

Lassen sparks Kirkwood past NIACC

Written by Jim Ecker

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Matt Lassen got a long, loving embrace from his mother after the Kirkwood Eagles defeated NIACC, 73-58, at Johnson Hall Wednesday night.

He deserved it.

Lassen drilled all four of his 3-pointers - all at clutch times - and finished with 12 points in his best all-around performance this season.

His parents, Susan and Ron Lassen, have watched their son spend a lot of time on the bench as a freshman, but not this time.

Lassen played 15 minutes and gave Kirkwood (15-7, 6-3) the boost it needed to stay in the ICCAC race.

Susan Lassen squeezed her son in delight.

"My mom is my biggest fan," said Lassen. "She sends me a big long text before every game, telling me to get after it. She's great. I definitely give her a couple of looks (during the game) to see how she's doing."

Lassen, a Linn-Mar grad, was averaging only 3.5 points and 6.8 minutes heading into Wednesday's game as a reserve guard, but he got a chance with the Eagles struggling in the first half.

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He hit a 3-pointer to tie the game, 26-26, then nailed another triple to give the Eagles a 29-28 advantage late in the stanza.

Kirkwood Coach Bryan Peterson rewarded Lassen with more playing time in the second half and the 6-foot-4 sharpshooter delivered again.

His third straight 3-pointer gave the Eagles a 47-43 lead and his fourth straight made it 50-43 a short time later. Those back-to-back triples fueled a 15-0 spurt that helped turn a 43-42 deficit into a 57-43 advantage.

Lassen also had two assists, one rebound and a steal. And perhaps just as significantly, he played well on defense.

"He was great," said Petersen. "He's a grinder, he's worked at it. It was great to see him have success out there, because he wants to help this team. He did tonight."

Lassen had to adjust from being one of the top players at Linn-Mar to being a reserve at Kirkwood.

"It was difficult," he said. "It's definitely tough to go from playing pretty much every minute of every game at Linn-Mar my senior year to coming here and sitting on the bench."

Lassen tapped into the rich basketball legacy at Linn-Mar for advice, contacting North Carolina guard Marcus Paige and former Indiana State guard and current Linn-Mar assistant Jordan Printy for tips.

"I reached out to Marcus and to Jordan Printy and they said, 'Keep your head up.' They said keep working, be the last one to leave the gym every day and they promised me it would pay off. And it's starting to."

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Lassen enjoyed contributing to an important victory.

"It took me a little bit to get adjusted to the college game," he said. "It's a lot more physical, it demands a lot more defensively. I think I'm starting to get it.

"My coaches have been great, my teammates have been awesome and help me adjust. Tonight my shot was feeling good and I just let it fly."

Kirkwood also got a big boost off the bench from Henry Uwadiae, a 6-foot-11 center from Nigeria who has made great strides this season. Uwadiae played only seven minutes, but he scored eight points, grabbed six rebounds, blocked three shots and had three thunderous left-handed dunks.

J.C. Fuller led Kirkwood with 14 points. Joseph Tagarelli had 10 points and 10 rebounds. Taylor Olson collected eight assists.

David Humphries scored 19 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for NIACC (18-7, 5-4). Alexander Davis had 12 points and Matthew Don had 11.

DMACC and Iowa Lakes are tied for the conference lead with 6-2 records. Kirkwood is a half-game back at 6-3.

NIACC (58): Davis 2 7-8 12, Humphries 6 4-5 19, Skogen 2 2-2 7, Don 4 3-5 11, Plagge 0 0-2 0, Jackson 2 2-3 7, Coleman 1 0-0 2, Lowe 0 0-0 0, Tellin 0 0-0 0, Lang 0 0-0 0. Totals 17 18-25 58.

KIRKWOOD (73): Fuller 5 2-2 14, Currie 4 0-2 8, Olson 1 2-2 4, Batie-Gaddy 3 2-4 8, Tagarelli 4 2-3 10, Lawton 3 0-0 7, Lassen 4 0-0 12, Weeks 1 0-0 2, Uwadiae 4 0-0 8. Totals 29 8-13 73.

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Halftime - Kirkwood 33, NIACC 30. 3-point goals - NIACC 6 (Humphries 3, Davis 1, Skogen 1, Jackson 1), Kirkwood 7 (Lassen 4, Fuller 2, Lawton 1).