

No.3 Eagles nudged by No.2 NIACC

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 05 February 2014 23:06 -

The Kirkwood Eagles and NIACC Trojans have played two hellacious women's basketball games this season, befitting two of the top teams in the country.

Unfortunately for Kirkwood, they've dropped a pair of heartbreakers.

The second-ranked Trojans withstood a ferocious comeback by the third-ranked Eagles in a junior college thriller at Johnson Hall Wednesday night and claimed a 90-87 victory.

The first time they met in Mason City, NIACC prevailed 111-105 in overtime when the Trojans were ranked No.1 and Kirkwood was No.2.

Only one of these teams can make the Division II national tournament this season because they'll both compete in the same regional, and that's a shame.

"We gave it our hearts and I think that's all that matters," said pint-sized Kirkwood guard Danielle Woolfolk. "I'm proud of my team - win, lose or draw.

"Our mindset now is to keep grinding," she said. "We'll see them again. Eventually we'll win."

The victory lifted NIACC to 21-2 overall and 10-0 in the ICCAC standings. That gives the Trojans a three-game lead over Kirkwood, Iowa Central and Marshalltown with all three clubs sitting at 7-3.

The Eagles (18-5) looked dead and buried when they trailed by 17-points, 68-51, midway through the second half, but Katelyn Tuttle hit a pair of 3-pointers that ignited a 23-5 run and got the home team and the crowd back in the game.

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The Eagles grabbed a 74-73 lead when Tyra Polite nailed a 3-pointer with 3:10 remaining, but the visitors from Mason City refused to fold. The Trojans took an 81-78 lead, but Taylor Silva tied it for Kirkwood at 81-81 with a triple.

It remained 81-81 going into the final minute, but things went haywire for Kirkwood from there. The Eagles made mistakes and missed shots, NIACC made 7-of-8 free throws and grabbed an 88-81 advantage with 20 seconds left.

A 3-pointer by Woolfolk pulled the Eagles within 88-84 with 8.4 seconds left. Kirkwood committed a foul prior to the in-bounds pass and Sierra Ford-Washington made both free throws to give NIACC a 90-84 margin, still with 8.4 showing on the clock.

Polite hit a 3-pointer to pull Kirkwood within 90-87, but there were only 1.5 seconds to go. The game ended when NIACC successfully passed the ball in-bounds.

"The kids played their hearts out, they did a great job," said KCC Coach Kim Muhl. "I'm not going to fault them.

"We're depleted, but still fought extremely hard. Had a chance to win."

Four Kirkwood reserves - Hanna Haynes, Zoe Kelso, Peyton Bockholt and Anna Martensen - missed the game with knee injuries, some more severe than others. That left the Eagles with only nine players, and they all contributed to the near-miss.

"Our kids did not stop until the end," said Muhl.

The difference in the two teams was easy to spot. "Turnovers," said Muhl. "Turnovers hurt."

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Kirkwood lost the ball 31 times in the 40-minute ballgame, sometimes with careless passes and weak ballhandling. NIACC made it tough on the Eagles with quick hands and quick feet, darting into the passing lanes to steal the ball. NIACC committed 17 turnovers.

Kirkwood pounded NIACC on the backboards, 51-38, and their plus-13 in rebounding nearly offset their minus-14 in turnovers.

Woolfolk collected 16 points, nine rebounds and six assists, but committed seven turnovers. Cassidy Clark finished with 16 points and 10 rebounds, but fouled out with 2:32 remaining.

Mikayla Fallon contributed 12 points, six rebounds and five assists, but had seven turnovers. Polite had 11 points, seven rebounds and five assists, but had six turnovers. Tuttle scored 11 points and Ariel Sneed had 10.

Chelsey Jacox poured in 32 points for NIACC. Cortni Rush scored 20 points and Kadejah Young had 11.

NIACC (90): Young 4 0-0 11, Jacox 10 9-12 32, Thompson 6 1-5 13, Ford-Washington 0 2-2 2, Rush 7 3-4 20, Cordle 0 0-0 0, Boyd-Lockett 0 0-0 0, Bell 2 0-0 6, Walker 3 0-0 6, Bianchi 0 0-0 0. Totals 32 15-23 90.

KIRKWOOD (87): Sneed 4 2-2 10, Woolfolk 6 1-2 16, Tuttle 3 2-3 11, Fallon 3 4-7 12, Clark 7 2-2 16, Silva 2 2-3 8, Polite 4 0-0 11, Larson 0 0-1 0, Robinson 1 1-2 3. Totals 30 14-22 87.

Halftime - NIACC 42, Kirkwood 39. 3-point goals - NIACC 11 (Young 3, Jacox 3, Rush 3, Bell 2), Kirkwood 13 (Woolfolk 3, Tuttle 3, Polite 3, Fallon 2, Silva 2). Fouled out - Walker, Fallon, Clark.