

Little Woolfolk could be big for Eagles

Written by Mike Condon

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Danielle Woolfolk thought she had made the right college decision.

Following a sterling prep career at Homewood-Flossmoor in Chicago, the cat-quick 5-foot-3 point guard signed on May 1, 2012, to play at Eastern Illinois University.

The Panthers were coached by Brady Sallee, coming off a 22-9 season. Ten days later, Woolfolk's basketball world was turned upside down.

Sallee left Eastern Illinois to become the head coach at Ball State and was replaced by assistant Lee Buchanan.

"That changed everything," Woolfolk said Sunday. "The coach that signed me left and the program wasn't a good fit for me anymore. I just needed a new start."

After playing in just 19 games, averaging 4.3 minutes a contest as a freshman at Eastern Illinois, Woolfolk was looking for a new start. Ariel Snead, a high school teammate of Woolfolk's, transferred to Kirkwood Community College from Illinois-Chicago last January. When Snead heard Woolfolk was looking for a new home, she recommended the Eagles.

"Ariel introduced me to Coach (Kim) Muhl," Woolfolk said. "And it just came about after that."

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Muhl got word that Woolfolk was looking for a new home. The veteran coach, getting ready to start his 25th season at the helm, had her in for a visit and liked what he saw.

“She has a lot of ability,” Muhl said. “She still has a lot of things she has to get situated and get under control. She is extremely quick and has the ability to get to the rim. Once she gets things under control, she has the ability to be the floor leader for us.”

The move to Cedar Rapids has agreed with the Chicago native. Woolfolk is taking pre-nursing classes with the goal of heading back to a four-year school for her final two collegiate seasons.

“I just love it here,” she said. “This has been a great move for me. I’m starting over, and it has been going well so far.”

Woolfolk showed off some of her talents Sunday as the Eagles went 3-0 against a trio of four-year schools in the Kirkwood/Mount Mercy Jamboree at Johnson Hall on the Kirkwood campus in Cedar Rapids. She scored 21 points in the three games, which were played under a continuous clock.

Kirkwood opened with a 39-30 win over Ashford University. The Eagles followed with a strong second-half comeback to overtake Clarke College for a 41-30 win and closed the day with an impressive 40-33 win over a talented Grand View University squad.

Woolfolk is one piece of a major roster overhaul. The Eagles have 14 new players. As a point guard, she not only has to learn what Muhl expects, she also must get the team to work as a unit on the floor.

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“She is trying to figure things out,” Muhl said. “It’s not an easy thing for Danielle, and it isn’t easy for all of them. But they are getting a little better every day, and as she learns more about her teammates, she can become a better point guard.”

To her credit, the soft-spoken Woolfolk knows the Eagles are a work in progress. She has enjoyed her first several weeks at Kirkwood. In that time, she has become keenly aware of the basketball program’s tradition of excellence with six national titles.

And Woolfolk knows that all centers on Muhl and his philosophy.

“I am just basically trying to buy into everything coach says,” she said. “Sometimes, I get going too fast. I have to go up-tempo, but not go crazy.”

Muhl said Woolfolk is her own worst critic. He said she lets mistakes bother her instead of shaking them off. Once Woolfolk learns to channel that energy, it will be another positive step.

“It’s an ongoing process for any point guard,” said Muhl. “I think she’ll be fine. She’s a pretty quiet kid, but she is pretty determined.”

That determination showed on Woolfolk’s face when asked about what she envisions at the end of the season.

“They’ve won a lot of national championships here,” she said. “We’re young and we have so much to learn, but there is no question our goal is to be playing our best basketball in March to win the national championship.”

The Eagles open regular-season play Nov. 1 against Owens Community College at the Southeastern Classic in West Burlington.