

No. 11 Eagles hold off No. 13 Spartans

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 28 January 2018 06:04 -



Chris King needed a heating pad for his sore back at halftime and was suffering from leg cramps after the game, but he felt good when he left Johnson Hall Saturday afternoon.

King poured in 27 points and collected six assists as the 11th-ranked Kirkwood Eagles topped 13th-ranked Southwestern Community College, 89-84, in a ferocious junior college basketball game.

King, a 6-foot guard from Des Moines, shrugged off the ailments after playing 37 of 40 minutes in a key ICCAC affair.

"I'm just trying to fight through it," he said. "You've always got injuries and little bruises through the season, so it's nothing really.

"You just have to go out there and give it your all for your team."

Kirkwood raised its ICCAC record to 4-0 and took a two-game lead in the loss column in the conference standings ahead of Southwestern (3-2), Iowa Lakes (3-2) and Iowa Central (2-2).

"Today was a good win," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "They're a good team, a good program. It was good, but it's still early."

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It's a 12-game campaign, with eight games left for the Eagles, but this victory gave them room to breathe.

Ethan Meeker, who missed the first 10 games of the season with a broken bone in his left hand, played his best game of the year with 17 points and terrific defense in a rugged, fast-paced affair.



Kirkwood won the NJCAA Division II title in 2016 and Southwestern captured the national crown last year, and both teams played like potential champions Saturday.

"These are the most-fun games," said Meeker, a 6-foot-1 sophomore. "A physical game. It's a huge rivalry for both teams. We won the championship two years ago, they won it last year. So those are the best type of games."

Meeker played with reckless abandon, driving hard to the basket and helping the Eagles gain the upper hand. He also excelled on defense, holding SWC star Terence Shelby Jr. to 14 points.

"He was really good," said Petersen. "He scored 17 points, but what I was most impressed with, he held their leading scorer to 6 of 17 from the field."

I thought Ethan did a real good job on him and forced him into some tough shots."

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Petersen has said all along that the Eagles need Meeker operating at full speed to reach their goals this season. It happened Saturday in the biggest game of the year so far.

"It was great to finally have a game like that," said Meeker, now averaging 6.3 points. "It was a rough road back from the injury, but I wouldn't be doing my teammates and my coaches justice if I didn't give them the credit.

"They never lost confidence in me, they've never stopped believing in me. I know a lot of people say that, but especially in my case it's really true."

Kirkwood (15-4) got lots of big contributions. Bailey Kale hit a series of big shots and scored 16 points. Doug Wilson, who leads the nation in field-goal percentage at 70.7, scored 10 points and grabbed seven rebounds.

Jay Small, LJ Stansbury and Taejuan Johnson played pivotal roles off the bench as Petersen was forced to adjust some of his lineups due to foul problems.

Kirkwood opened a 15-point lead at 74-59 with 6:04 left on a three-point play by Kale when he made a strong move to the basket and got fouled, but the game was far from over.

Southwestern used its quickness to attack the basket and pulled within five points at 78-73 with 3:07 left. The Spartans got within four points at 85-81 with 23.9 points left on a tip-in, but that's as close as they got.

Kale hit two free throws to make it 87-81 with 21.5 seconds remaining. Southwestern missed a long 3-pointer and King clinched the victory with two free throws for an 89-81 margin with 9.8 seconds to go.

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Southwestern topped Kirkwood in rebounds (33-28) and had the edge at the foul line (22-13), but the Eagles hit 56.7 percent of their shots and found a way to win.

"I just think we grinded it out a little bit more, maybe," said Petersen. "And we had some guys hit a couple of big shots."

Ryan Warred scored 17 points for Southwestern (16-5).

Kirkwood visits Ellsworth Wednesday night.

SOUTHWESTERN (84): Edwards 2 6-6 10, Whittington 2 2-2 7, Moran 5 4-7 14, Kueth 1 0-0 2, Shelby 6 1-1 14, Thomas 0 2-2 2, Diggs 0 0-0 0, Warren 6 4-5 17, Hailey 0 0-0 0, Barze 6 3-4 16, Ross 1 0-0 2. Totals 29 22-27 84.

KIRKWOOD (89): Kale 6 3-3 16, Meeker 7 2-2 17, King 10 3-6 27, Wilson 4 2-5 10, Arrington 1 0-2 2, Stansbury 3 1-2 7, Small 2 2-2 8, Marble 0 0-0 0, Johnson 1 0-1 2. Totals 34 13-23 89.

Halftime - Kirkwood 39, Southwestern 33. 3-point shots - Southwestern 4 (Whittington 1, Shelby 1, Warren 1, Barze 1), Kirkwood 8 (King 4, Small 2, Kale 1, Meeker 1).