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Eastern Michigan University

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Eagles Set for New Year's Eve Clash at Carrier Dome

Tuesday, Dec. 31, 2013 » 3:05 p.m. » Carrier Dome (34,616) » Syracuse, N.Y.



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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) - The Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team is heading to its final road non-conference destination Tuesday, Dec. 31, when it travels to Syracuse, N.Y. for the final game of the 2013 calendar year. This will be the third straight season that former Syracuse assistant coach and now Eastern head coach [Rob Murphy](#) will take his Eagles to his former "stomping grounds". The Detroit, Mich. native has yet to knock off his old boss, Jim Boeheim, in his first two attempts.

CLOSING OUT THE NON-CONFERENCE: The Eagles travel northeast to Syracuse for its final game of 2013 with the Orange in a nationally televised game with the No. 2-ranked team in the nation before returning back to the Convocation Center Saturday, Jan. 4. The Jan. 4 contest is the final non-conference matchup of the 2013-14 campaign when they welcome Rochester College to Ypsilanti for a 2 p.m. game. The Green and White will then start Mid-American Conference play with a pair of road games. EMU will first head to Bowling Green, Jan. 8, before

heading back to upstate New York for a game with Buffalo, Jan. 11.

FINDING THE GAME AT HOME: The Eagles' contest with the Orange will hit the airwaves of 89.1 FM (WEMU). In addition to the WEMU broadcast, the game will be televised on ESPNU.

Veteran "Voice of the Eagles" Chad Bush will serve as EMU's play-by-play announcer for the WEMU broadcast. On ESPNU, Jason Benetti will do play-by-play while Tim Welsh will serve as the game's analyst.

WHAT'S TO COME: Following its contest with Duke, the Green and White will complete the 2013 calendar season with its final non-conference game of the year, which should be a nice tune-up for the Eagles heading into the MAC portion of the schedule. EMU will host NAIA foe Rochester College Saturday, Jan. 4, 2014, at 2 p.m.

ALL-TIME AGAINST THE ORANGE: The Eagles and Orange have only met on the hardwood three times prior to the New Year's Eve contest. EMU has won one of the three contests dating back to 1996. However, following the Eastern Michigan win, the Green and White has fallen in two straight seasons to the Orange. In both the 2011-12 and 2012-13 campaigns the Eagles dropped games at the Carrier Dome by the same score, 84-48.

Last season, [Glenn Bryant](#) posted a double-double performance for the Eagles with 16 points and 10 rebounds in an 84-48 loss at the Carrier Dome. [Derek Thompson](#) led all scorers with 18 points, going 7-of-18 with a trio of three-pointers in the second half. Bryant was 6-of-18 to go along with a perfect 4-of-4 effort from the free throw line. The double-double was his first as an Eagle. [Da'Shonte Riley](#) was a force under the basket for the Eagles, denying six Syracuse shots. Those six blocks fell just one shy of his career-best mark of seven. As a team, the Eagles shot at a 29.5 percent clip (18-of-16) with a 4-of-19 (21.1 percent) effort from downtown and 8-of-12 (66.7 percent) from the charity stripe.

TWENTY-PLUS IN TWO STRAIGHT: Redshirt-junior point guard [Mike Talley](#) has proven to be more than just a table-setter on the floor for EMU. Although he is leading the Green and White in assists per game at 3.9, the 6-foot guard has scored 20-or-more points in two straight road games. Talley first put up a career-best 21 points in an 81-79 overtime win versus Oakland University, Dec. 21. A week later, Dec. 28, the Detroit, Mich. native posted 20 points against the No. 9-ranked Blue Devils of Duke University.

STRONG SYRACUSE TIES: When EMU takes on Syracuse Tuesday, Nov. 29, it will be a homecoming for several members of the Eagles' basketball staff. Third-year Head Coach [Rob Murphy](#) was an assistant coach at Syracuse University for seven seasons.

[Victoria Sun](#), who serves as the director of basketball operations, is a 1997 graduate of Syracuse University, while also serving as a student manager for Jim Boeheim's squad during her tenure.

Assistant coach [Benny White](#) served as an executive assistant to Dave Bing, the mayor of Detroit, who is a Syracuse basketball great.

SIMS PICKS UP THE PIECES AT DUKE: Senior [J.R. Sims](#) came into his own with a 10-point performance in the Eagles 82-59 loss at Duke Saturday, Dec. 28. Sims was 3-of-6 from the floor while knocking down a three-pointer. It was the first time the Fort Wayne, Ind. native had posted double-digit points since scoring 13 against Toledo, March 9, 2013, in the Green and White's final regular season game of the 2012-13 season.

AT THE TOP OF THE MAC: The Eagles are leading the esteemed Mid-American Conference in multiple categories this season. EMU posts the best field goal percentage defense (37.0 percent), most blocked shots (7.4 bpg) and greatest turnover margin (+4.3). EMU ranks second in steals (8.4 spg), third in three-point field goal percentage (34.3 percent) and fourth in assists (13.0 apg) scoring defense (66.8 ppg), field goal percentage (44.4 percent), three-point field goal percentage defense (30.8 percent), scoring margin (+4.7) and assist/turnover ratio (1.1).

Individually, [Da'Shonte Riley](#) leads the way in blocks, averaging 3.5 per contest, while [Glenn Bryant](#) is third, turning away 2.5 per game. [Karrington Ward](#)'s 15.0 points per game is good for the fifth-best in the MAC and Bryant is hitting 58.7 percent of his shots which is the fourth highest percentage in the conference. Additionally, [Mike Talley](#) has an assist/turnover ratio of 2.5, which is the second-best in the MAC.

ALL-TIME AGAINST THE ATLANTIC COAST: When facing teams who are currently in the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC), the Green and White has posted a dismal record of 3-10 through 13 contests. EMU has defeated three different teams in the ACC. Those schools are Duke, Pittsburgh and Syracuse. EMU has never played any ACC team more than three times in the history of the men's basketball program.

65 OR BUST: The Eagles seem to have found a magic number that they need to strive for this season. The Eagles are 7-0 when they score 65-or-more points this season. In their four losses they have not been able to eclipse that mark. Eastern scored 63 versus Kentucky, 57 in the setback to UMass, 64 in the game with Purdue and 59 in their loss to Duke.

FINAL STOP ON THE ROAD TRIP: Eastern's contest with Syracuse will mark the end to its longest stint on the road for the 2013-14 season. The Eagles three game road trip has seen them go 1-1 to this point, but they could quite possibly be facing off with their toughest competition

yet, squaring of with the No. 2-ranked Orange Tuesday, Dec. 31.

ON THE ROAD THIS YEAR: Eastern Michigan has really struggled in games on the road this season. Overall, the Eagles are 1-3 away from Ypsilanti and is averaging just 66.8 points per contest, while allowing 77.8. At home, the Eagles score 74.3 points per game and allow just 60.6.

Individually, we have seen a dropoff in offensive production in EMU's two top-scorers away from home. Both [Karrington Ward](#) and [Raven Lee](#) average over 15 points per game inside the Convocation Center. However, when on the road, Ward notches just 12.5 points per contest, while Lee scores 12 points per tilt.

IN THE NATIONAL SPOTLIGHT: Eastern Michigan will square off with the Orange on New Year's Eve at 3 p.m. and that game will be available nationally on ESPNU, it is the final scheduled game for EMU that will be televised nationally.

A BLOCK A DAY: Senior center [Da'Shonte Riley](#) has played in 64 career games for the Green and White. During that time, he has accumulated 134 blocks, which ranks as the third-most in EMU history. In 64 games, the Detroit, Mich. native has swatted at least one shot in all but 16 contests. This season, he has recorded a block in all but two games, while he missed out in eight games last season and six during the 2011-12 season. Overall, he has managed to stuff the opponent at least once in 75 percent of the games he has appeared in for EMU.

A LONG DECEMBER: Head Coach [Rob Murphy](#) has not had much luck in the month of December since taking over the reins of the men's basketball team at EMU. So far this season, the third-year head coach is 2-3. In all three seasons as the head man, Murphy's teams have struggled, posting just a 5-13 record over the past three seasons. In 2011-12 Murphy managed a 1-6 record in the final month of the calendar year, while he went just 2-4 last season.

HAPPY AT HOME: The Eagles have enjoyed much success within the friendly confines of the Convocation Center this season. With a 6-1 record, EMU has shot 46.8 percent from the floor, while hitting 42.2 percent of its shots from three-point land. Eastern is scoring 74.3 points per contest, while holding its opponents to 60.6 points per game.

Under Head Coach [Rob Murphy](#), the EMU basketball team has been comfortable opening up the season inside the friendly confines of the Convocation Center. Throughout the past three seasons since Murphy has taken over the EMU program, he holds a 28-10 record inside the Convocation Center.

SEND IN THE SWAT TEAM: Eastern Michigan's defensive prowess is what has allowed the

team to be successful the last few years. That stealthy defense includes their shot blocking ability. In its first seven games, EMU has blocked 81 shots and they average 7.4 per contest which is the fourth-best in the country.

[Da'Shonte Riley](#) has led that defensive block party. The senior who transferred from Syracuse just two seasons ago has racked up 38 blocks already this season. The Detroit, Mich. native is also earning his spot in the EMU record books. The seven-footer has blocked 134 shots in his career, good for the third-most in Eastern Michigan history. He is 33 shy of [Jamell Harris](#), while he trails the all-time leader Theron Wilson by a wide margin. Wilson finished his career with 257 rejections. Riley, however, has only played just over one and a half seasons for the Green and White, while Wilson appeared on the EMU roster for four seasons (1992-96). Riley holds down the No. 13 spot in the country with his 3.5 per game this season.

[Glenn Bryant](#) has been no slouch at turning away the opposition. He is averaging 2.5 blocks per contest, good enough to be tied for the 40th-most in the nation. His 69 career blocks have him tied with Calvin Warner as the ninth-best shot blocker in EMU history.

ROAD WOES: Since [Rob Murphy](#) took over as the head coach of the Eagles, the team has struggled on the road. Overall, Murphy's teams are 8-28 on the road in his first three seasons. In non-conference play, the Green and White holds a 3-17 record away from the Convocation Center.

A WIN ON THE ROAD: Wins on the road are hard to come by at the NCAA Division I ranks. The Eagles did just that Saturday, Dec. 21, with their victory at Oakland. It was EMU's first road win of the year and the first time it defeated Oakland at the O'rena since Nov. 14, 2009.

CHECK THE SPECIALTY STATS: The Eagles are averaging 28.7 points per game in the paint, 26.0 points off the bench, 18.3 points per game off turnovers, 10.5 second-chance points and 10.2 fast break points per game.

BENCH WORK: The Eagles' bench is providing 26.0 points per game through the first 11 contests. Those 26.0 points per game account for 36.3 percent of the Green and White's scoring this season.

LOOKING FOR HIS FIRST: Since becoming the Head Men's Basketball Coach at Eastern Michigan [Rob Murphy](#) has gone 0-6 against nationally ranked opponents. Last season, he fell in three contests to then-No. 4-ranked Syracuse, No. 2 Michigan and No. 23 Kentucky, while also losing to No. 4 Syracuse in 2011-12. This year, EMU has fallen twice to top-25 competition. Eastern Michigan first fell to No. 3-ranked Kentucky, before dropping a contest with No. 21 Massachusetts. The Eagles could reverse that trend this season as they have one more team on

the 2013-14 schedule that is currently ranked in the AP Top 25.

DEEP GREEN SEA: Head Coach [Rob Murphy](#) has the luxury of being "too deep". Murphy has 10 players that he feels could start on any given day for the Green and White. So far this season, the Detroit, Mich. native has played 10 different student-athletes for at least 10 minutes per game, including eight that have seen at least 14 minutes of action per contest.

DEFYING MURPHY'S LAW: Although defense has been Head Coach [Rob Murphy's](#) philosophy since he stepped foot on the campus of Eastern Michigan, the 2013-14 basketball team seems to be showing the third-year head coach that it might be able to win games on the offensive side of the ball as well. Since coming to Ypsilanti, Murphy's squads have averaged 53.2 and 56.6 points per game, respectively. On the other side of the ball, Murphy's Eagles have allowed just 58.7 and 59.1 points per contest in those two seasons. After eight games this season, the Eagles are averaging 71.5 points on the offensive side, while allowing just 66.8 points on the defensive side. It seems as though these Eagles are embracing the defensive philosophy while exploding on the other side of the court as well.