

## NIACC surprises No. 3 Eagles

Written by Mike Condon

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Sophomore day is usually a day of celebration.

That was what was expected Saturday as the Kirkwood women's basketball team closed out its regular season against NIACC at Johnson Hall.

Six Eagles were honored before playing their final regular-season home game and the next step was to go out and finish a perfect run through the ICCAC schedule.

However, the visiting Trojans had other ideas. They built an eight-point lead in the third quarter, then got the benefit of a controversial intentional foul call in the final seconds to shock the No. 3 Eagles, 60-57.

Kirkwood (26-5, 13-1) had already clinched an outright conference title and the top seed in the upcoming regional tournament. The victory clinched the No. 2 seed for NIACC (19-10, 11-3).

Kirkwood will host Ellsworth in the opening round of the regional tournament Tuesday night.

Eagles Coach Kim Muhl felt bad for sophomores Casey Miles, A.J. Downs, Addie Oberman, Caitlin Sudduth, Cyerra Hutchins and Madison Wood who had a rough day collectively as a group.

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"They struggled today," he said. "It was an emotional day for them and that can happen sometimes on a sophomore day."

Kirkwood never got in a flow with its offense. The Eagles shot 19-of-64 (29.7 percent) from the floor, including 2-of-19 from 3-point distance.

The teams battled to a 27-all tie at the break. NIACC came out and scored the first six points of the third quarter and never trailed the rest of the way.

Kirkwood did tie the contest at 52 on a pair of Wood free throws with 2:09 remaining. The teams traded baskets before Kirkwood made a stop.

With a chance to take the lead, Deleyah Harris' open try from the corner bounced out.

NIACC's Anna Eckert hit a single free throw with 40 seconds left to give the Trojans a 55-54 advantage. Wood and Harris both missed from in close and NIACC hurried the ball down the floor.

Trudy Peterson was fouled hard by Adrianna Dampier with 15.7 seconds remaining. The call was originally called a regular foul, but after two of the three officials working the game conferred, the call was changed to an intentional foul.

"It was a tough call," Muhl said of the intentional foul on Dampier. "I thought it should have just been the regular two-shot foul, which would have given us the ball in a one-possession situation."

Eckert hit both foul shots and NIACC got the ball back. Eckert was fouled and hit both foul shots.

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Sudduth hit a 3-pointer to cut the lead to three and when NIACC's Sammie Sproul hit only 1-of-2 foul shots, the Eagles had a chance with 2.8 seconds left, but Sudduth's contested 3-point try was off the mark.

"You aren't going to win when you shoot the way we did today," Muhl said. "We were off from the field and missed too many free throws."



Wood led the Eagles with 15 points. Sudduth added 13 points and Harris had 11 rebounds.

Sproul led the Trojans with 17 points and Larson finished with 10.

There's a good chance the two teams could meet again in the conference tournament final next Saturday at Kirkwood.

"I hope it happens," Muhl said. "I know our players are disappointed and I'm sure they'd like another chance to play them."

NIACC (60): Lentz 2 2-3 7, Larson 4 0-2 10, Sproul 5 3-6 17, Eckert 2 3-5 7, Peterson 2 2-2 8, Galvin 0 0-0 0, Cuffe 1 0-2 2, Adamich 0 0-0 0, Miller 2 5-6 9. Totals: 18 15-26 60.

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KIRKWOOD (57): Harris 1 2-2 4, Miles 1 2-4 5, Sudduth 5 2-6 13, Hutchins 0 0-0 0, Wood 4 7-8 15, Lemons 0 0-0 0, Downs 3 0-0 6, Wheatly 2 0-0 4, Oberman 0 0-2 0, Voss 0 0-0 0, Dampier 1 1-2 3, Jennings 2 3-4 7.

Totals: 19 17-28 57.

Halftime: Kirkwood 27, NIACC 27. 3-point goals: NIACC 9 (Lentz 1, Larson 2, Sproul 4, Peterson 2). Kirkwood 2 (Miles 1, Sudduth 1). Total fouls: NIACC 22, Kirkwood 24. Fouled out: Lentz. Technical fouls: none.