

Kirkwood eyes spot in national volleyball tourney

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood Community College volleyball team has compiled a 36-8 record this season despite a demanding schedule.

One more victory will send the fourth-ranked Eagles to the national tournament.

Kirkwood will face 10th-ranked DMACC in the regional finals at 2 p.m. Saturday in Iowa Falls, with the winner advancing to the national meet Nov. 15-17 in Toledo, Ohio.

Kirkwood Coach Jill Williams thinks the tough schedule has gotten her club ready for postseason tournaments. The Eagles swept NIACC in the regional semifinals Tuesday night and will play their most important match of the season Saturday.

"It's about preparing for this week," she said Wednesday. "We've taken a few lumps, but I think along the way we also learned.

"And so I think it's done what it needs to do to prepare us to go into a championship match and have every opportunity to pull off a win and go to the national tournament."

Kirkwood swept DMACC, 3-0, during the regular season. Williams said the Eagles are confident going into the rematch, but wary.

"DMACC is very solid," she said. "They're loaded with athletes."

Alexus Litts, a 5-foot-10 sophomore from Cedar Rapids Kennedy, ranks 11th in the nation in assists at the NJCAA Division II level and has been a key player for Kirkwood this season.

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Brittany Ambler leads the Eagles in kills, Ashley Gonzalez is first in hitting efficiency, Cali Beyer paces the team in digs, Erin Walker is No. 1 in aces and Alicen Wintermote leads the team in total blocks.

The Eagles also are getting important contributions from reserves.

"We find balance across the board," Williams said. "That's been key to our success."

Wintermote, a 6-foot freshman from Jewell, Iowa, is the tallest player on the team. Two women stand 5-foot-11 and five others are 5-foot-10. There are 15 players on the roster, with 13 from Iowa and two from Illinois.

It's not a particularly tall team, but Williams said the Eagles play an up-tempo style with a lot of energy.

"It's a feisty group. They don't let the ball hit the floor," she said.

"We're really playing well defensively, and I think that ignites the offense. We're playing some pretty good volleyball right now."

KIRKWOOD ROSTER

SOPHOMORES

Brittany Ambler, 5-9, Conrad; Stephanie Kittleson, 5-4, St. Ansgar; Alexis Litts, 5-10, Cedar Rapids; Courtney Busch, 5-11, Scales Mound, Ill.; Ashley Gonzalez, 5-11, Camanche; Ashtyn Dove, 5-10, Dike.

FRESHMEN

Chelsea Gryp, 5-9, Victor; Jalyn Doeden, 5-10, Cleghorn; Alicen Wintermote, 6-0, Jewell; Maddie Kennedy, 5-8, Cedar Rapids; Alyssa Scott, 5-10, Davenport; Amber Timmins, 5-10, LeMars; Taylor Rathbone, 5-9, Readlyn; Cali Beyer, 5-6, Tripoli; Erin Walker, 5-8, Silvis, Ill.