

Wagemester nets 400th win at Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker

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Doug Wagemester always figured he'd be a high school teacher and coach. That was the career path he envisioned for himself when he was growing up in Clinton.

"I loved my high school coaches and admired those guys," he said Saturday afternoon.

Instead of coaching high school basketball, Wagemester's life took a twist after he graduated from Loras College in 1990. He began his career as an assistant coach at the collegiate level and has stayed with it ever since.

Wagemester, 44, has been eminently successful as the head coach at Kirkwood Community College and collected his 400th victory in 15 years Saturday when the Eagles clipped Clinton Community College, 75-52, at Johnson Hall.

He's won 12 league titles at Kirkwood and has taken the Eagles to the NJCAA Division II national tournament nine times. He's reached the national finals three times, but had to settle for second place on each trip.

He's thought about those national championship games and how things could have been different. He's also thought about a loss in the national semifinals when he had a strong team, but said he's been able to move on each time.

"No, I don't lay awake at night," he said.

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"Almost to a fault, I have the ability to take it day to day. Practice to practice, drill to drill, possession to possession. Almost to a fault."

Wagemester, a big man at 6-foot-8, used to be one of the top foot-stompers in the business when he'd get angry during games. He doesn't do that a whole lot anymore, but he can get extremely intense during contests when his players do something wrong.

He lets them know when he's not happy.

"When he comes at you, you might get your head down or something, but then you realize he's saying the right things and he's doing it for the right reasons," said Kasey Semler, a sophomore from Marion. "You have to respect that as a player."

Kirkwood usually plays before small gatherings of 100 or 150 fans at Johnson Hall, so it's easy to hear what Wagemester is saying when he rips into his guys.

"As a freshman, it kind of shocks you the first time you see that," said Semler. "But you have to realize he's been doing it awhile. You know he's right. You just have to do what you're told and what he asks."

"He's a great guy, he's a great leader," said Semler. "You really respect what he says."

Taylor Olson, a freshman point guard from Cedar Rapids, said Wagemester has done a good job of helping him become a vocal leader on the team.

"I'm not really an emotional guy," said Olson. "So having a coach that's very intense, it's fun and it can get me going, too. He does a good job at getting you going, especially when you're feeling down or something like that."

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"We all know his intensity and that he wants the best for us. Him being on us is just going to make us better and makes us a better team."

Olson appreciates the way Wagemester supported him when his former girlfriend was killed in a car accident in October. "You can talk to him," he said.

Wagemester played basketball at Loras College from 1986 to 1990 and served as team captain as a senior. He received his bachelor's degree in physical education from Loras in 1990 and received his master's from the University of Redlands (Calif.) in 1994.

He began his coaching career as an assistant at Coffeyville (Kan.) Community College, Redlands and Colorado College before becoming a head coach at Grand View University in Des Moines. He compiled a 25-9 record during his only year at Grand View, setting a school record for victories, before moving to Kirkwood.

His record in 15 years at Kirkwood is 400-102 and his overall mark in 16 campaigns is 425-111. He's compiled a 171-23 record in league games at Kirkwood for a winning mark of 88.1 percent in ICCAC contests.

"I just feel really fortunate," he said. "I think about people. The people at Kirkwood, the administration over the years, my staff.

"The quality of people and the continuity have been unbelievable. I think about the terrific players we've had over the years. And my family.

"That's what I think about when I think about the longevity and what it takes to put some wins together."

Wagemester has turned down offers to become the head coach at Indian Hills Community College and Southeastern Community College over the years, even though it would have

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represented a climb from the Division II level to the Division I level of junior college basketball.

He also turned down a chance to become an assistant coach at an NCAA Division I school that has a winning tradition in order to stay in Cedar Rapids.

"It always came back to, this is where I need to be," he said. "It's that simple."

Wagemester and his wife, Kim, are both from Clinton. They have a daughter and two sons, and each time a job offer has come along they decided they wanted to stay here instead of moving somewhere else.

Wagemester also serves as the athletic director at Kirkwood and said he can picture himself staying at Kirkwood for another 20 years.

"I'm open to anything," he said. "Some days it's hard to pick up the whistle. And some days I feel like it's my first day. And I get excited about the silliest things. I get sideways about the silliest things.

"We'll see," he said. "I'm taking it a day at a time and see where it goes."

Kirkwood raised its records to 10-8 overall and 2-1 in the ICCAC with Saturday's 23-point victory over Clinton Community College. The Eagles built a 40-23 lead, but Clinton pulled within 41-40 with a 17-1 spurt.

Kirkwood regrouped with an 8-0 run of its own, including a 3-pointer by Semler, to grab a 49-40 advantage. The Eagles pulled away from there.

Olson made three 3-pointers and led Kirkwood with 16 points. Devan Douglas scored 15 points

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and J.C. Fuller had 14. Semler, who missed about a month with a broken bone in his right hand, returned to action and scored eight points in 12 minutes.

Dominique Helgemo led Clinton (4-10, 0-3) with 18 points.

CLINTON (52): Grant 22-2 8, Hurt 1 0-0 3, Helgemo 6 2-2 18, Randolph 2 2-2 6, Pemberton 4 3-6 11, Blyden 0 0-0 0, Stevens 1 2-6 4, Bostic 0 2-2 2, Barun 0 0-0 0. Totals 16 13-20 52.

KIRKWOOD (75): Hunter 1 2-2 4, Heffernan 2 1-3 5, Fuller 3 8-10 14, Olson 4 5-6 16, Douglas 4 7-12 15, Butler 1 0-0 2, Manego 2 0-0 5, Witt 0 0-0 0, Semler 2 3-3 8, Currie 1 0-0 2, Lang 2 0-0 4. Totals 22 26-36 75.

Halftime - Kirkwood 32, Clinton 23. 3-point goals - Clinton 7 (Helgemo 4, Grant 2, Hurt 1), Kirkwood 5 (Olson 3, Manego 1, Semler 1). Technical fouls - Clinton bench (2), Hurt.