

Red-hot Rhodes lifts Eagles by SCC

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen has been raving about Hunter Rhodes ever since practice began this year.

It was easy to see why Saturday night.

Rhodes poured in 19 straight points for the Eagles in the final 4 minutes, 16 seconds and hit the game-winning 3-pointer with 1.2 seconds left as Kirkwood rallied to trim Southeastern, 90-87, in a thriller at Johnson Hall.

Kirkwood trailed 79-71 when Rhodes went to work. When he was finished, the sixth-ranked Eagles had raised their record to 6-0 with their most satisfying victory of the season.

Southeastern tied the game, 87-87, with six seconds left on a pair of free throws by Chris Myers. Kirkwood quickly inbounded the ball to Rhodes on the run, and the six-foot sophomore raced up court and unleashed a 3-pointer from in front of the Kirkwood bench with a hand in his face.

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Rhodes banked in the 3-pointer with six-tenths of a second showing on the club, but the refs put 1.2 seconds on the board after talking it over.

"I was going as fast as I could because I knew we had to get a quick bucket," said Rhodes. "Eli Henry set a great screen for me and I was able to knock it down.

"Actually, I felt like I got fouled on it. He hit me, so I banked it in. As soon as I released it I knew it wasn't going to go straight."

Rhodes scored only five points in the first half, but he finished with 29. He scored every point for the Eagles from when they trailed 79-71 until they won 90-87 with nine free throws, two 3-pointers and two regular buckets.

Rhodes drove fearlessly to the hole and got fouled in Saturday's game, along with hitting his outside shots. He's been on a hot streak lately with 26 points against Parkland, 31 against Marshalltown and now 29 against Southeastern.

"He's awesome," said Petersen. "You see it on game night, but he's like that every day in practice. He gets himself ready to go. I can't say enough. I'm happy we have him, that's for sure."

Rhodes, from Canton, Ill., was a part-time starter last season and was mostly a playmaker and facilitator. Now he's doing that and much, much more with a 17.3 scoring average.

"He's on an unbelievable hot streak right now," said Petersen. "It would be awesome if he could

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continue it. He's a kid you trust, because he's about the right things. He brings it every day and he's a great teammate."



Rhodes, a terrific foul shooter, hit 13 of 14 at the line Saturday. He also made four 3-pointers, along with five assists and four rebounds. He's been playing like an All-American.

"Coach wants me to lead the team more and take shots when I'm open, so that's what I've been doing," he said. "I'm just playing my game and being confident."

Kirkwood tightened its defense and rebounding in the final minutes after falling behind 79-71 with 4 1/2 minutes remaining. Petersen was not happy with his team's defense prior to that point, but liked the way the Eagles responded in the clutch.

"It all started with our defensive stops," he said.

Kaliph Fagan gave Kirkwood a big lift off the bench with 14 points. Nick Richards scored 12 points and Josh Bartlett had 11. Christen Wilson contributed nine points and 10 rebounds as a reserve and Henry finished with six points and seven rebounds off the bench.

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Petersen likes sitting at 6-0 in mid-November.

"I feel pretty good," he said. "I still don't think we've hit our peak, which is good. I still think there's a lot we can get better at. I'm happy with the start, but hopefully we can continue to win and get better."

Anthony Goss led Southeastern (4-1) with 17 points.

SOUTHEASTERN (87): Graves 5 3-3 15, Massenburg 3 1-1 7, Goss 7 2-3 17, Anthony 2 7-11 11, McDaniel 0 2-3 2, Myers 3 2-2 10, Baston 0 0-0 0, Williams 4 2-2 13, Manuel 6 0-1 12, Henderson 0 0-1 0. Totals 30 19-27 87.

KIRKWOOD (90): Bartlett 4 0-0 11, Rhodes 6 13-14 29, Richards 3 5-7 12, Olson 1 2-2 4, Meier 1 1-2 3, Woods 0 0-0 0, Harp 1 0-0 2, Fagan 6 1-1 14, Wilson 3 2-2 9, Henry 3 0-0 6. Totals 28 24-28 90.

Halftime - Southeastern 46, Kirkwood 43. 3-point goals - Southeastern 8 (Williams 3, Graves 2, Myers 2, Goss 1), Kirkwood 10 (Rhodes 4, Bartlett 3, Richards 1, Fagan 1, Wilson 1).