

New lineup sparks Kirkwood men

Written by Jim Ecker

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It's mid-December and the Kirkwood Eagles have already played 12 games, but Coach Bryan Petersen is still juggling his lineup and searching for the right formula that will give them a shot at another national crown.

He may have found a few answers Wednesday night.

Kirkwood started a new four-guard lineup against John Wood Community College and posted a comfortable 84-64 victory in a non-conference game at Johnson Hall.

Petersen has tinkered with the lineup much of the season in search of the right starting lineup and the right combination of subs.

"Day-by-day, we're still looking for a lot of answers from our group," he said. "You never have it completely figured out. Everybody says by January you should know your team, hopefully.

"It's not January yet, but at the same time I thought we'd probably be a little further along than we are right now."

Petersen has a lot of talented players to choose from, including six guys who helped the Eagles capture the NJCAA Division II title last March and a talented group of newcomers.

Talent is not the issue, but chemistry and team cohesion are still a work in progress. The Eagles

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have a respectable 9-3 record, but they are no longer ranked No. 1 in the country and they lost to Black Hawk College last week after drilling them by 44 points earlier in the year.

The Eagles will dive into the conference race after the holidays and Petersen said the goals remain the same: Conference title, regional title and a trip to nationals.

"That starts when we get back (after the holiday break)," he said. "Big picture - we still have a chance at all those things."

Chris King popped in four 3-pointers and led Kirkwood with 19 points Wednesday. Ethan Meeker, a new starter, helped the cause with 12 points. Shakur Triplett, another new starter, also provided a spark with 10 points and five rebounds.

King, Meeker and Triplett started along with Byron Harp and Miles Wentzien as Petersen looked for a group that could provide a fast start and provide the right match-ups against John Wood.

"We got off to a good start, so yeah, it was exactly what we were looking for," he said.

Wentzien, King and Meeker hit 3-pointers in the opening minutes of the ballgame and King added a three-point play when he drove for a basket and got fouled. A dunk by Al'Tavius Jackson made it 20-4 and the Eagles were off and flying.

Kirkwood led 39-19 at halftime and raised the margin to 25 points at 51-26 on a basket by Elijah Henry. John Wood scored 10 straight points and pulled within 52-39, but Kirkwood went on a 13-2 run to restore order at 65-41.

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King shot 7-for-9 from the field and was 4-for-5 on 3-pointers while sharing point-guard duties with Harp. "I thought he played really well tonight," said Petersen.

JOHN WOOD (64): McKenzie 4 10-11 18, Elbe 0 1-2 1, Burrows 3 0-1 8, Eivins 0 0-0 0, Fadika 5 2-2 12, Sailmen 0 0-0 0, Plummer 2 1-3 5, Ranger 1 4-4 6, Schlotzhauer 2 4-4 8, Wolfmeyer 0 0-0 0, Long 2 2-2 6. Totals 19 24-29 64.

KIRKWOOD (84): Harp 0 0-0 0, Wentzien 3 0-0 8, Fagan 1 0-0 3, Marble 0 2-2 2, D. King 2 2-2 6, Triplett 4 2-2 10, Jackson 2 4-6 9, Rice 1 0-0 2, Meeker 5 0-1 12, C. King 7 1-1 19, Oliver 1 2-3 4, Henry 4 1-1 9. Totals 30 10-22 84.

Halftime - Kirkwood 39, John Wood 19. 3-point goals - John Wood 2 (Burrows 2), Kirkwood 10 (C. King 4, Wentzien 2, Meeker 2, Fagan 1, Jackson 1).