

## No. 8 Kirkwood men sink Iowa Lakes

Written by Jim Ecker

Tuesday, 03 March 2015 22:50 - Last Updated Wednesday, 04 March 2015 06:25

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The Kirkwood men's basketball team is healthy, playing fairly well and playing at home so far in the Region XI tournament.

It was a good combination Tuesday night.

The eighth-ranked Eagles dunked Iowa Lakes for the third time this season, 83-59, in the quarterfinals of the postseason tournament and will host the semifinals on Thursday.

Kirkwood (24-6) will play Southwestern on Thursday at 7:30 p.m. Southwestern downed Iowa Central, 86-74, to advance on Tuesday night.

Jordan Ashton popped in 22 points and the Eagles got strong contributions up and down the lineup Tuesday. The Eagles have been practicing and playing for six months and have the normal amount of wear and tear, but they appear to be on an up-tick in March.

"A good win. A good team win," said Coach Bryan Petersen. "I told the guys, it wasn't perfect. But we won, and that's all that matters. That's all that matters in March.

"For the most part, it's survive and advance."

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Kirkwood defeated Iowa Lakes (16-15) by 32 and 26 points during the regular season. This game was tougher, but the Eagles pulled steadily away and prevailed by 24.

"We started off slow, but we picked it up a little in the middle of the first half and we kept going in the second half," said Ashton, a sophomore from Mount Pleasant. "It's looking good for us right now. Thursday will be a tough one at home. We just have to do what we do and just play hard."

Ajay Lawton, healthy and jet-quick again after battling a bad ankle for several weeks, contributed 12 points, six rebounds and four assists as the starting point guard. Joe Tagarelli, pestered in mid-season with a sore knee, finished with 10 points, eight rebounds and three assists.

Ronald Singleton, a rugged power forward, filled out the boxscore with eight points, five rebounds, four steals, two assists and two blocked shots. Matt Lassen scored six points and the bench brigade of Hunter Rhodes, Kareem Martin Jr., Jacob Olson and Chike Ukah provided 25 points, eight rebounds and seven assists.

Petersen likes the look of his ballclub at the most critical time of the year.

"My job is to keep these guys fresh and going in the right direction. But I feel good about them," he said. "I've felt good about this group all year."

Kirkwood will be favored in the semifinals Thursday night at home, but looming on the horizon is a possible game at second-ranked DMACC Saturday afternoon for the Region XI title and a berth in the national tournament. The Eagles have lost two tight games to DMACC this season and would be slight underdogs in the championship game should they meet again.

"I definitely think we have a chance," said Ashton. "It's looking good right now. Like I said, if we

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just play hard and do what we do we should be fine."

Rachard Moody led Iowa Lakes with 16 points. The visitors shot 1-for-20 on 3-pointers.

IOWA LAKES (59): Moody 7 2-4 16, Burkhall 1 0-0 2, Wilder 4 3-4 11, Harmon 2 0-0 4, Smith 6 3-5 15, Slaba 0 0-0 0, Decock 0 0-0 0, Bauer 4 0-1 8, Tucek 0 0-0 0, Slotter 1 0-0 3. Totals 25 8-14 59.

KIRKWOOD (83): Singleton 4 0-0 8, Lawton 4 2-2 12, Lassen 2 1-1 6, Ashton 8 4-8 22, Tagarelli 2 6-6 10, Richards 0 2-2 2, Rhodes 2 1-2 6, Weeks 0 0-0 0, Olson 2 0-0 4, Martin 4 0-0 9, Ukah 1 2-2 4. Totals 29 18-23 83.

Halftime - Kirkwood 38, Iowa Lakes 24. 3-point goals - Iowa Lakes 1 (Slotter 1), Kirkwood 7 (Ashton 2, Lawton 2, Lassen 1, Rhodes 1, Martin 1).