

## Eagles facing DMACC for regional title

Written by Jim Ecker  
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CLINTON - The Kirkwood baseball team's quest for the regional title was delayed Sunday, but not by Mother Nature.

The 16th-ranked Eagles can blame (or thank) the DMACC Bears, who eliminated the No. 2 seed and the No. 1 seed from the tournament on Sunday and earned an extra day of rest before facing Kirkwood for the title.

College baseball teams are not allowed to play three games in one day, so the championship round between Kirkwood and DMACC was pushed to Monday at Ashford University Park in Clinton.

Kirkwood has a 3-0 record in the double-elimination tournament and needs one victory to claim the regional title. DMACC has a 4-1 record and needs two victories over the Eagles to wear the crown.

The first championship game Monday is scheduled for 11 a.m. A second championship game, if necessary, would follow.

Kirkwood topped DMACC, 9-1, in the first round of the tournament on Thursday, but since then the Bears have won four straight games to keep themselves alive.

The Bears beat NIACC, the No. 2 seed, in their first game on Sunday, then whipped Southeastern, the No. 1 seed, in their second contest to win the losers bracket.

If Southeastern had won the losers bracket in its only game Sunday, the Blackhawks would have faced Kirkwood in the first championship game on Sunday with another game, if necessary, on Monday. That possibility ended when DMACC ousted Southeastern, 5-3.

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So now it's Kirkwood, the No. 3 seed, against DMACC, the No. 6 seed, for the regional title.

The Eagles took batting practice Sunday at Ashford University Field and were dressed for a ballgame, but they went back to their hotel for another night in Clinton after DMACC stayed alive.

"I think DMACC is playing unbelievable baseball right now," said Kirkwood Coach Todd Rima. "They're swinging it as well as anybody at the tournament.

"We talked before we left the hotel to come watch, the way they're playing right now they could pull this off. And I give credit to Coach (David) Pearson for rallying those kids. They've won four in a row to put themselves in this position.

"The way they're playing right now, we better be ready to go, because they're going to give great effort."

DMACC will be playing its sixth game in the tournament on Monday and Kirkwood will be playing its fourth, so the Eagles will have a fresher pitching staff for the finals. The Bears have used eight pitchers in the tournament for a total of 39-plus innings, while the Eagles have used only five pitchers for 25 innings.

Rima originally tabbed Cal Stalzer, the No. 5 man in his rotation, as the starting pitcher if the Eagles had played on Sunday, but the extra day of rest might alter those plans.

Peyton Long, who pitched seven strong innings against DMACC on Thursday, might be ready to go again. Cameron Leff, who threw five innings on Friday, and Adam Ketelsen, who threw three innings in relief on Friday, also could be available.

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Rima planned to huddle with his coaches Sunday evening to discuss their options.

"We're going to go back and meet about it and find out exactly what to do," he remarked. "It does give some guys an extra day rest."

The regional champion will host a two-team district tournament next weekend against Southeast Community College of Lincoln, Neb., with the district champion advancing to the NJCAA Division II World Series.