

Kirkwood volleyball has young team

Written by Jim Ecker

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Kirkwood volleyball coach Jill Williams offered a lot of hands-on instruction to her players during Monday's scrimmage against Clarke University at Johnson Hall.

With 12 freshmen on the club and only three sophomores, the new Eagles have a lot to learn. Four freshmen from last year's team did not return this year for various reasons.

"There's a lot of teaching going on," said Williams. "And I find as a teacher, I've had to learn a lot of different ways to say things.

"Because if they're not picking up on it the first time or the second time, I have to come back and try to find something that they're able to understand and get them to see our system. And you have to see it before you can do it.

"I think that's one of the most difficult things for young kids when they come into any program," she said.

Sometimes the young Eagles understand right away, but sometimes there are blank stares. "And for the last 15 days there have been a lot of blank stares," said Williams, only half-kidding.

Kirkwood finished 33-9 last year and reached the championship round of the regional finals before falling short in a tight match. The Eagles will be young this year, but they'll have two all-stars in the lineup with sophomores Halle Lueck from Cedar Rapids Prairie and Erin Wenzel from Clinton.

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Lueck and Wenzel were both named all-conference and all-region last year as freshmen. Lueck was named the ICCAC Freshman of the Year for her work as a premier setter.

"She's a great leader," Williams said. "The girls really follow her lead and buy into what she's saying."

Natalie Demmel of Marengo, the third sophomore on the team, missed much of the 2014 season with a broken thumb.

Kirkwood added three Metro products to the team with Madsy Richards of Xavier, Caiti Peterson of Washington and Keke Pledge from Jefferson. Audrey Richards, Madsy's older sister, played at Kirkwood the last two years.

"I really like Madsy's energy, her open-mindedness, her willingness to do things a new way," said Williams.

Williams, starting her 11th year at Kirkwood, likes having talented local kids on the team.

"Why not get kids from the corridor, whether it's here or Iowa City," she said. "There is some great volleyball right here. Being able to pick up a few of those kids is nice."

The Eagles added a half-dozen new players who are 6-feet, 5-11 or 5-10. "There's good size out there," said Williams. "We should be stronger at the net."

Kirkwood opens the season Friday at the Johnson County tournament. The Eagles could be a little short-handed when the season begins with Pledge, Summer Kopet and Nicole Christensen nursing injuries.

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ROSTER

Erin Wenzel, 6-1, Soph, Clinton
Haley Schulte, 6-0, Frosh, Benton Community
Summer Kopet, 5-3, Frosh, West Liberty
Nicole Christensen, 5-8, Frosh, Carlisle
Erica Armstrong, 6-0, Frosh, Guttenburg
Madsy Richards, 5-8, Frosh, Xavier
Brittini Wright, 5-11, Frosh, Cedar Falls
Alex Miner, 6-0, Frosh, Gilbert
Natalie Demmel, 5-10, Soph, Marengo
Morgan Grimm, 5-11, Frosh, Osage
Jenna Laxton, 5-3, Frosh, Moline, Ill.
Catie Collins, 5-8, Frosh, Tama
Caiti Peterson, 5-8, Frosh, Washington
Halle Lueck, 5-9, Soph, Prairie
Keke Pledge, 5-3, Frosh, Jefferson