

Muhl thinks KCC women can win title

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kim Muhl has won 792 games and six national titles during his fabulous career as the women's basketball coach at Kirkwood Community College, so he knows what it takes to finish the year as the No. 1 team in the country.

There's a long, long way to go between now and the 2017 national tournament, but Muhl thinks the Eagles have the potential to hang another NJCAA banner at Johnson Hall this year.

The emphasis is on the word POTENTIAL.

"I think the prospects are high," he said this week. "As far as looking at them on the hoof and how they can play, it's a nice look right now.

"They're fun to be around, I'll tell you that."

The Eagles open the season Friday against Rend Lake College at the State Fair Tournament in Sedalia, Mo. They'll face State Fair in the second round on Saturday.

Muhl, 61, has compiled a 792-174 record at Kirkwood. He's not sure if he'll stick around long enough to make a serious run at 1,000 victories, but don't bet against it.

The Eagles have a young team with 11 freshmen and only four sophomores, but Muhl likes the club's depth, balance and athletic ability.

"We've got some kids who can play," he remarked. "There's some nice players."

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Simone Goods, a 6-foot-2 center, transferred to Kirkwood from Western Kentucky, where she averaged 2.6 points and 2.3 assists last year as a freshman for the NCAA Division I school. Goods could give the Eagles a dominant presence in the post with her size and ability.

"She's strong," said Muhl. "And her skill level is really good."

Shaneequah Watkins, who played at Odessa Community College last season, has claimed a spot in the tentative starting lineup. So has Deleyah Harris, who helped Kirkwood finish 27-6 last season, along with freshman point guard Tayana Wilson from Country Club Hills, Ill., and freshman Awal Ajak from Des Moines East.

"That first group is pretty dang athletic," said Muhl.

Olivia Usher, a freshman from Cedar Rapids Prairie, and Candace Wilson, a freshman from Cedar Valley Christian, are competing for playing time, although Wilson missed several weeks of practice after having an appendectomy.

Rylee Voss, a reserve for the Eagles last season, is also in the mix for playing time, along with a strong freshman class that includes Megan Axcell of Knoxville, Ill., Niaja Taylor of Rockford, Ill., Nyachristmas Puok of Des Moines East, Kelsey Achenbach of Prairie du Chien, Wis., Olivia Schmidt of North Scott, Ashley Hedges of Burlington Notre Dame and TiRayah Cotton of Omaha.

Kirkwood is ranked seventh in the NJCAA Division II preseason poll.