

KCC men earn No. 1 seed for regional

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood Eagles know exactly what it takes to win the national title. Now the journey begins for two NJCAA crowns in a row.

The 11th-ranked Eagles whipped Iowa Central, 87-64, Saturday to finish as co-champs of the ICCAC conference and claim the No. 1 seed for the regional tournament.

Kirkwood (23-5) will host Little Priest Tribal College (6-19) in the opening round of the regional Tuesday at 7 p.m.

The regional is packed with three other ranked teams with No. 5 DMACC, No. 12 Iowa Lakes and No. 14 NIACC, so the road to nationals will not be easy. The Eagles will probably have to defeat two ranked teams to make it.

"I'm just excited. Really, really excited," said Seybian Sims, who helped the Eagles win the 2019 national title. "I think we all feel really good."

Sims enjoyed a big game Saturday. He shot 7-for-8 from the field, drained all three of his 3-pointers, grabbed seven rebounds and dished out four assists.

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Luke Appel finished with another double-double with 12 points, 10 rebounds and six assists. Griff Clark drilled four 3-pointers and scored 12 points. Niko Gosnell shot 5-for-6 and had 10 points.

It was a strong performance from start to finish, except for a lull at the end of the first half when Iowa Central chopped a 17-point deficit to 10.

The Eagles killed Iowa Central on the backboards, 39-24, and collected 23 assists on 35 baskets with only 12 turnovers. They shot 53 percent from the floor, including 44 percent on 3-pointers at 11 for 25.

"We did a lot of good things out there," said Coach Tim Sandquist. "I think we came out and did what we needed to do."

Now it's on to the postseason, and the goal from Day 1 has been back-to-back national titles.

"We're locked in," said Sandquist, who succeeded Bryan Petersen as head coach this season. "I think we're focused. I think they understand what's at stake."

"It's been a good journey," he said. "Not without its challenges. We've had some ups and downs, for sure."

There have been more ups than downs, and now Brady Sartorius has returned to action after missing most of the season with injuries. He gives the Eagles another weapon

Sims was the biggest weapon for Kirkwood Saturday, hitting from all over the floor. He was known for his defense at Iowa City West, but his college coaches have nagged him about showcasing his offensive skills more often.

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"They'd get really mad at me for not shooting and not being aggressive," he said. "That's one thing I have to work on. I need to get that mind-set. I get yelled at for not being more aggressive."

The other first-round regional pairings are No. 7 Iowa Central at No. 2 DMACC, No. 6 Ellsworth at No. 3 Iowa Lakes, and No. 5 Southwestern at No. 4 NIACC.

The semifinals are Thursday and the finals are Saturday. The higher seed hosts all its games.

IOWA CENTRAL (64): Arthur Weston Jr. 2-2 2-2 8, Andrew Gibb 4-9 3-3 11, Javonte Keck 1-8 3-5 5, Cham Deng 3-8 2-2 9, Marquis Henry 5-11 1-2 13, Ayris Abdelnassar 2-6 0-2 5, Zack Foulks 5-12 0-0 13, Nathan Martinek 0-0 0-0 0, Jeremy Kambomba 0-3 0-0 0. Totals 22-59 11-16 64.

KIRKWOOD (87): Seybian Sims 7-8 1-1 18, Devonte Thedford 2-8 0-0 5, Luke Appel 5-11 1-2 12, Griff Clark 4-7 0-0 12, Niko Gosnell 5-6 0-0 10, Brady Sartorius 1-3 0-0 3, Gacoby Jones 3-4 0-0 6, Jamal Stephenson 2-7 1-2 6, Jalen Taylor 0-5 0-0 0, DJ Purnell 3-4 1-1 7, Owen Coburn 3-3 2-2 8. Totals 35-66 6-8 87.

Halftime - Kirkwood 42, Iowa Central 32. 3-point goals - Iowa Central 9-22 (Weston 2-2, gibb 0-1, Keck 0-4, Deng 1-2, Henry 2-4, Abdelnassar 1-4, Foulks 3-5), Kirkwood 11-25 (Sims 3-3, Thedford 1-3, Appel 1-4, Clark 4-7, Sartorius 1-2, Stephenson 1-5, Taylor 0-1).