

Healthy Rath sparks No.1 Eagles

Written by Jim Ecker

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Addison Rath was a little tired, but very happy.

She had just played five straight minutes at full speed for the Kirkwood Eagles Friday night before taking a well-deserved breather, having scored eight quick points to help spark the top-ranked Eagles after they got off to a slow start.

Kirkwood proceeded to whip McHenry County, 69-39, in the opening round of the Kirkwood Classic at Johnson Hall.

Rath had major knee surgery last December after playing only two games for Kirkwood and faced a grueling road to recovery.

"It's probably the most physically and mentally challenging thing I've ever had to go through," she remarked.

The Eagles were clinging to 15-12 lead when Rath went to work. She scored three straight baskets in three minutes to make it 21-12, then made a layup two minutes later before taking a rest, having gone 4-for-4 in a little more than five minutes.

"That definitely gave me a little boost of energy when everything started to click," she said.

Rath, a versatile 5-foot-9 wing, finished with nine points, three rebounds and one steal in 12 minutes of action in her best performance of the year.

It's been only 11 months since her surgery, which involved the total reconstruction of the torn ACL in her right knee and a donor graft to repair the torn MCL in the same knee.

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Rath is happy with the progress she's made.

"I'm way farther than what I expected," she said. "I didn't think I'd be able to play this hard this early, and I'm still only about 11 months out. Yeah, I'm surprised by how far I've come."

Rath is still working on her rehab and conditioning, but is excited to be playing basketball again after a stellar high school career at Mid-Prairie of Wellman. She averaged 17.2 points, 8.1 rebounds, 3.8 steals and 2.4 assists as a senior.

Kirkwood Coach Kim Muhl likes her versatility and strength. "And she's smart," he said. "Her IQ is good."

Muhl thought Rath "got a little gassed" during the game, but otherwise looked good.

"She did a nice job for us," he said. "She was energized and played hard and ran our stuff. She's worked hard to get back."

Rath wears a heavy brace on her right knee, but has gotten used to it.

"When I first did it, it was uncomfortable," she said. "I limped a little bit. Now it doesn't bother me all."

The brace looks like something an offensive lineman would wear. "I know," she said. "It's a weapon."

Paige Bradford led Kirkwood (5-0) Friday night with 15 points and 16 rebounds. Kemara Watson

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tossed in 14 points. Ju Gaston had 10 points and four assists.

The Eagles shot 55.8 percent from the floor after a slow start and pounded McHenry on the backboards, 44-23. Cori Hamill scored 14 points for the Scots (4-1).

Kirkwood plays ninth-ranked Illinois Central Saturday at 3 p.m.

MCHENRY (39): Cori Hamill 5-13 1-2 14, Alyssa Iverson 2-13 1-2 5, Raquel Mills 4-9 4-6 13, Grace Ozburn 1-6 0-0 2, Addie Ringel 1-7 1-2 3, Aleicia Valldejuli 0-2 2-2 2, Hannah Armin 0-3 0-0 0, Kira Goral 0-3 0-0 0, Emily Lynch 0-1 0-0 0, Savannah Standefer 0-2 0-0 0. Totals 13-59 9-14 39.

KIRKWOOD (69): Paige Bradford 6-8 3-4 15, Tatiana Hodges-Johnson 1-1 0-0 2, Ju Gaston 4-7 1-2 10, Amara Lipsey 2-4 0-2 6, Marissa Metz 1-5 0-0 2, Delani Harris 1-5 0-0 2, Jheda Kennedy 1-2 0-0 2, Kortney Drake 2-4 0-0 4, Addison Rath 4-5 1-2 9, Natalie Tomaszewski 1-1 0-0 3, Kemara Watson 6-10 2-2 14, Britney Smith 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 29-52 7-12 69.