

Kirkwood rolls to top of ICCAC race

Written by Jim Ecker

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It's late January and the Kirkwood men's basketball team is sitting atop the ICCAC standings.

If they keep playing defense like they did Wednesday night, the Eagles might stay there.

Kirkwood put the squeeze on Southwestern and stuffed the visitors, 59-30, with a superb defensive effort at Johnson Hall.

"It was pretty good," allowed KCC Coach Bryan Petersen. "They play a slower-down game, they want lower possessions. We knew we would have to pressure them and get them out of their comfort zone a little bit, and I thought our guys did a nice job."

Kirkwood raised its records to 13-5 overall and 5-1 in the conference. Iowa Lakes is in second place at 4-1, with DMACC, NIACC and Iowa Central all 3-2 for the 14-game league campaign.

"We're in position, but there's still a long ways to go," said Petersen.

J.C. Fuller popped in four 3-pointers and led the Eagles with 17 points. Joe Tagarelli grabbed 15 rebounds and scored 10 points for a double-double, Taylor Olson hit four 3-pointers for 12 points and Ajay Lawton collected eight assists.

Southwestern made only 12 of 46 shots for 21.4 percent. The Spartans scored 16 points in the first half and 14 points in the second half.

"I think we definitely played great defense," said Fuller. "We take pride in it at Kirkwood and we definitely did a good job today."

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The Eagles will reach the mid-point of the ICCAC season Saturday afternoon when they visit sixth-ranked Ellsworth (14-4, 2-2) in an important road game. A victory would give Kirkwood a big boost toward the title.

"That's our first goal," said Tagarelli. "(But) Coach has mentioned the standings only one time so far. We're not really worried about that.

"We're just worried about playing hard and doing what we have to do to get the wins."

Nick Lenhard led Southwestern with seven points.

SOUTHWESTERN (30): Mason 1 0-0 2, Koyamainavure 2 1-2 5, Hamdeed 2 0-1 5, Lenhard 2 2-2 7, Theis 2 0-0 5, Tucker 1 0-2 2, Drobnjak 0 0-0 0, Kellogg 2 0-1 4. Totals 12 3-8 30.

KIRKWOOD (59): Lawton 1 0-0 2, Fuller 5 3-3 17, Currie 2 2-4 6, Olson 4 0-0 12, Tagarelli 5 0-2 10, Atwater 0 0-0 0, Gibson 0 0-0 0, Lassen 1 0-0 3, Swank 0 0-0 0, Weeks 1 1-2 3, Bussell 0 0-0 0, Batie-Gaddy 0 0-0 0, Ward 1 2-2 4, Bennett 0 0-0 0, Uwadiae 0 2-2 2. Totals 20 10-15 59.

Halftime - Kirkwood 30, Southwestern 16. 3-point goals - Southwestern 3 (Hamdeed 1, Lenhard 1, Theis 1), Kirkwood 9 (Fuller 4, Olson 4, Lassen 1).