

No. 7 Kirkwood men open year Friday

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 01 November 2012 20:51 -

The Kirkwood Eagles have a 6-foot-11 center from Nigeria who resembles former NBA Hall of Famer David Robinson at times with a left-handed baby hook near the basket.

Unfortunately for Kirkwood, Henry Uwadiae is academically ineligible this season and won't be able to play for the Eagles until next year.

It's doubly unfortunate, because 6-foot-8 sophomore center Matt Tibby won't play for Kirkwood in their first two games this weekend due to a violation of team rules. That leaves the Eagles a little shorthanded as they begin the new campaign.

The seventh-ranked Eagles will face the William Penn junior varsity in the first round of the Indian Hills Classic Friday at 4:30 p.m. in Ottumwa. Kirkwood will play Indian Hills Saturday night in the second round.

Uwadiae arrived in the U.S. from Nigeria in 2009 and attended several prep schools. He committed to Wichita State this past summer and planned to sign a national letter-of-intent with the Shockers this fall, but the NCAA Clearinghouse declared him a non-qualifier and therefore not eligible to accept an NCAA Division I scholarship at this time.

Kirkwood Coach Doug Wagemester said Uwadiae took five years to complete four years of high school, counting his years in Nigeria and the U.S., and that his credits from his fifth year in high school did not count toward NCAA eligibility.

"Henry is a good student," Wagemester said.

Uwadiae can practice with Kirkwood this season, but cannot play in games until next season. The plan is for him to play for the Eagles during the 2013-14 campaign, then join Wichita State. He's raw, but obviously has potential.

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Wagemester knew Uwadiae would not be able to play this season, but Tiby's absence is a recent development on the eve of the campaign. Tiby averaged 12 points and 6 rebounds for the Eagles last season and turned down Division I offers to play for Kirkwood again this year.

Kevin Hunter, a 6-6, 230-pound sophomore from Simeon High School in Chicago, will move into the starting lineup this weekend.

"Kevin is talented. Kevin is tough enough," Wagemester said. "It's just a matter of consistency."

Kirkwood plans to start a pair of freshmen in the backcourt with Taylor Olson of Cedar Rapids Jefferson at point guard and J.C. Fuller of Sioux City East at off-guard. Olson and Fuller helped their teams make the state tournament last year and were named all-state, but now they have to adjust to a much higher level of play.

"We're still learning," Wagemester said.

Wagemester said his team will be tested by a tough early schedule. He's not sure how the team will do. "We've got to take some lumps and then I'll know," he remarked.

"If it doesn't kill us, it will make us better," he told his team. "Don't let it kill us."

"We're up against some tall cotton here. The whole premise is to get us better. Give ourselves a gauge."

Kirkwood will play its first four games on the road. The home opener is scheduled for Nov. 13 against the Grand View junior varsity.

"I like our balance and I think we're a little more athletic across the board (than last year),"

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Wagemester said. "We may give away a little bit of our shooting ability than we've had in the past, we may give away a little bit of basketball I.Q., but we're a little bigger and a little more athletic and have a little more playmaking ability."

The Eagles finished 27-5 last year and won their conference title. They lost to DMACC in the semifinals of the regional tournament.

Wagemester has compiled a 390-94 record in 14 years as Kirkwood's head coach, including a 169-22 mark in conference games.

Greg Stokes and Darin Pint, two long-time assistant coaches at Kirkwood, are not working with the team this year due to family reasons.

Stokes wanted to have more time to watch his two children play college basketball, with his son Darius at the University of Iowa and daughter Kiah at UConn. He also has a balky knee from his years as a college and pro basketball player.

Pint has a young family and wanted to spend more time with them.

Quincy Young is beginning his fourth year as an assistant at Kirkwood. Bryan Petersen, who played at Kirkwood and Iowa State, has joined the staff.

ROSTER

SOPHOMORES

Kevin Hunter, 6-6, Chicago; Shaun Manego, 6-1, Cape Coral, Fla.; Derek Witt, 6-5, Clinton; Gage Heffernan, 6-4, Peosta; Devan Douglas, 6-2, Clinton; Kasey Semler, 6-1, Marion; Matt Tiby, 6-8, Urbandale.

FRESHMEN

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Najeal Young, 6-5, Milwaukee; Demetrius Butler, 5-10, Davenport; Jamaree Atwater, 6-2, Moline, Ill.; J.C. Fuller, 6-3, Sioux City; Taylor Olson, 6-1, Cedar Rapids; Jalen Currie, 6-5, Milwaukee; Mike Lang, 6-8, Chicago; Henry Uwadiae, 6-11, Benin City, Nigeria.