

Petersen, Muhl ready with KCC cagers

Written by Jim Ecker

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Bryan Petersen has never been a head coach for a college basketball game in his life, yet his team is ranked 16th in the country heading into the 2013-14 campaign.

Kim Muhl has won 709 games and six national titles, yet his club is nowhere to be found in the national rankings on the eve of the new season.

Such is life at Kirkwood Community College as the Eagles begin their seasons on Friday.

Petersen, the interim head coach at Kirkwood while Doug Wagemester mulls whether he wants to take the reins again next season, will make his debut Friday when the Eagles face the College of Faith at the State Fair Classic in Sedalia, Mo.

Petersen was an All-American for Kirkwood during his playing days from 2005 to 2007. A mere six years later, he's coaching the team.

"It's kind of a learning experience, to be honest, every day," he said Wednesday. "You always have to expect the unexpected."

Petersen has had good teachers at the collegiate level. He played for Wagemester at Kirkwood and served as one of his assistant coaches last year, and he had good grooming at Iowa State - playing for Greg McDermott, then working for McDermott and Fred Hoiberg as a graduate assistant.

Petersen has 11 brand-new players on the club, but he inherited three experienced sophomores with Taylor Olson, J.C. Fuller and Jalen Currie and has put them in the starting lineup. Joe Tagarelli, a rugged 6-foot-5 transfer from Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and 6-foot guard

A.J. Lawton from Indiana could join them for the opening tip.

Lawton could help the Eagles play at a faster pace this season. "He adds something a little bit different to the table that we didn't have last year with a really quick playmaking point guard," said Petersen.

Olson, from Cedar Rapids Jefferson, is the incumbent point guard, giving Kirkwood the luxury of having two point guards on the floor at the same time. Olson is also an accomplished 3-point shooter.

Petersen credits the three sophomores with helping the transition from one head coach to another.

"That's been a real positive for me. It's been fun," he said. "It's definitely a different deal, that's for sure, but I've really enjoyed it."

Petersen said Matt Lassen of Linn-Mar, Myzeah Batie-Gaddy of Iowa City West, Joseph Weeks of Solon and Austin Swank of Iowa City West are all battling for playing time as freshmen, along with several other newcomers.

"All four local guys are definitely in the mix," said Petersen. "I think we're expecting some pretty good things out of at least a couple of them this year."

He likes the depth on the club and would like to use nine or 10 players in the rotation. At this point, about a dozen players are fighting for playing time and there are good battles at several positions.

"We've got some options," said Petersen. "It's kind of a good problem to have."

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Petersen thinks the Eagles could be a good shooting team. He said they need to improve on defense.

Henry Uwadiae, a 6-foot-11 center from Nigeria, returned to practice this week but will not play in the State Fair Classic after missing several weeks with mononucleosis and walking pneumonia.

The Kirkwood men will play the Missouri Valley junior varsity team on Saturday.

The Kirkwood women's basketball team will open its season at the Southeastern Classic in West Burlington Friday and Saturday. The Eagles will face ninth-ranked Owens (Ohio) in the opening round Friday and meet Lewis & Clark (Ill.) on Saturday.

Muhl, beginning his 25th year, plans to start Danielle Woolfolk, Mikayla Fallon, Katelyn Tuttle, Cassidy Clark and Ariel Sneed. Woolfolk, a 5-3 point guard, is a transfer from Eastern Illinois. Sneed, a 5-10 forward, began her college career at Illinois-Chicago.

Fallon played for Kirkwood last year and is the only letterwinner on the team. Woolfolk (Chicago) and Clark (Coal Valley, Ill.) are freshmen.

"The ballclub is going to be balanced, because right now we have no real scoring person every game," said Muhl. "I hope our strengths will be balance and depth. I hope it will be the two things that will influence our chances of winning."

Muhl plans to use 10 or 11 players this weekend. Peyton Bockholt, who suffered a serious knee injury last year and missed her senior campaign at Union High School, sustained a slightly torn meniscus in the same knee in a scrimmage last week and is rehabbing. She will not play in the Southeastern Classic.