

No. 13 Eagles knock off NIACC

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen pulled Chris King and Ethan Meeker into a private meeting prior to the holiday break last month to talk about where the Eagles were headed.

It had been a choppy season at that point and Petersen wanted his two experienced sophomores to help point the Eagles in the right direction.

It's worked.

King and Meeker played important roles Wednesday night as the 13th-ranked Eagles continued their surge with a 76-63 victory over NIACC in a conference game at Johnson Hall.

King popped in six 3-pointers and scored 23 points. Meeker, who missed the first month of the season with a broken hand, contributed eight points, five assists, three rebounds and two steals.

Most of all, they're providing more of the leadership that may have been lacking earlier in the campaign.

"I just wanted more ownership from those guys in particular, because they've been in our program and they've played a good amount of minutes over their careers," said Petersen. "I just wanted more ownership, because at the end of the day this is their last go-round at Kirkwood."

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"I talked to them about how they wanted to go out," he said. "I thought we were kind of on the edge. It could go either direction. They had some conversations with the team and some things got figured out, hopefully."

Kirkwood was honored as the national junior college team of the week last week after beating second-ranked Lincoln College and seventh-ranked Iowa Central. Wednesday's victory over NIACC raised their records to 12-4 overall and 2-0 in the conference.

King and Meeker spent about 15 minutes with Petersen after a ballgame in December, talking about the team and where the Eagles were headed. The Eagles have not lost since.

"It was about being better leaders and leading this crew and setting examples for the younger guys," said King. "That's all it was really about."

"At our practices, we're coming in way more focused than we have been in the past. And I feel like the guys are really buying in to what the coaches are trying to reach us and what they want us to do on the floor."

Petersen said the Eagles are sharing the ball a lot better now and playing better on defense, for the most part. "Hopefully we can sustain it and keep building on it," he said.

Kirkwood owned a 19-point lead at 49-30 with 13 minutes remaining, but NIACC went on an 18-5 run and pulled within 54-48 with 7:50 left. That's as close as it got.

King and Meeker, appropriately, hit consecutive 3-pointers to make it 60-48, with Meeker draining a long triple to beat the shot clock. King hit another 3-pointer on a feed from Meeker, then Bailey Kale made a triple to finish a 12-0 flurry for a 66-48 bulge.

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Those four straight 3-pointers sealed the victory. NIACC fell to 11-5 overall and 0-2.

Kyle Arrington contributed 10 points and seven rebounds for Kirkwood. Kale collected five assists and LJ Stansbury had five steals.

NIACC (63): Blackmon 0 0-0 0, Hamilton 7 4-6 22, Payne 3 0-0 8, McPherson 2 0-0 5, Sims 2 1-2 6, Skogen 2 0-0 5, Hardwick 7 1-1 16, Myers 0 1-2 1, Anderson 0 0-1 0. Totals 23 7-12 63.

KIRKWOOD (76): Kale 2 0-0 6, Meeker 3 0-0 8, King 6 5-6 23, Wilson 2 0-1 4, Arrington 4 2-3 10, Stansbury 1 1-3 3, Small 1 2-2 5, Ross 3 0-0 6, Marble 1 4-6 6, Johnson 2 1-2 5, Storey 0 0-0 0. Totals 25 15-23 76.

Halftime - Kirkwood 37, NIACC 25. 3-point goals - NIACC 10 (Hamilton 4, Payne 2, McPherson 1, Sims 1, Skogen 1, Hardwick 1), Kirkwood 11 (King 6, Kale 2, Meeker 2, Small 1).