

No. 2 KCC men stung by Ellsworth

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood men's basketball team climbed a notch to No. 2 in the national rankings this week, but the Eagles will probably slip a few spots after what happened Wednesday night at Johnson Hall.

The Eagles never found their rhythm and were stung by Ellsworth, 81-76, in overtime in an ICCAC conference game.

The Eagles have already clinched the conference title and the No. 1 seed for the NJCAA Division II regional that begins Tuesday at Kirkwood, but their impressive 14-game winning streak is history heading into the final game of the regular season Saturday.

Ellsworth will finish in the second division of the league standings, but the Panthers outplayed the Eagles and deserved to win.

"They beat us in every category," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen, who could not find any silver linings.

The Eagles trailed by five points with 30 seconds left in the second half, but they forced overtime at 69-69 when Doug Wilson connected for a layup with 3.5 seconds remaining.

Kirkwood scored the first basket in overtime for a 71-69 edge, but Ellsworth outscored the Eagles 12-5 the rest of the way.

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The outcome left the Eagles at 22-5 overall and 10-1 in the conference. Ellsworth raised its marks to 15-13 overall and 4-7 in the league.

Kirkwood clinched the conference title on Saturday and will host all of its games in the regional tournament as the No. 1 seed, but it won't mean much if they cannot protect their home court in the postseason.

"It's nice to have it," Petersen said about the top seed, "but maybe that crept into our minds a little bit with how we played."

Petersen was impressed with Ellsworth.

"I thought they did a good job of playing with energy and I don't think we did a good enough job to match it," he said. "We just broke away from what we are, and that's a team that plays disciplined, a team that will defend, and offensively be pretty versatile. We didn't do any of those things tonight."

The Eagles misfired from long range most of the game, finishing 8 for 34 on 3-pointers for 23.5 percent. They also lost the battle of the boards, 41-35.

Kirkwood's biggest lead all night was just two points and they missed a lot of shots they normally make.

Chris King led the Eagles with 22 points, but shot 6 for 22 from the field and 2 for 10 on 3-pointers. Wilson finished with 14 points and 10 rebounds. Bailey Kale scored 12 points and Carlo Marble had 11. LJ Stansbury contributed eight points, eight rebounds and four assists.

LJ Harris led Ellsworth with 27 points. LaVeechie Williams, who prepped at Cedar Rapids

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Washington, collected 16 points and 12 rebounds for the Panthers despite leg cramps. Tristan Forsyth also scored 16.

Kirkwood finishes the regular season Saturday at DMACC. The Eagles will host the regional opener next Tuesday at 7 p.m.

ELLSWORTH (81): Antoine 1 6-8 9, Williams 7 2-4 16, Harris 6 10-12 27, Lasley 3 1-1 8, Forsyth 7 2-2 16, Muilenburg 0 0-0 0, Donaldson 2 1-2 5, Gooder 0 0-0 0, Coates 0 0-0 0, Meyer 0 0-0 0. Totals 26 22-29 81.

KIRKWOOD (76): Meeker 1 0-0 2, King 6 8-9 22, Marble 3 2-2 11, Storey 0 0-0 0, Wilson 7 0-2 14, Stansbury 1 6-8 8, Kale 4 2-2 12, Small 1 0-0 3, Ross 0 0-0 0, Johnson 0 0-0 0, Arrington 2 0-0 4. Totals 25 8-34 76.

Halftime - Kirkwood 34, Ellsworth 34. Regulation - Kirkwood 69, Ellsworth 69. 3-point goals - Ellsworth 7 (Harris 5, Antoine 1, Lasley 1), Kirkwood 8 (Marble 3, King 2, Kale 2, Small 1).