The Kirkwood Eagles made four trips to the junior college World Series in the 1990's, but it's been 19 long years since they made their last appearance in the national tournament.

Now it's do-or-die time for the Eagles.

Kirkwood split the first two games of the North Plains district tournament with Southeast Community College on Saturday and now they'll play the decisive third game on Sunday.

The showdown in the best-of-3 series is scheduled to begin at 1 p.m. at the Kirkwood field.

The Eagles cruised in the first game, 10-1, behind a strong outing by Peyton Long, but Southeast took the nightcap, 14-9, when Kirkwood pitchers walked 12 batters and hit two others.

Now it's 12th-ranked Kirkwood (41-15) against unranked Southeast of Lincoln, Neb. (42-14) for a trip to the NJCAA Division II national tournament in Enid, Okla., May 26-June 2.

"Two good teams, the winner goes to the World Series. What else can you ask for?," declared Kirkwood Coach Todd Rima.

Long (4-2) pitched all eight innings in the first game and was terrific. He allowed one run on

seven hits, with five strikeouts and two walks. Southeast scored its only run on a solo homer.

"I thought Peyton Long was outstanding in Game 1," said Rima. "That's the start that you want from your Game 1 starter. He did exactly what we needed."

Chili Moseley socked a grand slam homer in the bottom of the eighth to give Kirkwood a 10-1 lead and end the game by the eight-run mercy rule. Taylor Jackson was 4-for-5 in the opener.

The Eagles had all the momentum heading into Game 2, knowing another victory would send them to the World Series, but Southeast scored four runs in the first inning to send a message: They did not come all the way to Cedar Rapids to roll over without a fight.

Kirkwood battled back and grabbed a 5-4 lead, thanks to a two-run homer by Jackson, a two-run homer by Ellison Hanna and an RBI double by Ross Kramer, but it didn't last.

Southeast scored five runs in the bottom of the fifth for a 9-5 lead and made it 14-6 in the bottom of the seventh on a grand slam by Aaron Palensky. There is no mercy rule in an elimination game, so they kept playing.

Kirkwood crept within 14-9 on a two-run homer by Max McCay and a solo shot by Spencer Wiskus, but the rally ended there.

McCay entered the game at catcher in the fifth inning when Joel Thompson injured his right

pinkie in a violent collision at home plate with Brenton Davis. Thompson had the ball and tagged Davis, but Davis knocked him over and the ball came loose for a run.

The home-plate umpire told Rima it was a legal play. "I was told it was, so that's what we go with," he said.

Rima does not think Thompson will be able to play on Sunday.

"It just doesn't look good right now," the coach said. "He's not feeling very good, so I would say he's doubtful."

Jackson went 4-for-5 again in the second game, making him 8-for-10 in the two games. Izaya Fullard also went 4-for-5 in the nightcap.

Rima used six pitchers in Game 2, but two of his top pitchers are fully rested for Sunday's showdown with Hunter Lee (8-2) and Adam Ketelsen (8-1) ready for action. Lee threw 131 pitchers last Saturday when the Eagles knocked off 10th-ranked Southeastern in the regional tournament and Ketelsen had two strong relief outings in the regional.

"Anytime those two guys have the ball, I feel confident," said Rima. "I'm also confident this team will show up and we're going to play hard. We'll be ready to go. I think it will be a great game."

GAME 1

Southeast 000 001 00 - 1 7 3
Kirkwood 031 200 04 - 10 13 0

W - Long (4-2). L - Sanderson.

GAME 2

Kirkwood 002 210 121 - 9 16 2
Southeast 400 051 40x - 14 12 0

W - Ramirez. L - Stalzer (6-4).