

No. 1 Eagles roll at national tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

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DANVILLE, Ill. - The Kirkwood Eagles looked like the No. 1 team in the country Tuesday afternoon.

The top-ranked Eagles built a 21-point lead in the first half and thrashed North Central Missouri, 96-66, in the first round of the NJCAA Division II national tournament at the Mary Miller Center.

Kirkwood (28-4) will face Niagara County (N.Y.), a 73-61 winner over Wake Tech (N.C.), in the quarterfinals Wednesday at 6 p.m.

Allante Pickens popped in five 3-pointers in the first half and had 17 points by intermission, with the Eagles sitting on a 53-32 lead at that point. He finished with six triples and 24 markers. Pickens shot 9-for-10 overall from the field and 6-for-7 on 3-pointers.

Doug Wilson and Devonte Thedford scored 13 points apiece for Kirkwood. Jamal Stephenson netted 12 points off the bench and Connor Kasperbauer contributed 10 points. Wilson had 10 rebounds.

"I thought we played pretty well," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "For spurts, we really executed defensively. And offensively we made some shots."

Kirkwood shot 54.5 percent for the game and 54.2 percent on 3-pointers, hitting 13 of 24 from beyond the arc.

Brady Sartorius, who missed the regional tournament due to concussion protocol, returned to action and scored five points in 14 minutes. Petersen was able to clear his bench and rest his starters for the quarterfinals.

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"There were a lot of positives," he said. "It was a good first game."

Kirkwood won the national title in 2016 and is seeking its second championship in four years.

North Central Missouri, the No. 16 seed in the 16-team tournament, finished at 18-13. Solomon Thomas scored 18 points for the Pirates.

NORTH CENTRAL MISSOURI (66): Spriggs 1 0-0 3, Reece 6 1-1 13, Rieves 3 4-4 11, Thomas 7 1-2 18, Lockett 1 2-4 4, Scott 1 0-0 2, Heidenwith 0 0-0 0, Childs 1 2-2 2, Richman 1 0-0 3, Horton 0 0-0 0 Jackson 2 2-4 6, Campbell 0 0-0 0, Salisbury 1 0-0 2. Totals 24 12-17 66.

KIRKWOOD (96): Sims 0 1-1 1, Pickens 9 6-7 24, Thedford 5 3-4 13, Kasperbauer 3 1-1 10, Wilson 5 3-5 13, Sartorius 1 2-2 5, Clark 2 0-0 5, Stephenson 5 0-2 12, Biernacki 1 0-0 2, Gosnell 1 1-1 3, Arrington 0 0-0 0, Appel 4 0-0 8. Totals 36 11-16 96.

Halftime - Kirkwood 53, North Central Missouri 32. 3-point goals - North Central Missouri 6 (Thomas 3, Spriggs 1, Rieves 1, Richman 1), Kirkwood 13 (Pickens 6, Kasperbauer 3, Stephenson 2, Sartorius 1, Clark 1).