

Miller shines as Eagles sweep SCC

Written by Jim Ecker
Sunday, 07 May 2017 06:07 -



The Kirkwood Eagles needed a boost Saturday after dropping a pair of one-run games to 19th-ranked Southeastern Community College on the final weekend of the regular season.

It was Miller time.

Austin Miller tossed a complete game as the Eagles trimmed the Blackhawks, 3-1, in the first game of their doubleheader to stop the bleeding and lift everyone's spirits.

Kirkwood then captured the second game, 9-5, to earn a split of the fourth-game series and give themselves a heavy dose of momentum heading into the regional tournament in Waterloo.

Kirkwood and Southeastern began the weekend in a tie for first place in the conference with 13-7 records, but they were only one game ahead of NIACC and Iowa Central. As it turned out, NIACC and Iowa Central both swept their four-game series this weekend and tied for the conference title with 16-8 marks. Kirkwood and Southeastern tied for third at 15-9.

Kirkwood drew the No. 4 seed in the regional tournament at Riverfront Stadium in Waterloo and will meet No. 5 seed DMACC on Thursday at 3:30 p.m.

Miller, a 6-foot-7 right-hander from Iowa City West, had struggled on the mound the last few weeks, but he emerged as the stopper Saturday with a good fastball and nasty change-up.

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He was determined to have a good outing after Southeastern won the first two games in the series, 1-0 and 9-8.

"Honestly, I wanted to show them: You know what, these guys are not better than us and I'm going to prove it to them," he remarked. "I wanted to get our team fired up and say, 'Hey, we're going to take two and we're not going to roll over and lay down.' I really wanted to go."



Miller struck out seven batters and allowed only four hits in the seven-inning contest. Southeastern scored in the first inning on a bloop double and two-out single, but he was in command the rest of the way.

Miller has a 5-4 record this season, but he was allowing more than six runs per game before Saturday's performance. Even now, he's got a 5.53 ERA that's not to his liking.

Miller compiled a 10-2 record and 1.91 ERA as an all-state pitcher at Iowa City West last season and was not happy with recent outings.

"Honestly, I kind of went back to basics," he said. "I kind of sat down last week and thought to myself, what have I changed since high school?"

"I kind of went back to my high school routine this week. I didn't throw a mid-week pen, kind of took a couple more days off than I normally did this season and came back and it felt good today. Everything was working."

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Miller threw his change-up for strikes, got ahead in the count and had good command of his fastball. His change-up dropped a few inches as it crossed the plate and baffled the Blackhawks.

"They were way out ahead on the change-up," he said. "I could throw it in any count and it was really working for me today."

Kirkwood Coach Todd Rima brought in a strong freshman class of pitchers this season and knew they would play a big role in the club's fortunes. Miller was supposed to be an ace this year and filled the part Saturday.

"That's the Austin Miller we know," said Rima. "He was awesome today. He needed that, and we needed to see that. We feel we're a better team today after seeing that going into the tournament.

"I think he just went back to trusting his stuff. He didn't over-think things. His change-up was a great pitch today."

Miller has already signed with the University of Mississippi and will pitch for the Rebels next season after spending one year at Kirkwood. He looked like somebody who could succeed in the Southeastern Conference with the way he threw Saturday.

"It's always been a dream of mine to go play in the SEC, especially for Ole Miss," he said. "I always wanted to be a Reb, so it's kind of funny how that turned out.

"I'm really pumped," he said, "but I still have some unfinished business to take care of this year."

Rima liked the way his club rebounded after losing a pair of frustrating games to Southeastern. The Eagles fell 1-0 in the first game Friday, then blew an 8-2 lead in the second game that was

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suspended due to darkness and finished Saturday with the score tied 8-8.

"I couldn't be any more proud of our guys," he said. "To bounce back after losing two games like that, I think it says a lot about their character and I think it bodes well for us moving into tournament play.

"I think it's big for us moving forward."

Korry Howell, a talented shortstop for the Eagles, went 2-for-2 in the 3-1 victory and scored two runs. Colin Kreiter was 2-for-2 and had a sacrifice fly.

Kirkwood struggled on defense in the early stages of the nightcap and fell behind 3-0, but the Eagles battled back with four runs in the fourth inning and grabbed a 7-3 lead in the fifth when Kreiter drilled a two-run homer to right field.

Southeastern pulled within 7-4 in the sixth and 7-5 in the seventh, but the Eagles tacked on a pair of insurance runs and relief pitchers Kaden Wadle and Lorenzo Elion closed the door.

Howell was 3-for-5 in the nightcap and scored two more runs. Elion, the starting third baseman, had two hits and two RBIs. Tyler Bordner also had two hits.

Peyton Long pitched five innings for the victory in the second game, raising his record to 7-1. The Blackhawks scored three runs against him, but they were all unearned.

Kreiter made a sensational running catch in deep left-center in the ninth inning of the nightcap. Ellison Hanna made a terrific diving catch in right-center in the first game to get the Eagles out of trouble.

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Kirkwood will take a 33-16 overall record into the regional tournament. Southeastern is 37-17.

GAME 1

Southeastern □ □ **100 000 0 - 1 4 2**
Kirkwood □ □ □ □ **011 010 x - 3 6 1**

W - Miller. L - Stout.

GAME 2

Southeastern □ □ **030 001 100 - 5 8 3**
Kirkwood □ □ □ □ **000 430 11x - 9 11 5**

W - Long. L - Garcia.