

Eagles scrambling for No. 1 seed

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood women's basketball team defeated Iowa Central by 12 points Wednesday night at Johnson Hall, 48-36, and actually lost ground in the conference race.

That's because NIACC, which is tied with Kirkwood for first place in the ICCAC conference with identical 11-1 records, clobbered Little Priest Tribal College by 35 points.

There's a good chance that Kirkwood and NIACC will tie for the conference title this season with 15-1 records, so they'll need to use a tiebreaker to determine the No. 1 seed for the regional tournament and the coveted home-court advantage.

The first tiebreaker is head-to-head competition, but the Eagles and Trojans split their two games.

The second tiebreaker is point differential in those two games, but they traded six-point victories.

The third tiebreaker is each team's record against the rest of the conference, which would be 14-0.

The fourth tiebreaker, according to Kirkwood athletic director Doug Wagemester, is overall point differential against all the other teams in the league.

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That's the rub. NIACC has outscored conference opponents by 318 points and Kirkwood has outscored them by 276, so the Eagles are trailing NIACC by 42 points with four games to go.

"You hate to do anything by points. Then you're watching scores," Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl said Wednesday. "It's not good. It's not healthy for our game."

Kirkwood topped NIACC by six points, 77-71, when they met in Cedar Rapids on Jan. 19, then NIACC topped Kirkwood by six points, 68-62, in the rematch in Mason City this past Saturday.

The No. 1 seed for the regional tournament is important, because only the regional champion will make the national tournament. There are no at-large berths.

Muhl would love to earn that No. 1 seed, but he's always prided himself on good sportsmanship and is not inclined to run up the score against a helpless opponent.

Is a 30-point victory enough? How about 40 points? Or how about 50 or 60? Where do you draw the line?

"Let's play one at a time and see what happens," said Muhl. "You can't think ahead."

The men's basketball teams in the ICCAC conference do not have the same problem. The men have a "power rating" as a tiebreaker, rather than point differential.

Muhl and Wagemester both indicated that women's basketball needs a similar tiebreaker, but it won't happen this year.

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There's always a chance, of course, that Kirkwood or NIACC will lose another game during the regular season and eliminate the need for calculating the point differential. Indeed, the Eagles did not play very well against Iowa Central Wednesday night and prevailed with their defense.

It was Kirkwood's first outing since losing at NIACC on Saturday.

"It's a win. We move forward," Muhl said after topping Iowa Central. "It's a survival game after a big game with NIACC. Emotionally we were pretty average tonight."

The Eagles had won nine straight games before falling at NIACC.

"We were on a pretty good roll," said Muhl. "In the NIACC game we played horrible. Thirty-one turnovers, 58 percent from the foul line. We missed 19 layups in the first half."

Paige Bradford led Kirkwood with 15 points against Iowa Central. The Eagles raised their overall record to 21-6.

Iowa Central fell to 12-12 overall and 3-8 in the conference.

IOWA CENTRAL (48): Crooks 5 0-2 10, Ward 3 0-3 6, S.Smith 1 0-0 2, West 2 0-0 6, Itula 0 0-0 0, Okinaka 2 0-0 5, C.Smith 0 0-0 0, Jackson 2 3-4 7. Totals 15 3-9 36.

KIRKWOOD (48): Bradford 6 3-3 15, Jenkins 3 0-0 6, Gaston 1 1-2 3, Hurst 2 0-1 4, Mullinnix 2 0-0 6, Lipsey 0 0-0 0, Kennedy 1 2-2 4, Myers 2 0-0 6, Tomaszewski 0 0-0 0, Robinson 2 0-0 4, Mensen 0 0-0 0. Totals 19 6-10 48.

Halftime - Kirkwood 22, Iowa Central 18. 3-point goals - Iowa Central 3 (West 2, Okinaka 1), Kirkwood 4 (Mullinnix 2, Myers 2).