

KCC baseball players lend cagers a hand

Written by Jim Ecker

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Cal Clark, Nate Barnes, Brock Adams and Jake McLaughlin became instant folk heroes at Kirkwood Community College Tuesday night.

It was the darndest thing you've ever seen.

Clark, Barnes, Adams and McLaughlin are baseball players at Kirkwood, but they answered the call when the men's basketball team needed a boost and left Johnson Hall to a standing ovation after the 17th-ranked Eagles defeated the Grand View junior varsity, 99-63.

Five Kirkwood basketball players were handed two-game suspensions by the National Junior College Athletic Association last week for their roles in a mishap in the final minute of a home game against Ellsworth. That left KCC Coach Bryan Petersen with only five eligible players for Saturday's conference game at DMACC and for Tuesday's home game with Grand View.

Petersen asked Kirkwood baseball coach Todd Rima if he had any players who might be able to help the team for a few days and Rima recommended Clark, Barnes, Adams and McLaughlin.

Clark played a pivotal role in both games, first in the 58-50 victory over DMACC and again Tuesday. He played 18 minutes as the "sixth man" against DMACC and reprised the role against Grand View with 21 key minutes off the bench.

Clark, who played basketball and baseball at Cedar Rapids Prairie, collected five assists against Grand View and looked comfortable as an emergency college basketball player.

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"That was a lot of fun," said Clark, a middle infielder for the baseball team. "It was a little different for me than the other guys, because I've been at Kirkwood games my whole life.

"It meant a lot to me that they asked me to play. And these guys loved getting the opportunity to join the basketball team for a few days as well."

Barnes, Adams and McLaughlin did not play in the tight victory at DMACC, but they all got a chance against Grand View. Adams and Barnes got into the game for five minutes in the second half and McLaughlin got on the court for three minutes.

All four baseball players scored, but it took until the final seconds to get Barnes onto the score sheet. Petersen realized that Barnes was the only player who hadn't scored, so he told Clark to feed Barnes near the basket and give him a shot.

Sure enough, Barnes scored with a reverse layup and the crowd ate it up with a standing ovation, with the Kirkwood baseball and softball players in the stands leading the cheers.

"That was pretty cool," said Clark. "We all got to score tonight, so that was a lot of fun to watch. The crowd went crazy, too."

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Barnes played high school basketball at Iowa City West, Adams played at Clear Lake and McLaughlin played in Frankfurt, Ill. All four baseball players answered the call last Thursday and practiced against the five Kirkwood regulars for both games.

"It was pretty cool," Petersen said of the entire experience. "I just can't say enough about Coach Rima and the baseball program in general. They really stepped up."

Clark averaged 11.4 points as a senior at Prairie, but he knew he wanted to play baseball in college and did not seriously pursue an opportunity to play college basketball.

He was ready when the time came, however.

"We knew he'd be able to hold his own," said Petersen. "He was very comfortable and had a pretty good idea what he was doing out there. He was very helpful to us."

All four baseball players attended a shoot-around Tuesday afternoon at 1:45 for Tuesday night's game, then ate a team meal with the rest of the squad. They had baseball practice at 3:30 after the meal, then reported to Johnson Hall for the game.

"Busy time," said Clark.

"I thought having only five guys, maybe there was a chance I'd get a little bit of time, but I definitely played more than I thought I would," he said. "But it means a lot to me to put on this Kirkwood uniform and I was going to do everything I could to help us win two games."

"I knew even if I was the worst player on the floor, my four teammates were the best players on the floor. So I felt pretty comfortable out there."

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The five suspended players will be back on Wednesday to prepare for Saturday's home game with Iowa Central. That means the four baseball players will be turning in their uniforms and becoming full-time baseball players again after six days as college basketball players.

Does that mean Clark has officially retired? "For now, I am," he said with a smile. "I believe this is it. Hopefully they won't need us again."

Kirkwood (15-4) held a slim 27-24 lead at halftime, but the second half was an entirely different story. The Eagles poured in 72 points in the second half and hit 27 of 33 shots for 81.8 percent.

Carlo Marble drained five 3-pointers and finished with 27 points. Al'Tavius Jackson ran the club and scored 20. Da'Rion King muscled in 19 points and grabbed eight rebounds. Kaliph Fagan scored 13 points and Shakur Triplett snared 10 rebounds.

And for the record: Clark scored three points, Adams made two free throws for two points, Barnes scored two points and McLaughlin got two points.

"Pretty cool," said Clark.

GRAND VIEW JV (63): Rash 6 0-0 15, Thedford 0 0-0 0, Miller 4 0-0 11, Gilman 4 0-0 10, Milam 3 1-1 7, Laporte 0 0-0 0, Chapman 2 0-0 6, Anderson 0 0-0 0, Chandler 0 3-3 3, Wrice 0 0-0 0, Haynes 5 0-0 11, Putnam 0 0-0 0. Totals 24 4-4 63.

KIRKWOOD (99): Triplett 2 4-5 8, Jackson 8 3-5 20, Fagan 4 5-5 13, Marble 9 4-4 27, D.King 9 1-2 19, Clark 1 0-0 3, Adams 0 2-2 2, Barnes 1 0-0 2, McLaughlin 1 0-0 2. Totals 35 19-23 99.

Halftime - Kirkwood 27, Grand View JV 24. 3-point goals - Grand View JV 11 (Rash 3, Miller 3, Gilman 2, Chapman 2, Haynes 1), Kirkwood 7 (Marble 5, Jackson 1, Clark 1).