

Mullinnix sparks Eagles by NIACC

Written by Jim Ecker

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Haley Mullinnix has a great smile and a wonderful laugh, but not when she's on the basketball court.

Mullinnix is a sphinx-like figure on the floor, rarely showing any emotion no matter how well she's playing.

The smiles and laughter can wait until the game is over, and there was plenty of both Saturday.

Mullinnix poured in a career-high 25 points and canned six 3-pointers to help the 10th-ranked Kirkwood Eagles defeat fifth-ranked NIACC, 77-71, in a conference showdown.

Mullinnix, a sophomore guard from West Branch, was averaging 6.1 points when the day began, but she played the best game of her life when the Eagles needed her most.

"It feels pretty good," she allowed, laughing and flashing that great smile. "Yeah, it definitely feels special. Especially because we did play so well as a team."

Kirkwood leads the ICCAC conference standings with a perfect 6-0 record. Iowa Lakes and Southeastern are tied for second at 4-1, with NIACC in fourth place at 3-1 after its first setback in the league.

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Mullinnix deliberately keeps her emotions under wraps during a game, trying to keep an even keel.

"I try to keep it down," she said. "Obviously when I'm playing well, it comes out a little more, but I try to keep it all intact and just play the game and keep my head on straight."

Mullinnix shot 6-for-7 from 3-point range and was 5-for-6 at the foul line, including four key free throws in the final 53 seconds.



"Haley can shoot the ball," Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl said in admiration. "She got a lot of wide-open looks. And she knocked them all down today."

Muhl used all 11 of his healthy players and was rewarded with important contributions from everyone. Ashley Tull, Kirkwood's starting center, missed the game with a knee injury, but several other players picked up the slack in the middle.

Mackenzie Jenkins pitched in 12 points and Paige Bradford collected a double-double off the bench with 11 points and 11 rebounds. The Eagles pounded NIACC on the backboards, 46-26.

"It was a good team win," said Mullinnix. "We stressed that. It's not just one person."

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Mullinnix is always happy to make an extra pass and help one of her teammates score some points. This time, the extra pass came in her direction and she knew what to do.

"I definitely let the game come to me," she said. "I've got tons of people around me on the team that can score. If I need to step up, I'll step up. But like I say, there are tons of scorers on this team. Everybody has their day."

Mullinnix described a happy scene in the Kirkwood locker room after the Eagles raised their overall mark to 16-5, winning for the 15th time in their last 17 games.

"It was a great environment," she said. "Everybody was excited and happy and just looking forward to the next game. Everybody contributed, and that feels good."

NIACC loves to fire shots from 3-point range and has several deadly shooters on the club. They launched 65 triples in a game three weeks ago and average more than 45 3-pointers per contest.

True to form, the Trojans attempted 42 3-pointers Saturday but made only 14 for 33.3 percent. By contrast, Kirkwood was 15 for 36 from behind the arc for 41.7 percent.

"We scouted them well," said Mullinnix. "We knew what we had to do. We knew we had to keep them off the 3-point line, but we also knew we couldn't give them wide-open looks in the lane."

NIACC sprung to a 24-18 lead after the first quarter, but Kirkwood outscored the visitors 18-2 in the first nine minutes of the second period to grab a 10-point lead at 36-26 with Mullinnix drilling a pair of 3-pointers during that stretch.

NIACC pulled within 36-31 at halftime, but Mullinnix drilled three more triples in the third quarter as the Eagles opened a 19-point bulge at 61-42 late in the stanza. The lead reached 21 points at 66-45 early in the fourth stanza on a 3-pointer by Johanna Myers, but the Trojans raced back

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into contention with a series of 3-pointers of their own.

Kirkwood's lead shrunk all the way to five points at 73-68 with 1:20 remaining, making it anyone's game at that point.

Mullinnix hit two free throws to make it 75-68. NIACC missed a 3-pointer and Mullinnix swished two more charity shots to make it 77-68 with 38.8 seconds left to seal the victory.

"It was a fun win," said Muhl.

Mandy Willems hit five 3-pointers and scored 26 points for NIACC (12-5).

Muhl said Tull will have an MRI to determine the extent of her knee injury.

NIACC (71): Willems 9 3-3 26, Hale 2 0-0 6, Mendez 4 0-0 11, Buford 4 2-2 11, Campbell 3 4-4 12, Longs 0 0-0 0, Loftus 1 2-2 5, Jones 0 0-0 0, Reese 0 0-0 0. Totals 23 11-11 71.

KIRKWOOD (77): Jenkins 5 0-0 12, Gaston 2 0-0 5, Hurst 3 0-1 8, Robinson 0 2-2 2, Mullinnix 7 5-6 25, Bradford 5 1-1 11, Lipsey 2 0-0 6, Kennedy 0 0-0 0, Myers 2 0-0 6, Tomaszewski 1 0-0 2, Mensen 0 0-0 0. Totals 27 8-10 77.

Halftime - Kirkwood 36, NIACC 31. 3-point goals - NIACC 14 (Willems 5, Mendez 3, Hale 2, Campbell 2, Buford 1, Loftus 1), Kirkwood 15 (Mullinnix 6, Hurst 2, Lipsey 2, Myers 2, Jenkins 2, Gaston 1).