

Meeker helps No. 14 Eagles rip Ellsworth

Written by Jim Ecker

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It's rare to see a college basketball team with four point guards in the starting lineup, but the Kirkwood Eagles come as close as you're going to get these days.

They've got Chris King, the primary point guard. They've got Byron Harp, who sparked the Eagles to the national title last year. They've got Miles Wentzien, a versatile guy from Fort Madison.

And they've also got Ethan Meeker, a slick freshman who put on a show Wednesday night.

Meeker collected 15 points and five assists as the 14th-ranked Eagles whipped Ellsworth, 89-53, in an ICCAC conference game at Johnson Hall.

"He played great," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "He's really come along."

"He works hard every day, so it's great to see him have success in games. He did a great job of getting in the paint and finding shooters. And obviously he's a good shooter himself."

The game was tied early, 18-18, but then Meeker and the Eagles went to work with a 14-0 run to grab command at 32-18. They never looked back from there and won easily by 36.

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Meeker hit a 3-pointer to make it 23-18, then a little later he drove to the basket and found Harp and Wentzien for 3-pointers from the corner on consecutive plays.

Later, Meeker hit another triple to make it 42-25 and Ellsworth never knew what hit them.

Meeker was a point guard and off-guard in high school, so handling the ball comes naturally even though King and Harp are the primary point guards on the club.

"That's part of my game that I really enjoy doing, just finding the open guy," he said. "I have great shooters around me, so it's pretty easy here."

King is 6-feet tall, Meeker is 6-1, Harp is 6-2 and Wentzien is 6-3, so it's a relatively small starting lineup along with 6-foot-6 center Shakur Triplett.

"It's kind of fun," said Meeker. "We get to go up and down. We've got a lot of shooters, so we can spread the floor."



King made four 3-pointers and scored a game-high 17 points for Kirkwood (13-4, 1-1). Meeker and Wentzien notched 15 points apiece, Da'Rion King contributed 13 points off the bench and Harp scored 11.

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The Eagles sizzled all night with terrific outside shooting and slick moves to the bucket. They hit 61.2 overall from the floor, made 60 percent of their 3-pointers (12 of 20) and were 89.5 percent at the foul line (17 of 19).

Kirkwood suffered a tough loss at top-ranked Southwestern on Saturday, but bounced back with a strong effort. The Eagles learned a few lessons in the 94-83 defeat and went back to work.

"We learned that we still have to get better defensively," said Petersen. "I think we learned that we can score the basketball, because I think they're a pretty good defensive team. I thought we scored enough to win the game. It's more our defense."

Meeker thought their defense was pivotal against Ellsworth (8-9, 0-2).

"I think it's probably the best on-ball defense we've played all year," he said. "And we were really finding the open guy and shooting the ball."

Meeker did not become an instant starter for Kirkwood this season, but he worked his way into the lineup and has become a key member of the club. Petersen said Meeker had to become comfortable and acclimated to college basketball, just like most freshmen.

"He's playing with a lot of confidence," said Petersen "We love to see that."

There's a lot more to college basketball than merely shooting the ball.

"I had to earn it, defensively and offensively," said Meeker. "I started to get more and more confident and my defense picked up a lot."

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LaVeechie Williams, a freshman from Cedar Rapids Washington, led Ellsworth with 14 points off the bench. Mo Arrington, another Washington grad, started for Ellsworth and scored two points.

The final minute of the game was marred by a pushing and shoving incident that involved Elijah Henry of Kirkwood and Mike Evans of Ellsworth. Henry was called for a technical foul and tempers flared on both teams before peace was restored.

Kirkwood athletic director Doug Wagemester helped take charge of the situation and firmly instructed a female Ellsworth fan to get off the playing floor and back in the stands.

A few minutes later, the teams shook hands and went their separate ways.

ELLSWORTH (53): Johnson 1 0-0 3, McGlaun 1 0-0 2, Arrington 1 0-0 2, Evans 1 1-2 4, Kuljuhovic 4 4-6 13, Blount 0 0-0 0, Lasley 2 0-0 6, Spencer 1 0-1 2, O'Large 2 0-1 5, Williams 4 6-8 14, Chandler 0 0-0 0, Kelly 1 0-0 2. Totals 18 11-18 53.

KIRKWOOD (89): Triplett 3 0-0 6, Harp 3 3-4 11, Wentzien 5 2-2 15, Meeker 5 2-3 15, C.King 6 1-1 17, Jackson 0 2-2 2, Fagan 0 2-2 2, Marble 0 0-0 0, Henry 3 2-2 8, D.King 5 3-3 13. Totals 30 17-19 89.

Halftime - Kirkwood 46, Ellsworth 25. 3-point goals - Ellsworth 6 (Lasley 2, Johnson 1, Evans 1, Kuljuhovic 1, O'Large 1), Kirkwood 12 (C.King 4, Wentzien 3, Meeker 3, Harp 2).