

Kasey Semler learning the ropes at Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kasey Semler hit a 3-point shot for Kirkwood Community College Tuesday night, but didn't get to enjoy it very long.

A few seconds later, Coach Doug Wagemester gave Semler a stern lecture about the proper way to play defense.

Welcome to college, kid.

"Exactly," Semler said with a grin after the Eagles faced Ashford University in a scrimmage at Johnson Hall.

Semler averaged 21.2 points and hit 41.9 percent of his 3-pointers at Marion High School last season, so there's no doubt he can score and he can shoot.

The big question will be defense. If you can't guard anyone at Kirkwood, you'll have a nice seat on the bench.

"I'm working on it every day," said Semler, a 6-foot-1 guard. "Coach Wags is on me about it a lot. I respect that and I'm trying my best to do what he says. I listen closely."

Kirkwood topped Ashford, 66-50, in the 40-minute scrimmage. Semler played 11 1/2 minutes as a reserve and was in the rotation with the top 9 or 10 players.

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He shot 1-for-4 on 3-pointers for three points and grabbed four defensive rebounds. His defense appeared sound for the most part, except for a few lapses.

Wagemester lectured him about one of those lapses during a timeout, but Semler was not the only one who received an earful at times. Overall, Wagemester likes what he's seen.

"He's coming, he's learning, he's adjusting," Wagemester said. "Obviously defense is the biggest adjustment for him.

"He's a great kid. He makes shots. He can sneak up on you off the dribble, too."

Semler is not blessed with great quickness for a college basketball player, but Wagemester thinks he can handle the job if he uses his head and body properly.

"He's got to be really tough and wired mentally, and then he's got to be a technician," Wagemester said. "He's strong enough."

Semler was an all-state guard at Marion and helped the Indians make the state tournament in 2009 and 2011. He also was an all-state baseball player and helped the Indians reach the state baseball tournament last season as well.

Semler said college basketball is a big adjustment from high school, but said he's enjoyed it so far. Kirkwood appears to have another strong team with lots of talent.

"It's awesome," Semler said. "It reminds me a lot of my AAU team. You can throw it and feel confident they'll catch it. It's fun playing every day with guys like that."

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Semler played on the Iowa Barnstormers AAU team with Jared Uthoff of Jefferson, and Washington's Josh Oglesby and Wes Washpun. All three are freshmen on Division I basketball teams, with Uthoff at Wisconsin, Oglesby at Iowa and Washpun at Tennessee.

Semler would love to join them in the Division I ranks some day, but knows he has work to do. "I'm coming to work every day and trying to get better," he said.

Wagemester said Semler has a chance to be in the rotation when the season begins Nov. 4 at the John Wood Classic in Quincy, Ill.

"We're really glad we got him," Wagemester said. "He's taking care of his business, the guys enjoy him, he's a teammate, he smiles, he works hard. He just keeps coming and going to work."