

Muhl, Eagles do the right thing

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 28 February 2019 06:13 -



When it comes to picking between good sportsmanship or embarrassing a weaker opponent, Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl will do the right thing every time.

It happened again Wednesday night.

The Kirkwood women's basketball team is locked in a fierce battle with NIACC for the No. 1 seed in the regional tournament that begins next week and the tiebreaker could be each team's point differential against all the other teams in the league.

Every point could matter, but Muhl will not deliberately run up the score when a game is completely out of hand.

The Eagles were sitting on a 91-43 lead and had the ball with 20 seconds left Wednesday against Southwestern, but Muhl told his team to hold the ball and let time expire.

The difference between a 48-point victory or a 50-point victory does not sound like much, but it might be important when the final calculations are made Saturday once the regular season is over.

Meanwhile, NIACC rolled up a 131-56 victory over Ellsworth Wednesday night for a 75-point margin against an opponent that has not won a ballgame all season.

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NIACC and Kirkwood could tie for first place in the ICCAC standings with 15-1 records. The first tiebreaker is head-to-head results, but they split their two games. The second tiebreaker is point differential in their two games, but they exchanged six-point victories on their home floors. The third tiebreaker is their record against everyone else in the league, but they both would be 14-0 if they tie for the title at 15-1.

The next tiebreaker is overall point differential against conference opponents. NIACC has outscored league teams by 417 points and Kirkwood has outscored them by 371, so NIACC has a 46-point lead over the Eagles at this point.

That's why every point counts. Muhl knows that, but will not push things to the extreme.

"No. Can't do it," said Muhl, who has won seven national titles at Kirkwood.



Muhl played his second-teamers until the final minutes Wednesday, even though the first-teamers might have pushed the margin against Southwestern to 60 or 65 points and closed the gap on NIACC.

"I don't care," he said. "I can't do it. It's not our style to do that. We've never done it before, so why are we going to start?"

Securing the No. 1 seed for the regional tournament is important, because the higher seed will host all its games. If NIACC is the No. 1 seed and Kirkwood is the No. 2 seed, the regional

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finals will be played at NIACC if they both make it.

The top seed is doubly important, because only the regional champion will make the national tournament. That means either second-ranked NIACC or fourth-ranked Kirkwood will miss the national tournament, despite being two of the very best teams in the country.

NIACC still has two regular-season games, against DMACC and Southeastern, while Kirkwood has only one more game at hapless Ellsworth on Saturday.

"Maybe they'll get beat," said Muhl.

If NIACC loses, everyone can put their calculators away and not worry about point differential because would be the outright league champions with a better record.

Muhl said using point differential as a tiebreaker has to be eliminated. "I'll bring it up at the fall meeting," he said. "We'll change it."

Paige Bradford led Kirkwood (24-6) with 17 points against Southwestern. Haley Mullinnix and Natalie Tomaszewski had 12 points apiece. Mackenzie Jenkins contributed 10 points, seven assists and six rebounds. Leah Robinson grabbed eight rebounds. Ju Gaston made six steals.

Southwestern fell to 11-17 overall and 5-11 in the conference.

SOUTHWESTERN (43): Brice 3 1-1 8, Moya 2 4-6 9, Aviles 0 0-0 0, Romo 2 0-0 5, Lair-Van Meter 2 2-2 6, Hunter 2 2-2 6, Haynes 1 0-1 2, Willis 1 0-0 3, Jordan 1 2-2 4. Totals 14 11-14 43.

KIRKWOOD (91): Gaston 2 1-2 6, Hurst 4 0-0 9, Mullinnix 4 1-1 12, Bradford 8 1-1 17, Jenkins

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4 1-1 10, Kennedy 2 0-0 6, Myers 3 0-0 8, Lipsey 0 0-0 0, Tomaszewski 3 6-6 12, Robinson 2 2-3 6, Mensen 2 0-0 5. Totals 34 12-14 91.

Halftime - Kirkwood 54, Southwestern 22. 3-point goals - Southwestern 4 (Brice 1, Moya 1, Romo 1, Willis 1), Kirkwood 11 (Mullinnix 3, Kennedy 2, Myers 2, Gaston 1, Hurst 1, Jenkins 1, Mensen 1).