Griffen Clark learned what it takes to win a national championship last season as a freshmen when the Kirkwood Eagles captured the NJCAA Division II national crown.

Now Clark is trying to impart some of that wisdom into this year's team as a sophomore.

"I would say the biggest thing about last year is how together you have to be as a team, especially when things get tough: How do you respond?," he remarked Wednesday night.

"And I think we learned how important leadership is, to have guys in the locker room who are going to keep everything under control. When things are going well, keep them going well, and when they're not going well, turn it around."

Clark helped turn things around Wednesday for Kirkwood when he popped in three straight 3-pointers in less than three minutes to help the ninth-ranked Eagles pull away from John Wood College and post a 64-48 victory at Johnson Hall.

The Eagles (5-2) were clinging to a 44-42 lead with less than nine minutes left. His three triples ignited a 16-0 run as Kirkwood took command at 60-42 and pulled out of danger.

Clark, a guard from Cedar Rapids Prairie, finished with 12 points in just eight minutes of action, hitting 4-for-5 on 3-pointers.

Clark has been a sparkplug off the bench, averaging 6.6 points in less than 11 minutes per game and nailing 54.2 percent of his 3-pointers (13 for 24). He's also a good ballhandler and defender with a high basketball IQ.

"Griff's role is growing, it's morphing," said new Kirkwood Coach Tim Sandquist. "He's the best shooter we have on the team, as he displayed tonight. He's confident.

"He knows when he goes in there what his purpose is, and that's to shoot and make 3's. He knows we have supreme confidence in his ability to do that for us. I'm happy for him."

Clark has accepted a leadership role this year as the Eagles try to put another championship club together under a new head coach. "I think the biggest thing last year is how together we were and that's something we're working on this year, coming together with this new group," he said.

And he enjoys being a sparkplug on the floor.

"Coming off the bench, I try to stay as ready as I can," he said. "When I do get in there, my teammates do a great job of finding me if I'm open. And if I hit one, they'll keep looking for me. They kind of put a lot of confidence in me."

Gacoby Jones matched Clark with 12 points for Kirkwood to share team scoring honors. Chandler Evans collected 14 points and 15 rebounds for John Wood (1-7).

Luke Appel (hand injury) and Connor Kasperbauer (ankle) did not play for Kirkwood.

JOHN WOOD (48): Nick Rumbo 3-11 0-0 7, TJ Jackson 4-8 0-0 8, Dallas Bryson 1-3 0-0 2, Chandler Bevans 6-16 2-2 14, Aaron Shoot 2-4 0-0 5, Stevie Wright 4-4 0-0 8, Mohammed Fadika 0-2 0-0 0, Ragar McKinney 0-2 0-0 0, Cooper Smith 1-3 0-0 2, Ja'Veon Taylor 0-0 0-0 0, Bradyn Kilby 0-0 0-0 0, Jack Palmer 0-0 0-0 0, Jarvis Jennings 1-2 0-0 2, Trey Koester 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 22-55 2-2 48.

KIRKWOOD (64): Seybian Sims 0-2 0-0 0, Devonte Thedford 4-12 0-2 9, Gacoby Jones 5-8 1-2 12, DJ Purnell 3-5 0-0 6, Niko Gosnell 0-5 4-4 4, Chris Burnell 2-4 1-2 5, Brady Sartorius 2-5 1-2 7, Griffen Clark 4-5 0-0 12, Jamal Stephenson 3-7 0-0 9, Jalen Taylor 0-0 0-0 0, Owen Coburn 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 23-55 7-12 64.

Halftime - Kirkwood 31, John Wood 23. 3-point goals - John Wood 2-14 (Shoot 1-2, Rumbo 1-6, Bryson 0-1, McKinney 0-1, Taylor 0-1, Jennings 0-1, Bevans 0-2), Kirkwood 11-22 (Clark 4-5, Stephenson 3-6, Sartorius 2-5, Thedford 1-1, Jones 1-3, Sims 0-1, Coburn 0-1).