

## King sparks No. 17 Eagles by Tritons

Written by Jim Ecker

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The five members of the Kirkwood men's basketball team who had to serve a two-game suspension for a minor infraction earlier this month were anxious to get rolling again Saturday.

It took 20 minutes to get fully in gear, but the 17th-ranked Eagles eased their pain by whipping Iowa Central, 101-72, in a conference game at Johnson Hall.

Chris King, Byron Harp, Miles Wentzien, Ethan Meeker and Elijah Henry were suspended by the National Junior College Athletic Association for two games for their roles in an incident against Ellsworth 10 days ago, but they were back Saturday.

King popped in six 3-pointers, scored 26 points and dished out seven assists as Kirkwood raised its record to 16-4 overall.

The Eagles led by only one point at halftime, 44-43, but they clamped down on defense in the second half and quickly pulled away. Kirkwood shot 66.7 percent from the field in the second half and clobbered Iowa Central in bench points for the game, 41-2.

The Eagles had trouble guarding Tray Croft and Prince Moss in the first half, but the second half was an entirely different story. Croft and Moss combined to score 56 of the visitor's 72 points, but most of that damage occurred in the first half.

King said the difference in the second half was simple.

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"Just guarding the ball with passion," he said. "The first half he (Croft) was scoring because everybody wasn't buying in and trying to help each other out. But the second half we really got back to what we usually do."

The Eagles ripped the Tritons, 57-29, in the second half and led by 33 points.

Kirkwood is operating with a 10-man roster these days, so when the five Eagles were suspended Coach Bryan Petersen added four baseball players to the roster and steered the team to a pair of victories, including a clutch road verdict at DMACC.

The baseball players have retired as basketball players, but it took the regular crew some time to get back in sync. "We were wondering how everybody was going to handle that," said Petersen.

For 20 minutes, the answer was murky.

"I wasn't very happy with the group in the first half," said Petersen. "The sense of urgency wasn't there. I didn't think we were playing very well together.

"It really wasn't a strategy thing. We just had to play harder and compete for each other."

The five suspended players gathered at Johnson Hall last Saturday when the Eagles played at DMACC, watching a live-stream broadcast of the game to support their teammates in absentia.

"We called them right after the game. Congratulated them," said King.

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They were reunited Saturday, even though it took a while to get the kinks out.

"We've been sitting out for a little bit and we haven't had our whole team, so it was kind of like a little bit of jitters," said King. "But the second half we started getting back to what we usually do."

Kirkwood played a lot of zone defense in the second half to stop Croft from making so many drives to the basket. The Tritons, with a thin bench, also appeared to get tired in the second half after four starters played all 20 minutes in the first half.

King, a 6-foot point guard from Des Moines, drilled Iowa Central with a series of 3-pointers, strong drives and terrific passes.

"He had another really good night, especially in the second half," said Petersen. "I think he really set the tone for us. If he gets it going, he's pretty talented."

King scored his 26 points in 25 minutes after running into mild foul trouble.

"I'm just playing my game," he said. "My teammates are telling me to shoot the ball more and be more aggressive and make plays, so that's what I'm trying to do."

Harp pitched in 16 points for the Eagles. Kaliph Fagan sparked Kirkwood during a key stretch in the second half and finished with 12 points. Da'Rion King contributed 10 points and eight rebounds.

Kirkwood raised its ICCAC conference record to 3-1, sticking one game behind Southwestern in the league standings. Iowa Central fell to 8-14 overall and 0-4 in the league.

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Croft finished with 30 points for Iowa Central and Moss scored 26, but the rest of the Tritons offered only 16 points.

**IOWA CENTRAL (72):** Croft 9 9-10 30, Moss 9 5-7 26, Hayes 2 0-0 6, Jok 1 0-0 2, Miller 3 0-0 6, Swift 0 2-2 0, Burgart 0 0-0 0, Hawkins 0 0-0 0, Loggins 0 0-0 0. Totals 24 16-19 72.

**KIRKWOOD (101):** Triplett 4 0-1 8, Harp 4 6-6 16, Wentzien 2 4-4 8, Meeker 1 0-0 2, C.King 9 2-2 26, Jackson 3 0-0 8, Fagan 4 3-3 12, Marble 2 0-0 6, Henry 1 3-4 5, D.King 4 2-3 10. Totals 34 20-23 101.

Halftime - Kirkwood 44, Iowa Central 43. 3-point goals - Iowa Central 8 (Croft 3, Moss 3, Hayes 2), Kirkwood 13 (C.King 6, Harp 2, Jackson 2, Marble 2, Fagan 1).