

The Kirkwood Eagles collected a huge victory at Johnson Hall Wednesday night and now the hot race for the conference title is up for grabs.

The 15th-ranked Eagles bumped off No. 5 DMACC, 77-68, to throw the ICCAC race into a three-team scramble with two weeks left in the season.

Kirkwood knocked DMACC out of first place, letting 10th-ranked Iowa Lakes climb into the lead with a 9-2 record. Kirkwood and DMACC are just a half-game behind Iowa Lakes at 8-2 in the 14-game campaign.

If the Eagles had lost Wednesday night, they would have fallen two games behind DMACC with just four games remaining. In other words, a loss would have been curtains.

"This team responded to the challenge of controlling their own destiny," said KCC Coach Tim Sandquist. "I was really proud of them. It was big to come out and win tonight."

DMACC walloped the Eagles, 78-58, in their first meeting Jan. 15 in Boone, but the Eagles made a succession of big plays in the second half to get revenge.

Griffen Clark popped in three huge 3-pointers to give Kirkwood the lead at 49-46, 56-47 and 61-52. Devonte Thedford hit six straight free throws in the final 70 seconds to ice the game and played all 20 minutes in the second half.

"It felt good," said Thedford, a sophomore point guard who helped the Eagles win the national title last season. "I didn't get tired or anything. When you're in the game, I don't ever get tired.

"It was pretty intense, pretty physical," he said. "But I like games like that."

Thedford finished with 23 points, five rebounds and four assists in 36 minutes without a single turnover.

"He was phenomenal," said Sandquist. "He showed why he's one of the best guards in the conference. He's a great leader for us."

Chris Burnell provided 11 points for Kirkwood, which raised its overall record to 19-5. Zach Lester scored 14 points for DMACC (22-4). The Bears shot only 17 of 33 at the foul line, while the Eagles were 30 of 38.

DMACC (68): Willie Guy 3-10 2-2 9, Zach Lester 4-9 4-5 14, Barlow Alleruzzo 4-7 1-4 12, Demarion Bariffe-Smith 2-5 1-4 5, Ryan Schmitt 1-7 3-8 5, Ty Majlik-Autry 2-4 0-0 5, Mark Bradshaw 2-4 2-2 6, Mike Hartford 1-4 2-6 4, John Herrick 3-3 2-2 8. Totals 22-53 17-33 68.

KIRKWOOD (77): Seybian Sims 2-7 1-3 5, Chris Burnell 3-6 4-5 11, Devonte Thedford 7-13 8-8 23, Luke Appel 2-7 2-3 6, DJ Purnell 1-6 6-9 8. Gacoby Jones 0-0 0-0 0, Griffen Clark 3-6 0-09, Jamal Stephenson 0-4 2-2 2, Owen Coburn 1-1 4-4 6, Niko Gosnell 2-3 3-4 7. Totals 21-53 30-38 77.

Halftime - DMACC 34, Kirkwood 30. 3-point goals - DMACC 7-23 (Guy 1-6, Lester 2-6, Alleruzzo 3-4, Bariffe-Smith 0-2, Majlik-Autry 1-1, Bradshaw 0-2, Hartford 0-2), Kirkwood 5-23 (Sims 0-3, Burnell 1-2, Thedford 1-5, Appel 0-3, Clark 3-6, Stephenson 0-4).