

Kirkwood men ousted by Ellsworth, 70-65

Written by Jim Ecker
Friday, 08 March 2013 23:40 -

The Kirkwood men's basketball team ran out of patches and bandaids Friday night.

The Eagles darn near ran out of players, too.

It was that kind of a season for Kirkwood, filled with injuries and player defections, but the Eagles went down fighting as best they could.

Kirkwood lost to Ellsworth, 70-65, in the regional semifinals Friday night at Johnson Hall to finish a topsy-turvy season with a 19-13 record.

The Eagles began the game with only nine players in uniform. Three Eagles fouled out, leaving only six eligible players at the end of the game, and one of them (Devan Douglas) has played with a torn meniscus in his left knee for much of the season.

"We're pretty banged up now," said freshman Taylor Olson, who left the gym with a bag of ice on his sore right hand.

Olson tried his best to rescue the Eagles by hitting five 3-pointers in the second half, including some clutch shots to keep it close, but Ellsworth grabbed too many offensive rebounds (14), hit too many big 3-pointers and rarely missed at the foul line when it counted.

Ellsworth sophomore Malcolm Canada hit 11 straight free throws in the final 73 seconds to keep Kirkwood at bay. The Eagles had to foul in an effort to catch up, but Canada swished one free throw after another before finally missing when it was too late to really matter.

"We couldn't keep it out of his hands," said Kirkwood Coach Doug Wagemester. "A couple of those times we put two kids on him, and we could not keep it out of his hands. He's so strong with it."

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Ellsworth (18-12) will face Iowa Lakes (25-6) in the regional finals on Sunday afternoon at Estherville. The winner will advance to the national tournament.

Kirkwood began the season with 13 players on the active roster. Wagemester dismissed three players from the squad along the way and then Kasey Semler tore the ACL in his left knee last Saturday and was shelved for the year.

The Eagles needed a few more possessions to go their way Friday night, but Ellsworth was a little too deep and a little too talented. That was the theme for much of the season as the Eagles tried to forge ahead despite the odds.

"Our guys are resilient. We didn't back down," said Olson, a Cedar Rapids Jefferson grad. "We could have just folded and had a bad season, but we fought back."

Mike Lang gave Kirkwood a 41-40 lead with his only basket at the 10-minute mark of the second half, but the game began to slip away from there.

Ellsworth made three 3-pointers in a flurry, including a pair by Abrie Anderson, and the Panthers grabbed a 50-43 advantage with a 10-2 run. Kirkwood kept trying, but never caught up.

Olson pulled the Eagles within 53-48, 62-57 and 69-65 with clutch 3-pointers, but the Eagles ran out of time and Canada kept making his free throws.

The final buzzer sounded and Kirkwood's season was over.

"I'm very proud of them," said Wagemester. "We've been through a bunch with this group. And they kept it together."

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Olson led the Eagles with 18 points with six 3-pointers. Kevin Hunter scored 13 points and J.C. Fuller netted 11.

Canada paced Ellsworth with 24 points, seven assists, five rebounds and two steals.

"We had to give every ounce out there, because Kirkwood never gave up," said Ellsworth Coach Troy Muilenburg. "They kept making 3's until the final horn. It was a good thing we did not relax."

Muilenburg, who played basketball at the University of Northern Iowa, will be trying to take Ellsworth to the national tournament for the first time in his 14 years as head coach.

ELLSWORTH (70): Canada 5 14-19 24, Moore 1 0-0 3, Fulks 4 0-0 11, Brown 3 0-0 8, Lamb 1 3-4 5, Weathers 0 0-0 0, Anderson 2 1-4 7, Dep 0 0-0 0, Collier 3 0-0 8, Ibarra 0 0-0 0, Haley 1 2-4 4. Totals 20 10-27 70.

KIRKWOOD (65): Hunter 4 5-8 13, Heffernan 1 3-4 5, Fuller 2 5-6 11, Olson 6 0-0 18, Douglas 2 4-4 8, Manego 3 0-0 8, Witt 0 0-0 0, Currie 0 0-0 0, Lang 1 0-0 2. Totals 19 17-22 65.

Halftime - Kirkwood 22, Ellsworth 21. 3-point goals - Ellsworth 10 (Fulks 3, Brown 2, Anderson 2, Collier 2, Moore 1), Kirkwood 10 (Olson 6, Fuller 2, Manego 2). Fouled out - Olson, Manego, Witt.