

No. 8 Eagles stung by new RedTails

Written by Jim Ecker

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Scott Weston had an unusual recruiting pitch when he began constructing a brand-new women's volleyball program at Hawkeye Community College in Waterloo roughly a year ago.

"You beg," he said Wednesday night.

The begging worked.

The young RedTails invaded Johnson Hall with 13 freshmen and stung the eighth-ranked Kirkwood Eagles in five sets, 25-22, 20-25, 13-25, 25-18, 15-8, in an ICCAC conference match.

Weston was hired to put a new team together from scratch in August of 2017, laying the groundwork for Hawkeye's first season of competition this year. All 14 of his players are from Iowa, including a bunch from the college's fertile base Blackhawk County.

He has talented players from Waterloo, LaPorte City, Tripoli, Jesup, Reinbeck, Evansdale, Dumont, Manly and Sigourney.

"It was pretty easy," Weston maintained, "because a lot of these girls wanted to be on the ground floor of something brand new, their opportunity to put their footprint right in the program. It's worked out to our advantage so far."

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Hawkeye raised its records to 13-3 overall and 4-1 in the conference, good for second place in the league. Kirkwood dropped to 19-4 overall and 3-2 in the ICCAC, tied for fourth place after seeing their nine-match winning streak come to an end.

Weston was the head volleyball coach at Clinton Community College, Iowa Wesleyan, McCook Community College and Bethel College and enjoyed success every step of the way. Then he was contacted by the folks at Hawkeye Community College and was sold on a new opportunity.

"It was a surprise to me when they called and asked about starting a program," he related. "With the talent of volleyball in this area, I really thought we could do something special."

The RedTails did something special Wednesday, bringing a brand-new team to Kirkwood and upsetting the No. 8 club in the country. Hawkeye is ranked No. 15 themselves and also has whipped No. 18 DMACC this season.



Kirkwood Coach Jill Williams was not pleased with the way her team played in an important ICCAC match. "And it's not because it's Hawkeye and it's their first year," she said. "I really respect what Coach Weston has done."

Williams looked at Weston's roster and was impressed with all the talent he corralled in a short period of time. "I knew right out of the gate, they're going to be good," she remarked.

Williams was not pleased with the way her club performed at critical junctures, especially after taking a 2-1 lead with a commanding victory in the third set. Then the jitters set in, she thought.

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"When we play relaxed and we play high-caliber competition on weekends (in tournaments) we're able to fight through adversity," she said. "But when it becomes a conference match, we get tight.

"We made so many mistakes," she said. "I thought we had them down. Then we came and made errors and it was like, 'Here, let's put some wind back in your sails.'"

Kirkwood fell behind, 20-12, in the fourth set and lost that game 25-18, tying the match at 2-2. The Eagles began the fifth set with two straight errors and trailed, 4-0, setting a bad tone. They rallied within 9-8, but Hawkeye strung together six straight points to win 15-8.

Weston was naturally proud of his team's performance. There are 13 freshmen and only one sophomore on the club.

"We had to stay invested, on every ball and every point," he said. "And we really had to dig and dig and dig to force that to a fifth set.

"I just can't say enough about our group and the way they played tonight on the road. That's a big one for this program.

"Even though we're first-year on the court, we expect to win," he continued. "That's our expectation, that's our goal every night, regardless of whether we're home or on the road. And the girls have the belief that they can win."

Alexa Ingram led Kirkwood with 22 kills. Lauren Keane had 33 assists. Maddie Lavenz made 31 digs.