

## Muhl nets 850th win as Eagles soar

Written by Jim Ecker

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The showdown for the conference lead turned into another showcase for the Kirkwood women's basketball team Saturday.

It also produced the 850th victory for Coach Kim Muhl in his Hall of Fame career with the Eagles.

The second-ranked Eagles jumped to a 22-2 lead in the first quarter and pelted 14th-ranked DMACC, 84-45, at Johnson Hall to grab a two-game lead in the ICCAC conference standings.

"It was a good win for us," said Muhl. "They dialed in."

Muhl raised his record to a sizzling 850-150 in exactly 1,000 games at Kirkwood in 29 years. He's already won seven NJCAA Division II national titles and has a shot at No. 8 this season.

Muhl, 62, brushed aside a question about making a run for 1,000 wins before he's through.

"I'm going for 851," he said, laughing.

Kirkwood raised its records to 21-3 overall and 7-0 in the conference with its 11th straight victory. The league's two alphabet schools, DMACC and NIACC, are both 5-2 at the mid-point of the race.

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"We're up two games now with seven to go," Muhl noted. "So if we take care of business we get to host a lot (in the regional tournament). We've got a long ways to go."

The Eagles jumped all over the Bears in the first quarter with their patented pressure defense and hot shooting. They had a 20-point lead in the opening stanza before the Bears came out of hibernation.

"I thought our emotion was great," said Muhl. "Our preparation was good. I just thought our defense was the difference-maker right out of the chute. We took them out of a lot of things."

There are no superstars on this year's club, but the Eagles are deep and talented. Brianna Mensen led the balanced scoring Saturday with 13 points off the bench. Olivia Usher and Mackenzie Jenkins netted 11 points apiece and Tay Wilson had 10.

Six different Eagles scored during the 22-2 getaway in the first quarter, with Mensen popping in a pair of 3-pointers. The visitors from Boone never fully recovered.

"It kind of puts them down and gets us going, so it was very nice to see that," Usher said about the fast start.

Usher, a Cedar Rapids Prairie grad, stacked her stat-line with six rebounds and five assists.

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She was a point guard at Prairie, but has moved to power forward at Kirkwood and can be hard to handle.

"If they put a small kid on her we go inside," said Muhl. "If they put a big kid on her we go outside and we pick-and-pop.

"She's smart," he said. "She does a lot of stuff for us, obviously."

Muhl has encouraged Usher to look for her shot, instead of passing the ball to teammates. She's making the adjustment, but normally looks to feed everyone else first.

"I'd say I've definitely become more aggressive scoring-wise," she said. "I high school I didn't necessarily look to score like I do now. Especially in my sophomore year at Kirkwood, I think I've developed that part of my game more.

"I'm playing with a lot of talent here, so it's easy not to look to score. You're looking for open teammates, because they're so good."

Usher helped the Eagles win the national title last year and would love to make another run for the crown.

"It's hard not to think ahead into national championship games and stuff like that, especially after last year," she said. "But we're definitely taking it game-by-game, because if we start thinking too far ahead there are enough good teams in our conference that can take advantage of that any given night."

Taylor Abernathy led DMACC with nine points. Joniqua Clark, a point guard from Cedar Rapids Washington, did not play for the Bears (17-6).

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**DMACC (45):** Shockley 3 0-0 8, Robinson 3 2-4 8, Davis 0 3-4 3, Atwood 1 2-2 4, Mitchell 2 0-0 4, Abernathy 3 0-0 9, Stalzer 0 1-2 1, Rouse 2 2-4 8, Horn 0 0-2 0. Totals 14 10-18 45.

**KIRKWOOD (84):** Wilson 3 3-6 10, Puok 1 1-2 3, Axccl 3 0-0 7, Ajak 4 0-0 9, Usher 4 2-4 11, Jenkins 5 1-2 11, Brown 1 0-0 3, Hurst 1 0-0 3, Taylor 1 0-0 2, Robinson 3 0-0 6, Mullinnix 2 0-0 4, Mensen 4 2-2 13, Wooldridge 1 0-0 2. Totals 33 9-16 84.

Halftime - Kirkwood 44, DMACC 23. 3-point goals - DMACC 7 (Abernathy 3, Shockley 2, Rouse 2), Kirkwood 9 (Mensen 3, Wilson 1, Axccl 1, Usher 1, Brown 1, Hurst 1, Ajak 1).