

No. 1 Eagles lose Ajak to torn ACL

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl is confident his team can make a good run in the postseason tournament next month, but the top-ranked Eagles will have to do it without Awal Ajak.

Ajak, a 6-foot freshman from Des Moines, confirmed Wednesday night that she suffered a torn ACL in her left knee in a win over Southwestern on Feb. 11 and has been lost for the season. Her surgery is scheduled for Monday.

Kirkwood collected another blowout Wednesday with an 85-37 victory over Southeastern Community College at Johnson Hall, but Muhl knows the Eagles will face stiff competition if they reach the national tournament and compete for the national title.

Kirkwood (27-0, 11-0) has not been pushed by too many teams this season, but Muhl is confident they'll respond to the challenge when the time comes and kick into a higher gear, even without Ajak.

"With this group, I think they can," he said. "They've got a pretty strong mental approach to the game. They know what's at stake.

"They bought in, they guard and they really pass the ball to each other."

Ajak, a key reserve on a deep and talented club, was averaging 8.1 points and 3.7 rebounds when she got hurt. She watched Wednesday's game in street clothes with her crutches nearby.

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Muhl expects her to make a full recovery and play for Kirkwood again next season. "Get it fixed. Come back," he said, disappointed with her loss but optimistic about the future.

All 13 Eagles scored against Southeastern (19-9, 7-4). Tay Tay Wilson popped in four 3-pointers and led the Eagles with 13 points. Deleyah Harris and Simone Goods scored 12 points apiece and Shaneequah Watkins had 10. Rylee Voss grabbed nine rebounds.

Goods has been named the Player of the Week in the ICCAC conference for the fourth time this season.

Kirkwood has three games left in the regular season before the regional playoffs begin March 7. The Eagles need one more victory to clinch the No. 1 seed for the regional.

SOUTHEASTERN (37): Harris 6 1-2 15, Galindo 0 0-0 0, Williams 2 1-3 6, Oakman 2 0-0 4, Franklin 1 6-8 8, Walker 2 0-0 4, Nguenowou 0 0-2 0. Totals 13 8-15 37.

KIRKWOOD (85): Harris 4 3-3 12, T.Wilson 4 1-2 13, Watkins 4 0-1 10, Goods 6 0-0 12, Usher 1 0-0 2, Puok 1 3-4 5, Hedges 1 0-0 2, Axccl 3 0-0 7, Taylor 2 0-1 4, Voss 2 3-4 7, Cotton 2 0-0 6, C.Wilson 1 0-0 3, Achenbach 1 0-0 2. Totals 32 10-15 85.

Halftime - Kirkwood 50, Southeastern 26. 3-point goals - Southeastern 3 (Harris 2, Williams 1), Kirkwood 11 (T.Wilson 4, Watkins 2, Cotton 2, Harris 1, Axccl 1, C.Wilson 1).