

King shines as No. 5 Eagles roll

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood Eagles played a game of "King Me" Tuesday night at Johnson Hall.

And if Chris King keeps shooting like this, the Eagles might be crowned the kings of junior college basketball for the second time in three years.

King tossed in seven 3-pointers and scored 28 points as the fifth-ranked Eagles topped Little Priest Tribal College, 98-78, in the quarterfinals of the NJCAA Division II regional tournament.

Kirkwood (24-5) hosts Iowa Central (20-11) in the semifinals Thursday at 7 p.m.

King, a 6-foot sophomore from Des Moines, was on fire all night. He scorched the nets from 3-point distance, nailing 7 of 10, and finished 10 of 13 overall from the field.

"I was kind of in the groove today," he acknowledged. "I was just taking the shots the defense was giving me. They were playing a zone, so I had pretty open 3's and I think I'm a pretty good shooter.

"My teammates were finding me. It just kind of happened."

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Little Priest Tribal College, which will join Kirkwood in the ICCAC conference as a full-time member next season, put up a good fight most of the night, but the visitors from Winnebago, Neb., had only eight players in uniform and appeared to run out of steam.

Kirkwood grabbed a 20-point lead at 71-51 with nine minutes left on a 3-pointer by Small and raised the ante to 29 points at 84-55 on a triple by King with six minutes left.

King retired for the night a few seconds later, netting 28 points in 32 minutes.

"I thought Chris was really good," said KCC Coach Bryan Petersen. "He had it rolling. I thought he made some really good decisions, too. He did a nice job of penetrating the zone and then finding some open areas to get his shot off."

King has made at least one 3-pointer in all 29 games this season. He's made 84 of 194 for 43.3 percent and is averaging 17.6 points. The seven 3-pointers were a season-high.



All told, the Eagles connected on 17 of 35 from behind the 3-point arc for 48.6 percent. Ethan Meeker hit three triples, while Bailey Kale and Carlo Marble hit two apiece. Small, Semaj Ray and Tajen Ross also got into the long-range act.

Meeker finished with 13 points and Marble netted 11. Twelve players got into the game and 11

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scored.

"We've got athleticism, we've got shooters," said King. "We've got a little bit of everything. And as long as everybody just plays their role I think we'll be fine."

Kirkwood will play all of its games in the regional tournament at home this week as the conference champion and No. 1 seed. If the Eagles beat Iowa Central on Thursday, they'll host the regional finals Saturday against 15th-ranked Southwestern or 19th-ranked Iowa Lakes.

"We definitely want to win the regional title here in front of our fans and in front of everybody that comes and supports us," said King. "That's big for us."

Kirkwood has won 16 of its last 17 games, with the only loss coming last week at home against Ellsworth in overtime. Ellsworth was eliminated from the regional tournament by Iowa Central Tuesday night, removing one possible obstacle in Kirkwood's path.

Meeker said the loss to Ellsworth taught the Eagles a lesson.

"It was a good lesson," he said. "We didn't come out ready to play.

"It's win or go home," he noted. "We have to be ready every single night. Losing to Ellsworth really taught us that we're going to get everybody's best shot.

"It's going to come down to our chemistry and our fans," said Meeker. "We have to stick together through adversity. It's something we didn't do very well last year and I think we learned a lot from that."

Kirkwood swept the season series from Iowa Central, 84-62 in Fort Dodge and 85-79 in Cedar

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Rapids.

Ethan Steinbronn, a 6-11 center from Maynard, poured in 25 points for Little Priest Tribal College.

LITTLE PRIEST (78): Steinbronn 10 4-4 25, King 1 0-0 2, Dunlap 6 1-2 16, Oliver 6 0-2 15, Gresham 2 1-2 5, Brown 0 0-0 0, Yazzie 4 0-0 10, Winishut 2 0-0 5. Totals 31 6-10 78.

KIRKWOOD (98): Kale 2 0-0 6, Meeker 5 0-0 13, King 10 1-2 28, Wilson 4 1-1 9, Arrington 2 0-0 4, Stansbury 3 1-1 7, Small 3 1-2 8, Ray 1 0-0 3, Ross 3 0-0 7, Marble 4 1-1 11, Johnson 1 0-0 2, Storey 0 0-0 0. Totals 38 5-7 98.

Halftime - Kirkwood 42, Little Priest 32. 3-point goals - Little Priest 10 (Dunlap 3, Oliver 3, Yazzie 2, Steinbronn 1, Winishut 1), Kirkwood 17 (King 7, Meeker 3, Kale 2, Marble 2, Small 1, Ray 1, Ross 1).