

## Wilson leads Kirkwood to national title

Written by Jim Ecker

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DANVILLE, Ill. - Doug Wilson played like an All-American Saturday night. Better yet, he played like a national champion.

Wilson poured in 30 points and snared 15 rebounds for a monster double-double as Kirkwood topped Johnson County Community College, 64-58, in the championship game of the NJCAA Division II national tournament at the Mary Miller Center in Danville, Ill.

Wilson canned 13 of 23 shots, blocked five shots, handed out four assists and even banked in the first 3-pointer of his career to beat the shot clock at a critical point in the game.



For his efforts, the 6-foot-7 sophomore from Des Moines was honored as the MVP of the tournament. Two of his buddies, Devonte Thedford and Allante Pickens, joined Wilson on the all-tournament team.

Wilson was simply magnificent in the biggest game of the year on a national stage.

"He's the best I've ever coached," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen, who pocketed his second national title in four years. "He's a special winner. And how much he's grown.

"Tonight was another night where he just put us on his back for a few moments and got it done. I can't say enough about his leadership and how much he bought into our program.

"He's one of the best ones to ever wear an Eagle uniform."

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Wilson was named the Player of the Year in the ICCAC conference, was named the MVP of the regional tournament and was fittingly honored as the MVP of the national tournament. As usual, he deflected the credit to his teammates and coaches after the Eagles claimed the national crown.

"We deserved it," Wilson said after Kirkwood won four games in five days. "This feels really good. This is what we've been working on since Day 1 of practice this season.



"We stayed connected, just like we have all season."

Kirkwood owned a 15-point lead with 9 1/2 minutes left in the ballgame, but Johnson County chopped that deficit all the way down to two points and trailed 60-58 in the final seconds.

Devonte Thedford hit two free throws with 8.2 seconds left to give the Eagles a 62-58 lead, then Wilson blocked his final shot of the game and canned two foul shots with 2.3 seconds remaining to finish their run to the national championship.

Kirkwood ended the season with a 31-4 record, giving the Eagles national titles in 2016 and 2019 under Petersen, a former Kirkwood All-American himself during his playing days.

"A lot of emotion," said Petersen, "but mainly I'm just happy for our guys. Our team was pretty special this year, with how they worked together and how they rooted for each other and were great teammates. They really bonded.

"I'm happy that they got to experience what they deserved. That's the biggest thing," he said. "This group really deserves this national championship and the moment tonight."

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The championship game matched No. 1 Kirkwood against No. 2 Johnson County for bragging rights for the 2019 campaign.

Kirkwood was clinging to its 60-58 lead in the final minute and had the ball. Wilson missed a jump hook with 36 seconds left, but Luke Appel made a huge play on defense when he drew a charge with 13 seconds left.

Thedford, an excellent foul shooter at 82.6 percent, canned his 1-and-1 with 8.2 seconds remaining for a 62-58 lead, then Wilson blocked a shot attempt in the final seconds and got fouled. Wilson, who has vastly improved his foul shooting since stepping on campus two years ago, made them both.

A few seconds later, the Eagles were jumping for joy at mid-court and members of "Pete's Posse" - self-named in honor of Coach Petersen - joined the players on the floor of the Mary Miller Center in celebration.

Seybian Sims grabbed 11 rebounds for Kirkwood and made a huge 3-pointer to give Kirkwood a 56-51 lead with less than five minutes left after Johnson Country had pulled within 53-51 with a 16-3 run.

Thedford capped his strong performances in the national tournament with 15 points.

David Turner tossed in 19 points and grabbed 11 rebounds for Johnson County, which finished with a 31-5 record. JaQuaylon Mays scored 13 points for the Cavaliers and A.J. Pleasant notched 10 points.

Johnson County enjoyed a pair of five-point leads early in the first half, but Kirkwood rallied for a 33-26 advantage at halftime with Wilson scoring 15 of his 30 points in the opening stanza.

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**JOHNSON COUNTY (58):** Larkin 2 0-0 4, Womack 2 0-0 4, Turner 8 0-0 19, Mays 3 5-6 13, Williams 3 0-0 6, Hughes 0 0-0 0, Milner 1 0-0 2, Pleasant 4 1-1 10. Totals 23 6-7 58.

**KIRKWOOD (64):** Sims 2 0-0 5, Pickens 0 2-2 2, Thedford 5 5-5 15, Kasperbauer 1 0-0 3, Wilson 13 3-4 30, Sartorius 0 0-0 0, Stephenson 1 0-0 2, Appel 3 1-1 7. Totals 25 11-12 64.

Halftime - Kirkwood 33, Johnson County 26. 3-point goals - Johnson County 6 (Turner 3, Mays 2, Pleasant 1), Kirkwood 3 (Sims 1, Kasperbauer 1, Wilson 1).