

No.8 KCC volleyball team ready to go

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 22 August 2013 21:22 -

The Kirkwood Community College volleyball team has been ranked No.8 in the first poll of NJCAA Division II teams for the 2013 campaign.

As far as Coach Jill Williams is concerned, the No.8 ranking is perfect. It's not too high and not too low. It shows respect for the program, yet tells the Eagles they have work to do to reach the upper echelon.

In other words, it's perfect.

Kirkwood opens the season Friday and Saturday with four matches at the Southeastern Volleyball Jamboree in West Burlington against good competition.

Kirkwood placed ninth at the national tournament last year and finished with a 40-9 record. Williams is anxious to see her new team in action as she works on the rotation and starting lineup.

"I bet this weekend helps me sort some of that out," she said Wednesday. "That's the beauty of four matches. You get that chance."

The Eagles will face Mineral Area College and Highland Community College on Friday, then will meet Riverland Community College and Kansas City Community College on Saturday.

The home opener is scheduled for Wednesday, Aug. 28 against Ellsworth Community College at Johnson Hall.

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Kirkwood needs to replace setter Lexi Litts, a first team All-American from Kennedy High School, and hitter Ashley Gonzalez, a second team All-American, along with several other top players. There are six returning sophomores on the squad and three freshmen.

Williams said the Eagles are probably not as quick as last year's team in terms of foot-speed, but said the team is still very athletic and a little taller.

"We still possess a scrappy, aggressive play. We get after it," she said. "Whether it looks pretty or not so pretty, they get after it and play it to the end.

"I'm seeing that this group is still pretty dynamic and pretty crafty in getting to balls. It will be interesting."

Sophomores Alicen Wintermote (middle blocker) and Erin Walker (outside hitter) received All-Region honors last season and are back to lead the team. Sophomore Cali Beyer (libero) also has considerable experience for the Eagles.

"Those three are definitely going to be our leaders," said Williams.

The other returning sophomores are Chelsea Gryp, Amber Timmins and Taylor Rathbone, all of whom figure prominently in the mix.

The eight freshmen include three Metro-area graduates with Bre Boote of Kennedy, Audrey Richards of Xavier and Becca Bell of Prairie.

Heather Poula, a 5-foot-11 freshman from West Branch, has looked good in preseason drills, according to Williams.

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"I think she's going to be a gamer for us," the coach said. "She wants to win whatever she does. She's very unassuming. She does it in a quiet way, but she's truly a competitor."

Williams is entering her ninth year at Kirkwood. The Eagles have reached the regional finals eight times and have made two trips to the national tournament during her tenure.

Williams thinks the Eagles have the talent to compete for conference, regional and national honors again this season.

"That's definitely every team's hopes," she said. "Our expectations are high, and yet we know we have work ahead of us."

NJCAA DII RANKINGS

1. Cowley County, 2. Grand Rapids, 3. Parkland, 4. Owens, 5. Central-Columbus, 6. Johnson County, 7. Moraine Valley, 8. Kirkwood, 9. Scottsdale, 10. Kishwaukee, 11. DMACC, 12. Lincoln Land, 13. Sinclair, 14. Kansas City, 15. Mott, 16. Illinois Central, 17. Hagerstown, 18. Monroe, 19. Catawba Valley, 20. MCC-Longview.

KIRKWOOD ROSTER

Sophomores (6)

Chelsea Gryp, 5-9, Victor
Alicen Wintermote, 6-0, Jewell
Amber Timmins, 5-10, LeMars
Taylor Rathbone, 5-9, Radlyn
Cali Beyer, 5-6, Tripoli
Erin Walker, 5-8, Silvis, Ill.

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Freshmen (8)

Abbey Roete, 5-4, Oelwein

Bre Boote, 5-10, Cedar Rapids

Audrey Richards, 5-9, Cedar Rapids

Becca Bell, 6-2, Ely

Payton Hilton, 5-11, LaPorte City

Megan Paustian, 6-0, Bettendorf

Jasmine Jackson, 5-11, Des Moines

Heather Poula, 5-11, West Branch