

King, Richards power No. 4 Eagles

Written by Jim Ecker

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When Da'rion King was a junior in high school, he committed to play football at Western Michigan University as a tight end with tremendous strength and great athletic ability.

His powerful body is just as impressive on a basketball floor as an immovable 6-foot-6, 240-pound center for the fourth-ranked Kirkwood Eagles.

King powered in 20 points Wednesday night, Nick Richards scored 18 and Jacob Olson added 16 as Kirkwood pounded Marshalltown, 79-56, with an impressive second half.

King, who is from Racine, Wis., said he made a hasty decision when he accepted a scholarship offer to play football at Western Michigan. That was in March of 2014 after he visited the college and was offered a spot on the team.

"I made a quick decision," he said. "I made a visit and they said everything I wanted to hear and it all sounded good. It was like a take-it or leave-it deal and I made a quick decision and didn't weigh my options.

"At the end I decided I wanted to go with my heart and go play basketball, which is my first love."

Once King gets the ball near the basket, nobody is going to take it away and few opponents are strong enough to stop his powerful moves to the bucket. He made 8 of 14 shots and also had a terrific assist when he whipped the ball to Josh Bartlett in the corner for an open 3-pointer.

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King gives the Eagles (13-2) a rare force in junior college basketball with his strength and soft touch.

"I've had guys that big and strong before, but not with his agility and balance," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "You can't teach that."



King was buried on the bench during the early part of the season as he adjusted to the rigors of college basketball, but he found his way into the starting lineup against Marshalltown and played 30 good minutes. King admitted it took him awhile to get on the same wavelength as the coaches in terms of working hard and fitting into the system.

"At first I was kind of in the doghouse," he said with a slight smile. "Every day I'm working, getting my confidence back, working to be the best player I can be and trying to be one of the leaders on this team and lead us to the national championship."

Some people apparently questioned his decision to play junior college basketball instead of Division I football, but King said he's happy at Kirkwood and likes how things are turning out.

"I'm still glad I made the decision," he said. "I was blessed to be able to play two sports and be good at both. I feel like I made a good decision. And for everybody who thinks it was the wrong decision, I'm just trying to continue to prove them wrong."

Kirkwood held a slim 34-33 lead at halftime against Marshalltown, which features an international roster with players from France, England, the Netherlands, Brazil, Norway and Lithuania, but the Eagles won the second half 45-23 with their superior depth and talent.

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Richards, a 6-foot-3 sophomore from Delaware, scored 12 of his 18 points in the second half as the Eagles pulled away in their final non-conference game before the ICCAC campaign begins Saturday at Iowa Lakes.

"I feel pretty good going into the conference season," said Richards. "Obviously we have some stuff to work on, but I feel pretty good about this team and I'm looking forward to it."

Kaliph Fagan gave Kirkwood a boost with 11 points off the bench with fearless drives to the basket. Olson, a sophomore from Cedar Rapids Jefferson, played a smooth game and finished with four rebounds, two steals, two assists and two 3-pointers on his way to 16 points.

Soufiane Mensah and Reggie Gradwell scored 16 points apiece for Marshalltown (12-6). Gradwell tossed in five 3-pointers, but the Tigers shot only 6 for 20 at the foul line compared to 22 of 27 for Kirkwood.

MARSHALLTOWN (56): Miller 1 0-0 2, Mensah 6 2-11 16, Lasley 4 0-1 9, Malalu 3 0-0 6, Sakinis 2 3-6 7, Ubiaro 0 0-0 0, Maddred 0 0-0 0, Perkis 0 0-0 0, Gradwell 5 1-2 16. Totals 21 6-20 56.

KIRKWOOD (79): Bartlett 2 0-0 5, Rhodes 0 3-5 3, Richards 6 4-4 18, Olson 6 2-2 16, King 8 4-5 20, Jackson 0 0-0 0, Harp 0 0-0 0, Fagan 3 5-7 11, Meier 1 0-0 2, Wilson 0 4-4 4, Triplett 0 0-0 0. Totals 26 22-27 79.

Halftime - Kirkwood 34, Marshalltown 33. 3-point goals - Marshalltown 8 (Gradwell 5, Mensah 2, Lasley 1), Kirkwood 5 (Richards 2, Olson 2, Bartlett 1).

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