

No. 14 Eagles soar by Marshalltown

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 12 January 2017 05:44 - Last Updated Friday, 13 January 2017 05:48



If you loved the way the Kirkwood Eagles played last season on their way to the national title, you had to enjoy what you saw at Johnson Hall Wednesday night.

Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen certainly did.

The 14th-ranked Eagles played a terrific first half and rolled by Marshalltown, 100-80, in a non-conference affair.

Kirkwood (12-3) jumped to a quick 14-0 lead in the first four minutes and led 54-31 at halftime with a near-flawless performance. The score was 30-9 midway through the first half.

"Probably the best basketball we've played all year," said Petersen.

The Eagles trimmed Marshalltown on the road, 78-75, in November, but the rematch was a blowout from start to finish.

Kirkwood opened 27-point leads in both halves and Marshalltown (13-6) never got closer than 20 points in the last 25 minutes of the game.

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Marshalltown outscored the Eagles 49-46 in the second half, but most of that came in the latter stages of the game.

"We played really good in the first half, but we kind of let up in the second half," said point guard Chris King, who led Kirkwood with 21 points and six assists. "We could have come out with a bigger win, but it was a good win overall."

The Eagles excelled in all aspects of the game with their passing, shooting, ballhandling and rebounding. They committed only eight turnovers in the fast-paced affair, shot 54.7 percent from the field and won the rebounding battle, 34-25.

Kirkwood had shown flashes of good basketball this season, but the Eagles appeared to recapture the form that catapulted them to the national crown last March.

"That's how I felt too," said Petersen. "That's what I told the group: This is kind of what we envisioned when we put the team together. This is how we wanted to play. So it was really good to see."

Kaliph Fagan scored 19 points in 19 minutes off the bench. Miles Wentzien contributed 13 points, Ethan Meeker had 12, Shakur Triplett notched 11 and Al'Tavius Jackson had 10.

King, a quick 6-foot red-shirt freshman from Des Moines Hoover, began his college career at Northwest Missouri State last season but transferred to Kirkwood at mid-year.

He practiced with the Eagles during the second semester last season, working against All-American point guard Hunter Rhodes and Byron Harp on a daily basis and preparing for this year.

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Rhodes is now playing at Northern Iowa and Harp, who excelled in the national tournament, is playing alongside King in the same backcourt, giving the Eagles two accomplished point guards in the starting lineup.

King treasured his time with the Eagles last season, even though he was not playing in games. He listened, learned and improved.

"It helped me out this year, I can say that," he remarked. "It helped me a lot.

"I feel like I'm hitting my stride right now. It's just confidence right now."

King left Northwest Missouri in pursuit of a bigger reward somewhere down the road, perhaps at the NCAA Division I level. One college coach in the audience Wednesday thinks that's a real possibility.

"I thought I could have a better opportunity by coming here and then moving on after my two years here," said King.

King has another year of eligibility at Kirkwood next season if he chooses to stay, but that could depend on what offers come his way.

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"I'm not trying to think about that right now," he said. "I'm just playing with my guys right now, playing with my team right now and things will go from there."

"We have a lot of potential," said King. "We just have to stay focused and stick with the grind and I think we've got a chance."

King is a rare point guard who has the ability to hit 3-pointers and the quickness to get to the rim. He's also a clever passer and an unselfish performer.

"He's making the right decisions right now and he's shooting the ball pretty well," said Petersen. "Chris is really coming along."

Petersen liked the timing of Wednesday's performance because it comes on the eve of the ICCAC campaign. Kirkwood opens the conference season at Southwestern on Saturday, matching the 2016 national champs against a team that is ranked No. 2 in the country right now.

"It was nice to do that before the big one on Saturday," Petersen said after his team's impressive show.

MARSHALLTOWN (80): Thiam 5 0-0 10, Millard 5 0-0 11, Preto 4 2-2 12, Coffi 4 3-4 12, Simmons 0 5-6 5, Mozee 1 0-0 3, Coleman 1 3-3 5, Hauser 3 2-2 9, Gradwell 5 0-0 13.

KIRKWOOD (100): Triplett 5 1-1 11, Harp 3 0-0 6, Wentzien 3 7-8 13, Meeker 4 2-2 12, C. King 6 6-8 21, Jackson 4 0-0 10, Fagan 7 3-3 19, Marble 1 0-0 3, Henry 0 0-0 0, D. King 2 1-2 5. Totals 35 20-24 100.

Halftime - Kirkwood 54, Marshalltown 31. 3-point goals - Marshalltown 9 (Gradwell 3, Preto 2, Millard 1, Coffi 1, Mozee 1, Hauser 1), Kirkwood 10 (C King 3, Meeker 2, Jackson 2, Fagan 2,

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Marble 1).