

Iowa Western hoops joining Kirkwood's league

Written by Jim Ecker
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Iowa Western Community College men's and women's basketball teams are switching from NJCAA Division I to Division II, putting the Reivers into the same ICCAC conference with the Kirkwood Eagles.

That's good for Kirkwood, because Iowa Western has strong teams and it they will give the Eagles another good opponent. But it's also potentially bad for Kirkwood, because now there will be even stiffer competition to earn the league's only bid to the national tournament.

The Iowa Western men's basketball team will join the ICCAC for the 2020-21 school year. Their women's basketball team will the conference in 2021-22.

The switch from DI to DII is just for basketball at Iowa Western and does not affect their other sports. The school is located in Council Bluffs.

Doug Wagemester, the athletic director at Kirkwood, was a little surprised by the move. "We've been dealing with it the last 10 days," he said Thursday. "It kind of came out of nowhere."

On balance, he thinks adding Iowa Western to the league could be good for Kirkwood, citing the Reivers' tradition and location in Omaha/Council Bluffs.

"They could add value to the league and make it an even stronger league," he said.

Iowa Western officials said they have been discussing the move for more than a year, according to the Council Bluffs Nonpareil. The move was approved Tuesday by the NJCAA.

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Iowa Western cited four major factors in their decision:

- + Help them recruit more local basketball players
- + Improve their scheduling agreements with other junior colleges in Iowa
- + Create a significant savings in scholarship allotments
- + Create a sizable savings in their travel budgets

NJCAA Division I schools can award a full scholarship to their athletes that covers the entire cost of attending school. The Division II schools, like Kirkwood, can offer tuition and books, but not room and board.

The ICCAC Division II men's basketball league will be growing from eight teams to nine teams this coming season. The women's basketball league will be growing from nine teams to 10 teams in 2021-22.

Meanwhile, the ICCAC Division I men's league will shrink to four teams in 2020-21 and the women's league will shrink to only two teams in 2021-22, suggesting that more changes could be on the way.