

No. 2 KCC women roll at national tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 21 March 2018 04:26 -



HARRISON, Ark. - The Kirkwood Eagles jumped to a 24-2 lead after the first quarter Tuesday afternoon and crushed Gogebic Community College, 95-56, in the opening round of the NJCAA Division II national tournament.

The second-ranked Eagles (32-3) will face North Arkansas College (20-6) in the quarterfinals Wednesday at 8 p.m.

North Arkansas is the host school and the entire tournament is being played on its home court at Pioneer Pavilion in Harrison, Ark., where they have a strong following.

"It will be packed here tomorrow night," said Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl. "It will be rocking, because they're pretty excited about them playing. It will be a wild one, I think."

North Arkansas won its regional title to earn a spot in the national tournament as the No. 7 seed.

"They had to win the right to get here and they did," said Muhl. "It's not going to be easy, because they play very well here. I'm telling you, it's going to be packed."

"They had a large crowd today and the gym was full, so I can't imagine at 8 o'clock how many people will crawl out from under the rocks."

Mackenzie Jenkins led six players in double figures with 18 points and eight rebounds as Kirkwood rolled to its 22nd straight victory. Awal Ajak scored 17 points, including 15 in the first half when the Eagles grabbed a 52-20 cushion at intermission.

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Olivia Usher scored 13 points, Christmas Puok 11, Brianna Mensen 11 and Arika Wooldridge 10. Megan Axccl grabbed 10 rebounds and Tayana Wilson collected seven assists.

"I thought we played pretty well overall," said Muhl. "We wore them down and got open shots, which made it a lot easier. I thought overall it wasn't bad right out of the chute. Pretty good."

Lori Wardynski, who leads all NJCAA Division II players in scoring at 27 points per game, tossed in 23 points for the Samsons (16-13). Gogebic, located in northern Michigan, has only seven players on its roster.

Leah Robinson, one of Kirkwood's top reserves, sprained her left ankle with six minutes left in the game when she stepped on an opponent's foot while battling for an offensive rebound.

"We'll have to see tomorrow," said Muhl. "We'll ice it tonight when we get her back to the hotel and get her off it and hopefully she'll be OK tomorrow."

Kirkwood owned the backboards, 59-26, and made 41 of 83 shots from the field for 49.4 percent.

The semifinals are Friday night and the championship game is Saturday night. Kirkwood is the defending national champion and is seeking the eighth national title in school history.

"We just have to go play now," said Muhl.

GOGEBIC (56): Pilola 2 0-0 6, Engler 7 1-3 15, Mason 0 0-0 0, Wardynski 9 4-10 23, Froberg 3 0-2 9, Nasi 0 3-4 3, Lundin 0 0-0 0. Totals 21 8-19 56.

KIRKWOOD (95): Wilson 2 1-2 5, Puok 5 0-0 11, Axccl 2 0-0 6, Ajak 7 2-2 17, Usher 6 0-0 13,

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Jenkins 8 2-4 18, Brown 0 0-0 0, Hurst 1 0-0 2, Taylor 0 0-0 0, Robinson 1
0-1 2, Mullinnix 0 0-00, Mensen 4 2-2 11, Wooldridge 5 0-0 10. Totals 41 7-11 95.

Halftime - Kirkwood 52, Gogebic 20. 3-point goals - Gogebic 6 (Froberg 3, Pilola 2, Wardynski
1), Kirkwood 6 (Axccl 2, Puok 1, Ajak 1, Usher 1, Mensen 1).