

## No. 3 Eagles rip DMACC, 100-59

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 13 January 2016 23:35 - Last Updated Wednesday, 13 January 2016 23:42

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The Kirkwood men's basketball team has become scary good.

The DMACC Bears found out the hard way Wednesday night after sweeping all three games from kwood last season.

The third-ranked Eagles played a magnificent ballgame from start to finish and pounded the 7th-ranked Bears, 100-59, in a conference game at Johnson Hall.

Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen, who is a stickler for detail, was hard-pressed to think of anything his team did wrong.

"I'm trying to think," he said, a smile crossing his face. "We'll probably have a few things when we look at the tape, but honestly it's hard to tell right now.

"It was a great team win," he said. "We obviously shared the basketball extremely well and defensively I thought we did a nice job."

DMACC swept the season series from Kirkwood last season and also beat the Eagles in the regional playoffs, denying Kirkwood a trip to the NJCAA Division II national tournament. That served as motivation leading into Wednesday's game.

"It was brought up a few times," Petersen allowed.

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Hunter Rhodes and Nick Richards led the onslaught Wednesday with 20 points apiece, but they had plenty of help. Da'Rion King, a 6-6, 240-pound center who has become a game-changer for Kirkwood in recent games, collected 13 points and eight rebounds. Byron Harp and Cristen Wilson scored 10 points off the bench, while Jacob Olson and Josh Meier added eight points apiece.

Rhodes played for Kirkwood last season and vividly remembers all three losses to DMACC.

"The goal coming in here tonight was to just make a statement, especially after last year," he remarked. "This just felt amazing.

"Everyone is playing well right now. Everyone is coming along and getting their role together. And I feel like we can still get a little better, too."



Kirkwood raised its records to 15-2 overall and 2-0 in the conference. Both of Kirkwood's losses came in tight affairs against Iowa Western, which plays a notch above the Eagles at the NJCAA Division I level.

DMACC fell to 13-5 overall and 0-2 in the league, having lost by one point to 11th-ranked Southwestern Saturday in their conference opener.

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Kirkwood blazed to a 51-27 lead at halftime and never took its foot off the gas. The Eagles continued to soar and pummeled the Bears 49-32 in the second half en route to the 41-point victory.

"We were adamant with these guys," said Petersen. "Don't stop, we're going to keep going and keep attacking."

Kirkwood shot 54.8 percent from the field in the first half, 56.3 percent in the second half and 55.6 percent for the game. They also made 10 of 20 3-pointers for 50 percent.

King has given the Eagles a big lift the last few weeks as a power center who can score, rebound, play defense and pass the ball to open teammates. He was buried on the bench earlier in the season, but he's made everyone better since becoming a true force in the middle.

"We live off of him," said Rhodes.

Petersen likes the way his club is playing, but cautioned there's still a long way to go.

"I give the guys in the locker room a lot of credit," he said. "They've bought into that they're playing for something bigger than themselves. They're playing for the team goal of winning the national championship."

Petersen does not shy away from those words: National championship.

"It's always in the back of our heads," he said. "That's what we started working for when we started putting this team together last spring. But at the end of the day you still have to worry about the next one. It needs to be that way."

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Kirkwood has captured one national title in men's basketball and has made deep runs in other national tournaments, with those banners hanging from the walls at Johnson Hall.

"This team really hasn't done anything yet. That's the big thing," said Petersen, who was an All-American at Kirkwood during his playing days. "There are plenty of banners to remind us of what's come before us.

"I think this team could be one of them, but we're not there yet."

Rhodes, a point guard from Canton, Ill., likes the way the club has come together.

"Our whole roster can play. It's amazing," he said. "If we stick together and play like we can, we're capable of doing good things."

**DMACC (59):** Kinsey 8 2-4 19, Epps 2 5-6 9, Benson 0 0-0 0, Larsen 4 1-2 9, Steele 3 0-0 6, White 0 3-4 3, Rowan 4 3-6 11, Ostrowski 0 0-0 0, Lipovsky 0 0-0 0, Noah 1 0-0 2. Totals 22 14-22 59.

**KIRKWOOD (100):** Bartlett 1 0-0 3, Rhodes 5 7-9 20, Richards 8 2-2 20, Olson 3 0-0 8, King 5 3-4 13, Jackson 1 1-2 4, Harp 4 1-2 10 Fagan 0 2-2 2, Meier 3 2-3 8, Wilson 4 2-2 10, Henry 0 0-0 0, Triplett 1 0-0 2. Totals 35 20-26 100.

Halftime - Kirkwood 51, DMACC 27. 3-point goals - DMACC 1 (Kinsey 1), Kirkwood 10 (Rhodes 3, Richards 2, Olson 2, Bartlett 1, Jackson 1, Harp 1).