baseball career at Iowa. "We didn't agree on some things (at Iowa) and I decided a fresh start was a better choice for me," he remarked.

The Eagles credited their work in practice this week for their good performance on Saturday. The Eagles lost 3-of-4 conference games to NIACC here last weekend and got embarrassed by Marshalltown in a double-header here Tuesday.

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"We went back and figured some stuff out in practice," said Brittain, a sophomore third baseman from Van Meter. "We worked really hard this week and found a way to compete and we came back and we did it here today."

Prairie grad Drew Yanecek picked up the victory in relief in Game 2. Tyler Butz, another Prairie grad, had four hits in the twin-bill.

Xavier grad Bryce Grimm reached base four times with two hits and two hit-by-pitches. His double ignited the eight-run outburst in the eighth inning of the nightcap.

"Those are two good wins against two really good arms," said Rima. "Big day tomorrow. They'll come ready to play and I'm pretty sure we will too."

"We put it all together today. We've been waiting to do that."

Kirkwood began the day in a three-way tie for first place in the conference with Iowa Central and Southeastern, but the Eagles finished the day at the top of the heap all by themselves. There are 14 games left in the conference season and the Eagles feel like they are legitimate contenders for the title.

"I really do," said Brittain. "If we keep playing as a team and getting W's like that, we're going to be really tough to beat."

GAME 1

Iowa Central █ █ 000 10 - 1 2 1
Kirkwood █ █ █ █ 404 3x - 11 12 1

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W - Drahozal. L - Anshutz.

GAME 2

Iowa Central □ □ 000 210 111 - 6 7 1
Kirkwood □ □ □ □ 300 000 08x - 11 11 1

W - Yanecek. L - Sobotka.