

No. 1 Eagles soar into national title game

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 23 March 2019 07:12 - Last Updated Saturday, 23 March 2019 07:15



DANVILLE, Ill. - The Kirkwood Eagles played like national champions in the first half against Erie Community College Friday night in the semifinals of the NJCAA Division II tournament.

Now the Eagles (30-4) will try to finish the job when they face Johnson County Community College of Kansas (31-4) for the national title Saturday night at 7:30.

The Eagles took most of the suspense out of their semifinal date with Erie with a sensational first half when they made 18 of 23 shots for an incredible 78.3 percent, paving the way for an 84-70 victory that lifted Kirkwood into the national finals.

All-American Doug Wilson and guard Allante Pickens were unstoppable in the stanza as Kirkwood build an early 38-9 lead on its way to a 50-29 cushion at halftime.

The Eagles did nothing wrong in the first 12 minutes of the game.

"It was pretty incredible," said Kirkwood Coach Bryan Petersen. "And I thought our defense was pretty locked in as well.

"The second half we weren't quite as good and didn't concentrate as much, but the first 12 minutes were pretty impressive by our group of guys. They really got us off to a great start."

Erie got within 15 points on two occasions in the second half and drew within 14 points with a 3-pointer in the final seconds, but got no closer in the one-sided affair.

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Wilson was "Mr. Inside" with 15 points in the first half and Pickens was "Mr. Outside" with five straight 3-pointers in the opening 20 minutes of the semifinals.

"Allante is one of the best shooters in the country and he was hot," said Petersen. "And obviously Doug Wilson came out and did what he's done all year for us. Those two guys got us off to a great start.

"When we take shots that we want, we're pretty good."

Wilson finished with 27 points, shooting a perfect 9-for-9 from the floor and going 9-for-10 at the foul line. Pickens finished with 17 points and Luke Appel contributed 10 points.

Wilson, a strong candidate for National Player of the Year, took control of the game from the outset. He scored 11 points in the first six minutes with sleek moves around the basket.

The Eagles shot a sizzling 65.9 percent from the field Friday, canning 29 of 44 shots overall after the amazing first half.

Kyle Harris scored 18 points for Erie (27-5).

ERIE (70): Fofana 3 2-2 10, Harris 6 3-4 18, Motley 3 0-0 7, Diakite 2 0-0 4, McDonald 3 3-4 9, Alston 0 0-0 0, Hazelwood 1 0-0 2, Golden 0 0-0 0, Anisca 3 3-5 10, Whitehead 2 0-0 4, Kemp 1 4-4 6. TOTALS 24 15-19 70.

KIRKWOOD (84): Sims 1 2-2 4, Pickens 5 2-2 17, Thedford 3 3-4 9, Kasperbauer 0 1-2 1, Sartorius 3 0-0 6, Clark 0 0-0 0, Stephenson 2 0-0 5, Biernacki 0 0-0 0, Wilson 9 9-10 27, Gosnell 2 0-0 4, Arrington 0 1-2 1, Appel 4 2-5 10. Totals 29 20-27 84.

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Halftime - Kirkwood 50, Erie 29. 3-point goals - Erie 7 (Harris 3, Fofana 2, Motley 1, Anisca 1), Kirkwood 6 (Pickens 5, Stephenson 1).