

No. 4 Eagles cruise in regional

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 07 March 2019 05:58 -



The Kirkwood women's basketball team plans to spend the weekend in Mason City, but the Eagles are not going there for the fine cuisine or weather.

The fourth-ranked Eagles are headed to Mason City for the final two rounds of the NJCAA Division II regional tournament, with a trip to the national tournament the ultimate prize.

Kirkwood reached the semifinals of the regional Wednesday night by pounding Southwestern, 87-49, in the opening round at Johnson Hall.

The Eagles led, 47-11, at halftime and put the game on cruise control in the second half.

Kirkwood (26-6) will face DMACC (16-14) in the semifinals Saturday at 3 p.m. in Mason City. NIACC (25-5) will meet Iowa Central (18-12) in the other semifinal, with the winners colliding Sunday for the regional title.

NIACC, which is located in Mason City, is hosting the semifinals and finals as the No. 1 seed in the regional. NIACC and Kirkwood tied for the conference title and swapped six-point victories during the regular season, but NIACC got the No. 1 seed based on point differential against all the other teams in the ICCAC conference.

Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl does not like the way "point differential" was employed to break the tie, thinking it can lead to unsportsmanlike conduct by teams that might be inclined to run up the score against a hapless opponent. It did not escape Muhl's attention that NIACC scored 131 points against winless Ellsworth when NIACC and Kirkwood were battling for the No. 1 seed.

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"I'm not going to get into tiebreakers," Muhl said diplomatically Wednesday night. "We're ready to go play. That's all I'll say."

"We'll be happy to go up there and play and see what happens. We'll be ready. We're prepared for it."

Paige Bradford and Haley Mullinnix scored 14 points apiece against Southwestern. Amara Lipsey netted 11 points. Mackenzie Jenkins, Anasha Hurst and Leah Robinson scored 10 points as six Eagles reached double figures.

Jenkins collected 11 rebounds and six assists. Robinson had nine rebounds and three steals. Hurst dished out five assists. Mullinnix hit four 3-pointers and had four steals. Lipsey hit three triples.

"I thought we shared the ball well tonight," said Muhl. "I thought our kids shared the ball, played pretty hard and felt a sense of urgency. It was all good."

Now the Eagles need to win two ballgames in Mason City to reach the national tournament. Kirkwood won the national title in 2017 and finished second in the nation in 2018.

"It's all about effort," said Muhl, pointing to the weekend. "This group, if they have effort, they're pretty good."

"I just think we need to handle the pressure, don't turn it over and we'll be fine."

Tina Lair-Van Meter scored 13 points for Southwestern (11-18).

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SOUTHWESTERN (49): Hunter 2 0-0 4, Brice 0 4-4 4, Moya 1 3-4 5, Romo 2 0-0 5, Lair-Van Meter 6 1-1 13, Haynes 1 1-2 3, Willis 2 2-2 7, Aviles 0 2-2 2, Jordan 3 0-1 6. Totals 17 13-16 49.

KIRKWOOD (87): Bradford 6 2-2 14, Jenkins 5 0-0 10, Gaston 2 0-0 4, Hurst 4 0-0 10, Mullinnix 5 0-0 14, Lipsey 3 2-2 11, Kennedy 0 0-0 0, Myers 0 1-2 1, Tomaszewski 3 0-0 7, Robinson 2 5-6 10, Mensen 2 2-2 6. Totals 22 12-14 87.

Halftime - Kirkwood 47, Southwestern 11. 3-point goals - Southwestern 2 (Romo 1, Willis 1), Kirkwood 9 (Mullinnix 4, Lipsey 3, Tomaszewski 1, Robinson 1).