

CLINTON - The Kirkwood baseball team finished the NJCAA Division II regional tournament in style Monday afternoon with another impressive performance along the banks of the Mississippi River.

The 16th-ranked Eagles thumped DMACC, 10-2, in the championship round to claim the regional title at Ashford University Field in Clinton.

"It's a special moment for our program, for our kids and our staff," said Coach Todd Rima. "I'm super-happy for the guys that all their hard work paid off."

Kirkwood (40-14-1) will host Southeast Community College (41-13) of Lincoln, Neb., in a two-team district this Saturday and Sunday, with the winner advancing to the World Series.

The Eagles went 4-0 in the regional tournament and outscored their opponents, 37-12, highlighted by a thrilling 5-4 victory over seventh-ranked Southeastern on Saturday.



Cal Stalzer (6-3) pitched five strong innings for Kirkwood Monday, allowing two runs and just one earned run. Adam Ketelsen tossed 3 2/3 shutout innings in relief and Kaden Wadle got the final out.

Stalzer was the No. 5 starter for Kirkwood during the regular season, but he got the ball in the championship game and flourished.

"I thought Stalzer was great," said Rima. "One of the keys for the game was he didn't give up any free bases. No walks, no hit-by-pitches.

"They had some hits, but they were all singles. He kept the ball down and got a bunch of ground balls. I thought he was great. That's what we needed him to do."

Spencer Wiskus, who belted a key three-run homer against Southeastern, supplied a clutch two-run blast against DMACC to give the Eagles a 2-1 lead in the fourth inning and get things started.

"He was clutch all weekend," said Rima. "He had struggled a little bit coming into the tournament, and to see him get it going like that makes our lineup different.



"When he hit that home run, it kind of put everybody at ease. I felt we were maybe pressing a little bit early, and as soon as he hit that homer everybody just calmed down and the whole demeanor of our team changed."

Catcher Joel Thompson blasted a two-run home run in the seventh inning when the Eagles erupted for six runs to take control at 10-2. Thompson's blast, his second of the tournament, made it 6-2.

Thompson has hit only three homers all season, but two of them came in the regional. He's hitting .194 for the season, but is swinging a hot bat at the right time.

"I'm not sure what got him going, but we're just glad he did," said Rima. "I think he gained some confidence after that first home run.

"He believes in himself a little bit more. You can tell by the way he carries himself, you can tell by the way he's catching. He's showing more leadership."

DMACC was playing its sixth game in the tournament after winning the losers bracket on Sunday and finished 4-2 in the regional. The Bears (28-28) lost to Kirkwood, 9-1, in the opening round, but then reeled off four straight victories to face the Eagles again.

Kirkwood was playing only its fourth game in the tournament, giving the Eagles a fresher pitching staff for the finals. The Eagles did not play on Sunday, giving their pitchers an extra day of rest while DMACC was playing two games to stay alive.

The game got off to an ominous start for the Eagles when the first three batters for DMACC got base hits in the top of the first, but Kirkwood center fielder Taylor Jackson gunned down a runner at the plate to keep the Bears off the scoreboard. It was Jackson's first assist of the season and came at a perfect time.

DMACC scored an unearned run for a 1-0 lead in the third inning, but Wiskus belted his two-run homer to left field for the 2-1 lead in the fourth and the rest of the game belonged to the Eagles.

Kirkwood was leading, 4-2, in the top of the seventh inning when the Bears put runners on second and third with two outs, but Ketelsen stranded the potential tying runs with a strikeout to end the inning.

"I think it was another game-changing situation," said Rima. "He gets that strikeout, our guys come off the field with a lot of momentum and then we put together some great at-bats that allowed us to put them away."

Ketelsen was one of Kirkwood's starting pitchers during the regular season, but unselfishly went to the bullpen for the regional and had two strong outings.

"I think it epitomizes what our team is. And that's a bunch of guys that are selfless," said Rima. "They play for each other, and Adam did that.

"He had every right to want the ball as a starter. He's earned that, but we thought this gives us the best chance."

The Eagles broke loose for their six-spot in the bottom of the seventh for their 10-2 bulge. Cal Clark, who returned to action in the regional tournament after missing several weeks with a facial injury, began the six-run outburst with a leadoff single and Thompson followed with his two-run homer to make it 6-2.

Korry Howell, who finished 4-for-5, followed with a single and Jackson made it first-and-third with another single. Howell scored on a wild pitch to make it 7-2, then Izaya Fullard hit a sacrifice fly to drive in Jackson and make it 8-2.

Wiskus delivered an RBI double to make it 9-2, and Chili Moseley collected an RBI single to make it 10-2.

Fullard, one of the top RBI men in the country, drove in two more runs Monday and had two hits. Wiskus was 3-for-4 with his double, home run and three RBIs.

DMACC needed two victories over Kirkwood in the championship round, but the Eagles took care of business in the first game and did not have to play a winner-take-all game on Monday.