

No.3 Eagles dumped by John Wood

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood men's basketball team went from being unloved and unranked all the way to No. 3 in the new national poll Tuesday, but the glossy achievement turned sour by the end of the night.

The John Wood Blazers dominated the sluggish Eagles from start to finish and handed Kirkwood its first loss of the season, 75-65, in a non-conference game at Johnson Hall.

"We're not the No. 3 team in the country. Bottom line," proclaimed unhappy Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen, whose club fell to 9-1.

They certainly were not the No. 3 team Tuesday night. The Eagles shot poorly from the field, had trouble finishing at the rim, played porous defense and got pounded on the backboards.

The Eagles belted John Wood by 21 points when they met four weeks ago in Quincy, Ill., but this was an entirely different story. The Blazers surged

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to a 17-point lead in the first half and Kirkwood never fully recovered.

"Energy and focus," said Petersen, citing the two main culprits in his team's demise. "That team was hungry to win. Our team wasn't. We didn't prepare to win.

"I told the guys, that team deserved to win. We didn't have great practices leading up to this and we had our worst shoot-around today. That's what happens.

"When we got them by 20 points (actually 21), that's a month ago. They've gotten better, and we didn't come out with the energy and the focus that we needed to."

John Wood (7-5) dropped out of the rankings Tuesday after being listed No. 10 in the preseason poll, but they were the superior team on the southwest side of Cedar Rapids Tuesday.

The Blazers shot 53.2 percent from the field, including a series of uncontested layups when the Eagles lost their man on defense and nobody was in position to help.

Kirkwood made only 35.7 percent of its shots, including a dismal 4-for-18 showing on 3-pointers for a club that hit 19 triples against Iowa Western before the Thanksgiving break.

"We're going to have nights when we don't put the ball in the basket. You have to be able to guard," said Petersen. "Tonight they made us pay for it. We didn't guard them."

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John Wood spanked Kirkwood on the backboards, 34-24.

The Eagles pulled within seven points in the second half at 66-59 with 3:04 left, but the rally ended there.

Paxton Harmon led the Blazers with 22 points. Jordan Johnson added 16 points and Brody Gronewold had 11 for the winners.

Jordan Ashton led Kirkwood with 19 points, but shot 4-for-12 from the field. Joe Tagarelli finished with 16 points and 10 rebounds, but missed shots near the rim that he normally converts.

Petersen likes the character on his team and hopes Tuesday's performance will serve as a wakeup call.

"That's what it needs to be," he said. "I told the guys, all of our goals are still intact. Our goal was not to go undefeated.

"We want to win conference, we want to win regional and go to the national tournament and win that, too. That's our three goals.

"Chemistry is easy when things are going really well," said Petersen. "How they respond when things don't go well is the real key."

Kirkwood visits Southeastern Community College in West Burlington Saturday night.

JOHN WOOD (75): Gronewold 4 2-2 11, Johnson 3 9-10 16, Howard 2 2-4 6, Harmon 9 3-3 22, Dorema 4 0-0 8, Odia 1 2-4 4, Smith 0 0-0 0, Drake 2 0-0

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4, Trammell 0 2-2 2, Williams 0 2-2 2. Totals 25 22-27 75.

KIRKWOOD (65): Singleton 0 0-0 0, Lawton 3 1-1 8, Lassen 2 0-0 6, Ashton 4 10-11 19, Tagarelli 7 2-5 16, Rhodes 1 7-8 9, Weeks 0 0-0 0, Olson 1 1-1 3, Martin 0 0-0 0, Ukah 2 0-1 4. Totals 20 21-27 65.

Halftime - John Wood 42, Kirkwood 25. 3-point goals - John Wood 3 (Gronewold 1, Johnson 1, Harmon 1), Kirkwood 4 (Lassen 2, Lawton 1, Ashton 1).