

CLINTON, Miss. - The Kirkwood Eagles scored in the bottom of the seventh inning Wednesday to snap a 2-2 tie and trim Illinois Central, 3-2, in the opening round of the NJCAA Division II national softball tournament.

Kirkwood (51-15) will face DMACC (49-6) in the quarterfinals Thursday at 3:30 p.m., matching two rivals from the ICCAC conference.

Kirkwood led 2-1 heading into the top of the seventh, but Illinois Central loaded the bases and scored the tying run on a wild pitch before Erin Hocker got the final out on a fly ball.

The Eagles wasted no time in the bottom of the seventh. Taleah Smith led off with a double to left-center. Shelby Hulsebus hit a single to left field with one out and Smith raced home with the winning run on an error by the left fielder.

Hocker (27-9) walked seven batters and allowed seven hits, but made big pitches when it counted to escape further damage. Illinois Central left 13 runners on base. Kirkwood did not commit any errors, greatly helping the cause.

Kirkwood got off to a good start with single runs in the first and second innings, but the Eagles did not tally again until the bottom of the seventh for the walk-off victory.

Rachel Stewart went 2-for-3 and scored a run. Jayme Finn also scored for Kirkwood.

DMACC won the ICCAC conference title this season and took 3-of-4 games from Kirkwood, which finished second in the standings. The Bears are seeded No. 2 in the national tournament and the Eagles are seeded No. 7.

Illinois Central 000 010 1 - 2 7 4
Kirkwood 110 000 1 - 3 7 0

David and West. Hocker and Butler. W - Hocker. L - David. 2B - Jackson, Smith

QUARTERFINAL PAIRINGS THURSDAY
All Games at 3:30

No. 7 Kirkwood (51-15) vs No. 2 DMACC (49-6)
No. 5 Itawamba (39-14) vs No. 4 Highland (34-10)
No. 9 Johnson County (25-12) vs No. 1 LSU Eunice (48-7)
No. 11 Sinclair (32-14) vs No. 3 Phoenix (49-7)