

No. 8 Eagles reach regional finals

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood Eagles are the undefeated conference champions this year and the No. 1 seed for the regional volleyball tournament, but now they'll be hitting the road in pursuit of a spot in the national meet.

In some sports in the Iowa Community College Athletic Conference, the No. 1 seed gets to host all of its events in regional competition. Volleyball is a different animal and Kirkwood Coach Jill Williams is not sure why.

"I can't explain it to you, because I don't understand it myself," she remarked Wednesday night.

Kirkwood swept Southeastern, 25-14, 25-19, 25-8, at Johnson Hall in a match that pitted the No. 1 seed against the No. 8 seed from the ICCAC.

But instead of playing for the regional title at home, the eighth-ranked Eagles (31-8) will face 16th-ranked DMACC (23-12) in what figures to be a nearly empty gym at Southwestern Community College in Creston this Saturday at noon.

Those are the conference and regional rules, so the Eagles will be making a three-hour trip to Creston to play for the regional title while DMACC will have a much shorter trip from its home in Boone.

The regional champion will claim a berth in the NJCAA Division II national tournament in Charlestown, W.Va., on Nov. 17-19 and that's the only thing that matters now.

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Kirkwood defeated DMACC in a tight match, 25-19, 20-25, 25-22, 25-22, during the conference race three weeks ago. Now the rematch will be for a trip to West Virginia.

"I think it will be a really competitive match," said KCC sophomore Alex Miner, who led the Eagles with 14 kills and six blocks against Southeastern. "I think we're going to win it."



The Eagles coasted in the first set against Southeastern for a 25-14 victory with Miner pointing them in the right direction with three early kills. The visitors from West Burlington led the second set, 19-18, but Kirkwood won the last seven points for a 25-19 verdict.

The third set was a mismatch as the Eagles rolled 25-8.

Kirkwood finished seventh at the national tournament last year and many of this year's top players gained valuable experience last season as freshmen.

"I think this group has learned so much from that experience and that's why you've seen the success this year," said Williams. "They just carried over from last year's national tournament.

"I like the 'team' about our team," she said. "They've got high energy and they like one another. If not, they've got me fooled."

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Different players have led the Eagles in different matches. It was Miner's turn last night with her 14 kills, but it was a typically balanced attack again. Madsy Richards had eight kills, Erica Armstrong six kills, Margaret Micka five kills and Morgan Grimm four kills.

Caiti Peterson contributed 31 assists and Jenna Laxton had 14 digs.

"I think we have a lot of versatility," said Miner, a 6-footer from Gilbert. "We're able to spread the ball around and use a lot of hitters. We have a lot of options."