

## Eagles win opener; Muhl blasts format

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood women's basketball team played its final home game at Johnson Hall Wednesday night and now will pack its bags for the rest of the Region XI tournament after coasting by Ellsworth, 65-36.

Coach Kim Muhl is not happy.

The Eagles won the ICCAC title by a landslide this season, but all it got them was a home game in the opening round of the league tournament.

Kirkwood will play the rest of the tournament in Keokuk. Making it even worse, the Eagles will have to play Southeastern Community College on its home floor in Keokuk.

Muhl thinks the highest seed should host all of its tournament games, just like the men do in the same league. Instead, the women pre-assign the semifinals and finals to a different location each year and now the Eagles will be flying south.

Kirkwood has dominated the ICCAC under Muhl and is usually the No.1 seed for the tournament, just like it is this year. Muhl said his rival coaches don't want Kirkwood to host the semifinals and finals, so they've banded together and voted to hold the final two rounds at "neutral" sites to level the playing field.

"It's done because of us," he charged Wednesday night. "It's a very aggravating point with me."

Kirkwood finished 15-1 in the league this season. Southeastern finished 7-9, but now will have the homecourt advantage Friday night.

Muhl blames the other coaches.

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"They didn't want to play us at home," he said.

"It's pretty obvious what's going on at the meetings. They vote against Kirkwood.

"Why do we play the regular season? Why do we even do it? It's the dumbest thing I've ever heard."

Muhl said the league has tried different formats over the years, including rewarding the highest seeds with home games throughout the tournament. He'd like to see it happen again, but apparently does not have the votes.

Kirkwood (27-4) finished its home schedule with a perfect 14-0 record after taking a nap against Ellsworth Wednesday night. The Eagles drubbed the Panthers twice during the regular season, 82-37 and 78-42, and had a hunch they would not be seriously challenged by Ellsworth in the tournament.

Muhl was not happy with his team's performance, but preferred to let it go and look ahead.

"We got a victory. I'm not going to dwell on it. I can't," he said.

"We're better than that. It was an ugly game. It was slow-paced."

Ellsworth (11-20) arrived with just seven healthy players and could not compete with Kirkwood, even though the Eagles shot only 30.9 percent from the field. Kirkwood launched 81 shots in the 40-minute game and missed 56 of them.

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Whitney Rohrbach led the Eagles with 17 points and nine rebounds. Kianna Jacobs had 13 points and eight rebounds. Alexis Fitzpatrick nearly collected a triple-double with 10 points, 10 rebounds and nine assists.

Celine Jolicoeur led Ellsworth with 12 points. Cedar Rapids Jefferson grad Brittney Steffeny scored nine points for Ellsworth.

ELLSWORTH (36): Campbell 3 2-2 8, Jolicoeur 3 5-7 12, Johnson 0 0-0 0, Steffeny 2 4-6 9, Olsen 2 3-8 7, Mejia 0 0-0 0, Heusinkveld 0 0-0 0. Totals 10 14-23 36.

KIRKWOOD (65): Jacobs 5 3-3 13, Chuol 2 0-0 4, Defelmeier 3 0-0 8, Rohrbach 7 0-0 17, Fitzpatrick 4 0-0 10, Fallon 1 0-0 3, Gray 0 0-0 0, Faber 1 0-0 2, Henderson 0 2-2 2, Tow 2 2-2 6. Totals 25 7-7 65.

Halftime - Kirkwood 32, Ellsworth 18. 3-point goals - Ellsworth 2 (Jolicoeur 1, Steffeny 1), Kirkwood 8 (Rohrbach 3, Dufelmeier 2, Fitzpatrick 2, Fallon 1). Technical foul - Henderson.