

Wentzien nets 28 as Eagles top NIACC

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood sophomore Miles Wentzien is a grown man with muscles upon muscles, but nobody makes it through a college basketball season without a few bumps and bruises.

Wentzien missed two games last month after injuring his collarbone and sternum in a game against Ellsworth, but he's relatively healthy now and ready for the stretch run.

Wentzien tossed in 28 points and grabbed six rebounds Wednesday night as the 12th-ranked Eagles pulled away from NIACC, 81-63, in a conference game at Johnson Hall.

Wentzien was hit in the jaw by an errant elbow Wednesday and needed a few moments to shake it off, but otherwise said he feels good as the season has moved into March.

"I felt pretty close to 100 percent out there tonight," he said. "I'd say 95 to 100 percent."

That's good news for Kirkwood, which will need all of its players in good health as they try to win a second national title in a row.

Kaliph Fagan, a key member of the bench brigade, did not play against NIACC after turning his ankle in practice Tuesday, but he plans to play Saturday in the final game of the regular season at Iowa Lakes.

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The regional tournament begins next week and the Eagles (23-5, 9-2) will likely be the No. 2 seed behind Southwestern. The highest seeds get to host all their playoff games, so the Eagles might have to beat Southwestern in Creston for a trip to the national tournament.

Kirkwood and Southwestern split their two-game series this season, with each team winning on its home floor.

"Hopefully at the end we can get another shot against Southwestern," said Wentzien.

Kirkwood jumped to a 13-point lead in the first half Wednesday, but NIACC (16-13, 3-8) rallied and took a 41-40 edge with 16:40 left in the game.

"I felt we were a little sluggish," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen.

"We came out pretty good," said Wentzien, "and then we let our foot off the pedal a little bit."

The Eagles came alive again in the final 16 minutes, whipping NIACC 41-22 from that point to the final buzzer.

Byron Harp made a tough drive to the basket to put Kirkwood ahead 42-41, then Wentzien and Chris King nailed 3-pointers as the Eagles moved in front 48-41 with an 8-0 spurt.

NIACC was still hanging around at 65-58 with less than five minutes left to play, but Harp made another drive to the bucket and Wentzien nailed another triple to make it 70-58.

The margin reached 20 points at 81-61 in the final minute on a 3-pointer by Chris King.

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Harp scored 12 points for the Eagles and King finished with 10. Kirkwood hit 64 percent of its shots in the second half and was 57.7 percent for the game.

NIACC (63): Baker 2 0-0 5, Wurm 1 6-8 9, Rathjen 9 0-0 22, Trousell 2 2-4 7, Gumm 3 1-7 7, Moss 2 1-2 7, Burnside 1 4-4 6. Totals 20 14-25 63.

KIRKWOOD (81): Triplett 3 1-2 7, Harp 5 1-2 12, Wentzien 9 7-8 28, Meeker 3 0-0 7, C.King 3 2-2 10, Jackson 3 0-0 7, Marble 1 0-0 3, Henry 1 0-0 2, D.King 2 1-2 5. Totals 30 12-16 81.

Halftime - Kirkwood 36, NIACC 34. 3-point goals - NIACC 9 (Rathjen 4, Moss 2, Baker 1, Wurm 1, Trousell 1), Kirkwood 9 (Wentzien 3, C.King 2, Harp 1, Meeker 1, Jackson 1, Marble 1).