

Muhl welcomes new team at Kirkwood

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 09 October 2013 21:39 -

Kim Muhl was not entirely happy with his women's basketball team at Kirkwood last season.

The Eagles went 28-5 and captured another conference title, but Muhl had trouble communicating with the club at times.

Dysfunctional, he called them.

Some graduated. Some left the program on their own. Some were not invited back.

Muhl, one of the most successful junior college coaches in the country, went out and recruited a brand-new squad. Mikayla Fallon, a 5-foot-9 wing player, is the only letterman on the squad, and she averaged just 2.5 points.

There are 15 players on the team. Fourteen are new, although Ariel Sneed got a chance to practice with the Eagles last winter after transferring from the University of Illinois-Chicago at mid-semester.

Otherwise, Muhl started over.

"It wasn't easy, because we tried to stay local and not go too far out of state," he said Tuesday. "It was hard. Yes."

Kirkwood has eight players from Illinois, three from Iowa and one from Nebraska, so 12 of the 15 are from the midwest. But there also are new people from New York, Pennsylvania and California.

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Twelve of the 15 players are freshmen. Sneed, the transfer from Illinois-Chicago, and 5-foot-3 point guard Danielle Woolfolk, a transfer from Eastern Illinois, are sophomores. So is Fallon, the only player who's ever worn a Kirkwood uniform in a game.

Muhl is accustomed to success, with a remarkable 709-128 record and six national titles heading into his 25th season at Kirkwood. He thinks he has the ingredients for another strong team, despite the youth and inexperience.

"We've got some pieces. There's no question, we've got some pieces that can play," he said. "The big thing is for them to quit doing things on their own and play together.

"It's very difficult, with kids who were the best player on their high school team, asking them to screen or asking them to pass or reverse the ball."

Muhl said they need to communicate on the court, talk to each other, help each other. They've only been practicing since Oct. 1, so they've had less than two weeks together.

He's confident - hopeful - it will come together.

"The big thing is, I think we have a good group. Good kids. They'll work pretty hard," he said. "They've been a little pouty, but hopefully that will subside and they'll just play."

Kirkwood has good size with 6-foot-2 Hanna Haynes, 6-foot-1 Cassidy Clark, 6-foot Zoe Kelso, 6-foot Breannie Robinson, 5-foot-11 Peyton Bockholt, 5-foot-10 Cuylla Hall, 5-foot-10 Kirsten Larson, 5-foot-10 Anna Martensen and the 5-foot-10 Sneed.

They pass the "eye test" in terms of legitimate height, and Muhl liked the way many of them played at the Midwest Juco Jamboree in Kansas City this past Sunday.

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"Down in Kansas City, our posts played extremely well they they got the ball," he said. "They shot close to 62 to 65 percent. Six of them."

Muhl said the Eagles struggled with their outside shooting Sunday, but thinks it will get better.

He thinks Woolfolk, the transfer from Eastern Illinois, will help Kirkwood in the backcourt, and he's not concerned about having a player who's only 5-foot-3 on the floor.

"No," he said. "As quick as she is, she can get her own (shots). She's hard to guard."

Muhl also likes 5-foot-5 Taylor Silva at point guard, saying she's done a good job of adjusting to college basketball. The other new players are Katelyn Tuttle, Tyra Polite and Carla Marfe.

Muhl likes his team and is not concerned with their lack of experience.

"No, I'm really not," he said. "If they buy into what we're doing, if they play hard, our system will survive. We can be in ballgames all the time. And they're going to play hard."

After dealing with a "dysfunctional" group last year, Muhl said this year's team is much easier to deal with. "Oh my God," he remarked. "They're nice human beings, they're fun to be around. They truly are fun to be around."

"They'll frustrate you because of their inexperience and their youth, but as far as everyday things ... They're good people."

Muhl anticipates having another good season, but said they might get off to a relatively slow start with a tough early schedule.

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"We're going to take our lumps, but I'm hoping by January or February, we'll start to be a little nasty by then," he said. "We can make a run for the national tournament."

Kirkwood opens the regular season Nov. 1 at the Southeastern Classic in West Burlington.

ROSTER

Ariel Sneed, 5-10, Harvey, Ill., Soph
Danielle Woolfolk, 5-3, Chicago, Ill., Soph
Katelyn Tuttle, 5-8, Pleasant Valley, Frosh
Cuyla Hall, 5-10, Oak Park, Ill., Frosh
Taylor Silva, 5-5, Bellevue, Neb., Frosh
Mikayla Fallon, 5-9, East Moline, Ill., Soph
Carla Marfe, 5-7, Queens, N.Y., Frosh
Tyra Polite, 5-9, Upper Darby, Pa., Frosh
Kirsten Larson, 5-10, Belvidere, Ill., Frosh
Hanna Haynes, 6-2, Van Buren, Frosh
Anna Martensen, 5-10, Belvidere, Ill., Frosh
Peyton Bockholt, 5-11, LaPorte City, Frosh
Zoe Kelso, 6-0, Rock Island, Ill., Frosh
Cassidy Clark, 6-1, Coal Valley, Ill., Frosh
Breannie Robinson, 6-0, Oakland, Calif., Frosh