

Harp plays sweet music for Eagles

Written by Jim Ecker

Sunday, 19 February 2017 07:32 -



The Kirkwood Eagles slapped adversity in the face again Saturday afternoon.

If you've followed the Kirkwood men's basketball team this season, you know it's nothing new.

The ninth-ranked Eagles dressed only eight players due to medical issues and still managed to knock off DMACC, 83-63, in a key ICCAC conference game at Johnson Hall.

Earlier this year, the Eagles had to borrow a few players from the Kirkwood baseball team when five of their own players were suspended for two games by the NJCAA.

The Eagles are now 3-0 with a short-handed roster.

"They've been faced with a lot of different adversity during this year," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "Basically our message to the team was, 'We've done this before, so we have to find a way and not make excuses.'"

"I thought the guys did a really nice job, coming out and setting the tone the first five minutes."

Byron Harp poured in 26 points for the Eagles and padded his stat line with six assists, five

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rebounds, five 3-pointers and one only turnover in 39 minutes.

Da'Rion King hit 8-of-9 shots from the field and muscled in 16 points, Chris King scored 13, Ethan Meeker netted 10 and Elijah Henry came off the bench to grab 11 rebounds.

Miles Wentzien missed the game with an injured collarbone and Kaliph Fagan was sidelined after having a wisdom tooth removed, leaving the Eagles with only eight able-bodied players.

Harp, a point guard who was instrumental in Kirkwood's run to the national title last season, knew he had to expand his role with two of his teammates unavailable.

"I wanted to be more aggressive and I wanted to be a leader, because some of my main guys were out," he said. "When I get into that mentality, I think I can be pretty tough."

Harp pumped in nine points in the first four minutes of the game, helping the Eagles jump to a 17-3 lead before DMACC (15-12, 4-5) made its first field goal.



Kirkwood opened 16-point leads in the first half, but the Bears rallied and pulled within six points at 49-43 with about 13 minutes left in the ballgame.

Several Eagles were in foul trouble at that point, further thinning the ranks, but they never

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panicked.

"Just stay calm, we're fine, we're going to win this game," Harp thought at the time. "I completely trust our team in every situation. They make runs in games, but remain calm. Always remain calm."

The Eagles followed Capt. Harp's approach and bounced back with six straight points for a 55-43 lead to lift themselves out of serious danger. Da'Rion King capped the 6-0 spurt with a thunderous two-hand dunk with a pretty feed from Harp.

The margin reached 16 points again at 63-47 on a three-point play by Carlo Marble and the Eagles stayed comfortably ahead until the final horn.

Petersen liked the way Harp took charge of the club with an outstanding all-around performance.

"Another really good one," said Petersen. "Obviously he's been a very good player for us over his two years, but the last month and again today he's been really good.

"They gain confidence from his demeanor. He was excellent today."

Kirkwood raised its records to 21-4 overall and 8-1 in the conference, good for a half-game lead in the league standings over Southwestern with only two weeks left in the regular season.

"We want to win every game, win our conference, win the region, win the national championship," said Harp.

Wali Parks, an Iowa City West grad, led DMACC with 23 points.

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DMACC (63): Marshburn 1 1-3 4, White 3 10-10 17, Parks 6 8-10 23, Ivory 1 1-2 3, Lipovsky 2 0-0 4, Payawal 2 1-2 6, Ruff 0 0-0 0, Palmer 1 0-0 2, Shorkey 0 0-0 0, Synsmir 0 0-0 0, Locke 2 0-0 4. Totals 18 21-27 63.

KIRKWOOD (83): Triplett 1 2-2 4, Harp 8 5-8 26, Meeker 4 0-2 10, C.King 3 4-4 13, D.King 8 0-0 16, Jackson 0 0-0 0, Marble 2 3-3 8, Henry 2 2-2 6. Totals 28 16-21 83.

Halftime - Kirkwood 39, DMACC 29. 3-point goals - DMACC 6 (Parks 3, Marshburn 1, White 1, Payawal 1), Kirkwood 11 (Harp 5, C.King 3, Meeker 2, Marble 1).