

Kuch helps No. 5 Eagles slam Ellsworth

Written by Jim Ecker
Friday, 04 May 2018 19:56 -



Lauren Kuch lofted a long fly ball down the left-field line and dutifully ran to first base Friday afternoon, thinking she'd have to turn around and take another swing.

"I actually thought it was going to be foul," she said.

Kuch knew she was wrong when she heard a loud "ping" as the ball hit the metal foul pole. The bases were loaded, so it became a grand slam home run instead of a long strike.

"I was excited," Kuch said. "Yeah, I was excited."

Kuch's grand slam in the bottom of the first inning steered the fifth-ranked Eagles to a 10-0 victory over Ellsworth in the opening round of the regional junior college tournament at Kirkwood.

The game was stopped after 4 1/2 innings due to the college mercy rule.

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Kirkwood (44-11) will face Iowa Central or NIACC in the semifinals Saturday at 2 p.m.

Kuch went 2-for-2 with a walk, five RBIs and scored three runs. She also made a sensational diving catch in left field for the first out in the top of the fifth.

Kuch has been a rock for the Eagles all season, hitting .465 with 12 homers and 63 RBIs. She ranks seventh in the country in RBIs, giving Kirkwood three players in the top-7 with DoniRae Mayhew (first with 81) and Monika Bevans (sixth with 64).



"I actually don't look at my stats," she said. "I go up to bat looking for my pitch. I don't think too much about it. I don't make things too complicated. I try to stay within myself, I guess."

Kuch has made a smooth transition from Cedar Rapids Prairie to college softball. She hit .414 with eight homers and 35 RBIs as a senior at Prairie last year, so she's improved her batting average by 51 points and also improved her power numbers.

Kuch lives in Fairfax, which is about a 10-minute drive from Kirkwood and her comfort zone. She played for Kirkwood Coach Joe Yegge at Prairie and saw no reason to change.

"I knew I didn't want to go that far away," she said. "And I knew Yegge and enjoyed playing for him in high school. And I love the campus. I love everything about Kirkwood."

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Kuch and Natalie Halvorson, another Prairie grad, have been two keys for the Eagles this season. Halvorson tossed a two-hit shutout Friday with five strikeouts, raising her record to 24-8 and giving her a 2.53 ERA.

Halvorson committed first to Kirkwood and was hoping Kuch would follow suit. "Yeah, she encouraged me," Kuch confirmed.

Ellsworth shocked Kirkwood, 2-0, on a two-hitter by Sydney Kramer on April 21, but the Eagles beat Kramer and the Panthers, 16-2, this past Sunday and then got her again Friday.

"I think today we were coming out ready to attack," said Kuch. "We saw her this past weekend and we came out attacking her then. And I think we were really ready to do it again."

Hannah Mausser went 3-for-3 with a double and three RBIs Friday, barely missing a pair of homers on blasts that hit the outfield wall. Kenady Waugh, who has returned to the lineup following a knee injury, had two hits and scored twice. Audra Bridenstine had a two-run double.

The regional tournament continues through Sunday.