

## Kinnaird gets her K's for Eagles

Written by Jim Ecker

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Lexi Kinnaird does not want to jinx herself by peeking at the national stats for junior college pitchers, but she'd certainly like the numbers if she took a look.

The Kirkwood sophomore leads all NJCAA Division II hurlers by a wide margin in strikeouts with 154 K's in 100 innings and she ranks second in the country with 15 wins.

They do not keep a stat for strikeout-to-walk ratio, but if they did Kinnaird would lead that category as well. Remarkably, she's walked only seven batters in 100 innings, an average of one pass every 14 frames.

Kinnaird (15-2, 1.61 ERA) showed pinpoint control again Thursday as the second-ranked Eagles rallied to top Southeastern Community College, 4-2, in the first game of a doubleheader at Kirkwood.

The Eagles (31-2) also rallied for an 8-4 victory in the nightcap.

Kinnaird fanned eight batters and did not walk a soul in the 4-2 verdict in Game 1 for Coach Joe Yegge's club.

Kinnaird struck out 163 batters and walked 43 in 160 innings last year, so she's well ahead of that pace this season. Her control was good last year, but now it's fantastic.

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She said she's not doing anything different this year, but the numbers have been phenomenal.

"It's really something that Yegge has pushed from the beginning, pounding the zone and getting ahead early," she said. "So I think that's been my thought process for every at-bat.

"That's really helped me a lot this year, but nothing special."

There has been one big change for Kirkwood this season, however. Yegge is letting All-American catcher Maddie Hansen call the pitches this year, instead of having to look into the dugout for signals.

That speeds up the game and has worked just fine.

"I think we're in sync," said Kinnaird. "Everything that she's thinking, I'm thinking right along with her. So it's really been fun."



"I also like the fast-paced game. It helps me out and it's worked really well for us."

Kinnaird has compiled a flashy 40-4 record at Kirkwood the past two seasons, including a 25-2 record last year. She plans to pitch at Wisconsin-Green Bay at the NCAA Division I level next season.

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The Eagles trailed Thursday's opener 2-1 heading into the bottom of the sixth inning before erupting for three runs. Morgan Frost led off with a single and scored all the way from first base on a hit-and-run double by Angie McBeain to tie the score 2-2.

Monika Bevens snapped the tie by belting a two-run homer to give the Eagles a 4-2 margin. Kinnaird allowed a two-out single in the top of the seventh, but got the final out on a fly ball.

Kirkwood also trailed in the nightcap heading into the bottom of the sixth, this time 4-3, before breaking loose for five runs and the 8-4 victory. Lexi Ferrari hit a two-run double to give the Eagles a 5-4 lead.

Bevens hit another home run in the second game, giving her seven homers for the season. Hansen hit her 10th homer in the nightcap and McBeain socked her ninth of the year.

McBeain (12-0, 1.62 ERA) pitched a complete game for the victory.

Kirkwood has crushed most of its opponents this season, but the Eagles were pushed to the limit by Southeastern. In the long run, Kinnaird thinks some close games might be good for the Eagles as they try to reach the national tournament again.

"We obviously always want to score a lot of runs," she said. "But we're going to get opportunities to grow and improve where we need it when things aren't working for us.

"I think it can help us when we get to nationals," she said, "but like I said we always like to score a lot of runs."

Kirkwood boasts a team batting average of .455 with 61 homers in 33 games. The Eagles are

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averaging more than 12 runs per game.

Kinnaird said she was not worried about the 2-1 deficit in the first game, not with so many good hitters on her side.

"I know my team is going to have my back at the end of the day," she remarked. "We have a lot of power, we come up with the clutch hits when we need to. So it's been fun."