

Kirkwood men ousted by DMACC

Written by Bill Seals

Saturday, 07 March 2015 19:16 -

BOONE - There's an old saying in sports that it's difficult for any team to beat another team three times in a season, but that's exactly what host DMACC was able to do Saturday afternoon.

The second-ranked DMACC Bears sent No. 8 Kirkwood home just one game short of a spot at nationals with an 86-69 victory in the championship game of the NJCAA Region XI tournament in Boone.

The Bears will take a 26-5 record to the national tournament. Kirkwood retires with a 25-7 mark.

Although they led for stretches of the first half, in large part by forcing turnovers and scoring in transition, the Eagles could not keep the pressure on down the stretch as DMACC gradually pulled away.

"They've got good players who made plays," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "They're a good team, won our conference and are ranked number two in the country.

"When they go on that run and have players like that, you can do great things. We didn't do a good job of limiting those runs by taking some quick shots that fueled the transition buckets. But I'll give those players the credit for getting those things done."

Foul trouble also plagued the Eagles for much of the game. Ron Singleton was limited to just 16 minutes and Joseph Tagarelli played only 20. Both starting forwards later fouled out as the Bears pulled away.

"It hurts," Petersen said. "Tagarelli is a first-team All-Region player and those fouls got him out of a rhythm in the first half.

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"Then Ron is a really good defender and rebounder. Not having those two guys out there in stretches really hurt us. Tags got it going in the second half, so when he had to come out it hurt us."

Singleton headed for the bench early in the second half after picking up his third foul. Tagarelli added his third foul less than a minute later and also left, depleting Kirkwood's post depth.

With those two on the bench, DMACC's Aarias Austin knocked down a 3-pointer with 16:11 remaining to give his team a 48-40 lead and force a Kirkwood timeout. Jon Fuqua followed with a pair of free throws and Cedar Rapids native Trey Sampson knocked down his fourth 3-pointer of the game for DMACC to force yet another stoppage of play by Petersen with his team trailing by 12.

Just seconds after chipping in with a 3-point play to later cut the deficit to 70-62, Singleton fouled out. Jamar Hurdle converted both free throws and DMACC extended to double digits with 4:23 remaining. On the following possession, Fuqua tacked on a layup and the Bears started to pull away.

"They've got good players who play hard," Petersen said. "When you get into March, players make plays, they played hard, made shots tonight and got it done."

On the strength of 3-of-4 shooting from beyond the 3-point line, Kareem Martin came off the bench to score a team-high 14 points for Kirkwood. Jordan Ashton added 13 points. Ajay Lawton added 12, but shot just 2-of-11 from the field.

Cold shooting became a problem for the Eagles in the final 20 minutes, as they hit just 10-of-27 shots and were 2-of-14 from beyond the 3-point arc.

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It was a bitter pill to swallow for an Eagles team that went 25-7 in Petersen's second season as head coach. With no at-large berth for the losing side, the eighth-ranked team in the country won't be advancing.

"It didn't end the way we wanted, but I told the group in there we won 25 games playing one of the hardest schedules in the country," Petersen said.

"We had a lot of sophomores out there that laid the foundation for this group.

"The chemistry was off the charts and that's what allowed us to win those 25 games. It didn't go our way tonight, but I don't want it to take away from the year we had with this group."

Playing against the junior-college program from his home town, Sampson scored all of his points from beyond the 3-point arc, going for 12 points on 4-of-9 shooting.

KIRKWOOD (69): Singleton 3 0-1 6, Lawton 2 7-8 12, Lassen 1 0-0 3, Ashton 4 2-2 13, Tagarelli 4 3-3 11, Rhodes 0 0-0 0, Olson 2 2-2 6, Martin 5 1-2 14, Ukah 1 2-2 4. Totals 22 17-20 69.

DMACC (86): Fuqua 7 9-11 23, Austin 4 2-2 12, Sampson 4 0-0 12, Collins 5 3-6, 15, Hurdle 2 10-12 14, Epps 1 2-3 4, Benson 0 0-0 0, Hislop 0 0-0 0, Newsome 0 0-0 0, DeFreitas 2 2-2 6. Totals 25 28-36 86.

Halftime - DMACC 41, Kirkwood 35; 3-point goals - Kirkwood 8 (Ashton 3, Martin 3, Lawton 1, Lassen 1), DMACC 8 (Sampson 4, Austin 2, Collins 2).