

Young Eagles begin year at No. 14 in nation

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 03 November 2017 04:43 - Last Updated Friday, 03 November 2017 04:47



If you'd like to figure out who's playing for the Kirkwood men's basketball team this season, make sure you pick up a roster when you get to Johnson Hall for a game.

There are a lot of new names and faces to memorize.

There are 12 new players on the 15-man roster this season. That makes only three returning players for Coach Bryan Petersen, and sophomore Ethan Meeker will be sidelined another month with a broken wrist after being a key player for Kirkwood last year.

Chris King and Carlo Marble are the only two veterans who will take the court Friday night when the 14th-ranked Eagles open the season against Mesa Community College at the Indian Hills Classic in Ottumwa.

Petersen said the Eagles have looked just "OK" in preseason drills.

"The group has grown in some areas, but it's been a very up-and-down fall when it comes to consistency, but that's usual when it comes to freshmen," he remarked.

"We're a little behind. I think it was expected a little bit, having so many new guys."

Kirkwood lost a whole bunch of good players from last year's club that finished 25-7 and reached the regional finals. Petersen has to find replacements for Byron Harp, Miles Wentzien,

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Da'Rion King, Kaliph Fagan, Shakur Triplett, Elijah Henry and Al'Tavius Jackson.

It starts with Chris King, who averaged 12.7 points and 3.4 assists while sharing point-guard duties last year with Harp.

"He's got to mature and he's got to be a point guard this year. He's got to lead our guys," said Petersen, who played the position himself at Kirkwood and Iowa State.

"He needs to be a big factor on our team. He's had a pretty solid fall so far. It's good to have him back."

Carlo Marble, whose late father Roy Marble starred for the Iowa Hawkeyes, averaged 5.7 points as a reserve last season. He'll be asked to carry a bigger load this year.

Meeker, who averaged 6.6 points last season, was headed for the starting lineup until he broke a bone in his right wrist this fall. "That's been a huge blow for us," said Petersen.

King and Marble were in the starting lineup when Kirkwood played an exhibition game last week. They were joined by LJ Stansbury, a 6-foot-4 guard from Delaware; Doug Wilson, a 6-7 forward from Des Moines Hoover; and Tajen Ross, a 6-3 guard who played at ADM in Adel.

The nine other new players on the squad are Bailey Kale (La Crosse, Wis.), Traivon Washington (Milwaukee), Jay Small (Hinton), Semaj Ray (Kansas City, Mo.), Jalen Taylor (Kansas City, Kan.), Taejuan Johnson (Mequon, Wis.), Justin Storey (Raleigh, N.C.), Niko Gosnell (Lone Tree) and Kyle Arrington (Council Bluffs Lewis Central).

Storey, a 6-5 forward, averaged 2.6 points as a freshman at Mineral Area Community College in Missouri last season.

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Petersen likes the chemistry of this year's group, especially with so many new players. "I think that's probably our strongest thing right now," he said. "It seems like they get along."

Petersen is concerned about his team's rebounding, shooting and overall defense, which pretty much covers the gamut.

"Kind of all of the above right now," he said about his worries. "But right now, I would say defensive toughness and an efficient offense. Those are our two biggest concerns.

"Toughness and competitiveness: I really think that would cover up some of the other issues that we're having right now."

Petersen led Kirkwood to the NJCAA Division II national title two years ago and said winning the national championship is always the goal heading into a new season.

"Right now we're nowhere close to being ready to compete at a national level. It's just a fact," he said.

"Do I think we can get there? Yes, especially when we get Ethan back. Right now we just have to focus on getting better.

"I know that's 'Coach Talk,' but that's really true with this group. We just have to focus on getting better each day."

Kirkwood will face 17th-ranked Johnson County in the second round of the Ottumwa Classic Saturday.

ROSTER

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LJ Stansbury, 6-4, Frosh, New Castle, Del.
Bailey Kale, 6-1, Frosh, La Crosse, Wis.
Traivon Washington, 6-3, Frosh, Milwaukee
Carlo Marble, 6-5, Soph, Des Moines
Jay Small, 6-1, Frosh, Hinton
Semaj Ray, 6-2, Frosh, Kansas City, Mo.
Ethan Meeker, 6-1, Soph, Galesburg, Ill.
Tajen Ross, 6-3, Frosh, ADM
Chris King, 6-0, Soph, Des Moines
Jalen Taylor, 6-5, Frosh, Kansas City, Kan.
Taejuan Johnson, 6-5, Frosh, Mequon, Wis.
Justin Storey, 6-5, Soph, Raleigh, N.C.
Doug Wilson, 6-7, Frosh, Des Moines
Niko Gosnell, 6-7, Frosh, Lone Tree
Kyle Arrington, 6-10, Frosh, Council Bluffs