

Eagles crush Dawson, 19-2, for district title

Written by Metro Sports Report
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GLENDIVE, Mont. - Erin Hocker celebrated her trip home to Montana with all of her friends from Kirkwood Thursday afternoon.

Hocker pitched a complete game as the seventh-ranked Eagles smashed 18th-ranked Dawson Community College, 19-2, in the championship game of the district tournament to earn a spot in the NJCAA Division II World Series.

Kirkwood (50-15) advances to the national tournament May 22-25 in Clinton, Miss.

London Jackson belted her 22th home run in the second inning to give Kirkwood an early lead and the Eagles piled up the runs as the game went along. There was no mercy rule in the district finals and the Eagles showed no mercy.

Lauren Kuch socked a three-run homer and pinch-hitter Skylar Ryan hit a grand slam in the seventh inning as the slugfest continued.

Eric Frese will be taking his team to the national tournament in his first year as head coach. Frese had never been a college softball coach before coming to Kirkwood this season, but the Norway native has vast experience as a college baseball coach and had no trouble adjusting.

Kuch, an All-American last season who is headed to Grand View, went 3-for-4 and scored four times. Sydney Albaugh had a big two-run single in the third inning when the Eagles grabbed a 5-0 advantage.

Ashlyn Tingery hit a two-run homer for Dawson in the bottom of the third to pull the Buccaneers within 5-2, but Hocker shut the door the rest of the way.

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Hocker, who is from Great Falls, Mont., got to pitch in front of her family who made the six-hour drive to Glendive. She was the hard-luck loser when Dawson beat Kirkwood, 1-0, in the first game of the district tournament Wednesday, but she left Montana with all smiles Thursday.

Hocker, who ranks second in the nation in victories, raised her record to 27-9. She also had a save in Game 2 of the district tournament when the Eagles prevailed, 12-3.

The two-team district was a best-of-3 event, so Kirkwood was on the verge of elimination after dropping the opener 1-0. Instead, the Eagles fought back and trounced Dawson 31-5 in the next two games.

Shelby Martin, who pitched the 1-0 shutout for Dawson on Wednesday, was not able to fool the Eagles on Thursday.

Dawson finished the season at 43-5.