

## Kaste sparks Eagles past Indian Hills

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 25 April 2018 04:42 -

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Miranda Kaste waited three years to enjoy a day like this for the Kirkwood softball team.

Kaste sparkled as a relief pitcher and then drew a bases-loaded walk in the bottom of the eighth inning to help the Eagles trim Indian Hills, 4-3, in the first game of their non-conference doubleheader Tuesday at Kirkwood.

Kirkwood exploded for eight runs in the bottom of the fifth inning to win the second game, 9-1.

Kaste enrolled at Kirkwood in 2015 as a middle infielder, but she broke her left leg in practice that fall and did not recover in time to play during the 2016 campaign.

She had a metal plate and screws removed from her leg during the summer of 2016, but developed a stress fracture in the leg and had to watch the entire 2017 season come and go as well.

Finally healthy this year, Kaste has been a key utility player for the Eagles as an infielder and emergency relief pitcher after several other pitchers left the program.

Tuesday was her day to shine.

Kaste began the first game at second base, but she relieved DoniRae Mayhew in the circle in the top of the fifth with the Eagles trailing 3-2. She blanked Indian Hills the rest of the way with four shutout innings and became the pitcher of record when Kirkwood tied the game, 3-3, in the bottom of the sixth on a clutch two-out RBI single by Audra Bridenstine.

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The game went into extra innings and Kaste escaped a bases-loaded jam with one out in the top of the eighth, thanks to a strong defensive play by Mayhew (now playing first base) and a strikeout.

The Eagles had runners at first and third with two outs in the bottom of the eighth with Rachel Stewart due to bat and Kaste in the on-deck circle. Stewart was hitting .488 with 56 RBIs and Kaste was hitting .264 with 19 RBIs, so Indian Hills played the percentages and gave Stewart an intentional walk to load the bases and face Kaste.

The strategy failed when Kaste, who hails from Muscatine, patiently drew a walk on a 3-1 pitch to force in pinch-runner Lauren Klaahsen with the winning run for the 4-3 victory.

Kaste has helped the Eagles in other games, but this was the highlight of the season so far. She became the winning pitcher (her second win of the year) and had the game-winning RBI in the same contest.

Some players would have quit by now after missing two full years with injuries, but not Kaste.

"It was hard, especially with the injury," she said. "But playing college softball is what I always wanted to do.

"I'm living a dream right now. We have a great team. The girls are a lot of fun."

In fact, Kaste said her teammates are one of the major reasons she's made it back and playing again.

"It was obviously tough, but I'm very blessed to have great teammates the past two years and this year," she said. "My team had my back the whole time."

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Kirkwood trailed 3-0 heading into the bottom of the fourth, but consecutive RBI doubles by Sonya McCormick and Skylar Ryan pulled the Eagles within 3-2 heading into the fifth.

Bridenstine, who has struggled recently, came through with her big hit in the bottom of the sixth and Kaste became the double-hero with her pitching and walk-off walk.

Stewart and Monika Bevans had two hits for the Eagles in Game 1.

The second game was tied, 1-1, heading into the bottom of the fifth when the Eagles got red-hot. They scored eight times to end the game, 9-1, by the college mercy rule.

Ryan had a triple and drove in two runs in Game 2. Bevans also collected two RBIs. Kaste drove in two runs, scored twice and had a double. Mayhew went 2-for-3 with an RBI. Bridenstine had two hits and scored twice. Stewart had an RBI.

Natalie Halvorson (20-4) pitched a complete game for Kirkwood. She limited Indian Hills to four hits and one unearned run.

The doubleheader matched two of the premier junior college softball programs in the country. Indian Hills (42-10) is ranked No. 14 in NJCAA Division I and Kirkwood (40-6) is ranked No. 5 in NJCAA Division II. Both teams played in the Junior College World Series last year.

Kirkwood has a doubleheader at DMACC on Wednesday. The Bears are undefeated in NJCAA Division II and lead the Eagles by three games in the conference standings.