

Eagles whip Tritons for ICCAC lead

Written by Jim Ecker

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The Kirkwood Eagles have taken a few lumps from some of the top volleyball teams in the country this year, but the Eagles keep battling and they keep swinging.

It paid off Wednesday night.

The 16th-ranked Eagles swept 17th-ranked Iowa Central, 28-26, 25-17, 25-19, in a showdown for the Iowa Community College Athletic Conference lead Wednesday night with typical grit and determination.

Kirkwood fell behind by six points in the first set and trailed by three points in the next two sets as well, but the Eagles stormed back each time for the big victory over the Tritons.

"It was just finding our rhythm and getting after it," said freshman Ady Wintermote, who led Kirkwood with 15 kills. "Once we're in rhythm, we can be a really good team. We can put anyone to the test."

The Eagles have played 12 ranked teams this season and have a 4-8 mark in those matches, but the freshman-packed lineup keeps improving and now has the inside track for the conference title.

"Each game is a growing opportunity," said Wintermote, who starred at South Hamilton High School. "When we go up against ranked teams it's not, 'Oh, no.' It's a time to make a name for ourselves."

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"We're a young team and we have a lot of building to do," she said. "It's good to see good competition so it can help us learn and get better and be at that level."

Kirkwood has a 6-0 record in the ICCAC with two matches left in the conference race. Iowa Central (5-1) and DMACC (5-1) both have one loss, but the Eagles have beaten both of those teams and would have the tiebreaker if the race ends in a tie.



If Kirkwood wins the conference title, they'll earn the No. 1 seed for the regional tournament.

"Winning that top seed is our first goal," said Coach Jill Williams. "Winning the conference championship so that No. 1 seed can set us up for hopefully a nice bracket."

The Eagles visit Ellsworth Oct. 18 and finish the conference race by hosting Northeast (Neb.) Oct. 25. A victory in either match would clinch the league title.

"It's really exciting," said Wintermote. "That was one of our main goals. We wanted to come out on top in conference. Each game is a battle and we're ready to take it."

Kirkwood trailed 15-9 in the first set, but battled back and took its first lead at 21-20 before prevailing in overtime, 28-26.

The Eagles trailed 8-5 in the second set, but got on track and stormed into an 18-11 lead en

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route to a 25-17 victory.

The Eagles fell behind by three points again in the third set at 5-2, but they went on a 10-2 streak to take control on their way to a 25-20 verdict and the match.

"Our kids believed in what they do," said Williams. "It just took us awhile to get us going and get our game on track."

Wintermote helped clinch the victory with six kills in the final set.

"She really feeds off the team's energy," said Williams. "When we got going and we got back, you started to see her arm loosen up and start to swing away."

Margaret Micka collected 10 kills in the match, including the final slam to finish the victory. McKenzie Petersen, Lauren Keane and Abbi Tunis had five kills.

Keane rolled up 31 assists in three games. Brianna Eberhardt had 16 digs, Micka 15 and Keane 11. Petersen and Nyadoar Gatwech had four blocks.

The victory lifted Kirkwood to 18-14 overall.