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Eastern Begins Three Game Homestand with Akron on Wednesday

Wednesday, Jan. 22, 2014 » 7:07 p.m. » Convocation Center (8,874) » Ypsilanti, Mich.



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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) - After taking the first leg of the Michigan Mid-American Conference trophy by defeating Western Michigan University, 56-37, Jan. 14, and Central Michigan University, 72-59, Jan. 18, the Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team will return to the Convocation Center to take on three-straight MAC East opponents. The Eagles will have to square off with the reigning 2013 FirstEnergy MAC Men's Basketball Tournament champions when the University of Akron comes to Ypsilanti for a 7 p.m. tip Wednesday, Jan. 22.

EASTERN RETURNS HOME FOR THREE IN A ROW: The Green and White has started the 2013-14 MAC season on a tough note, having to go out on the road for three of its first four conference games. The Eagles had a successful quartet of games to start the conference slate, going 3-1, and will now reap the benefits of that by returning home for three-straight games. EMU will see Akron, Jan. 22, before welcoming Ohio, Jan. 25. Following those contests, Eastern will square off with a familiar Bowling Green squad that they topped at BGSU, 56-51, when the Eagles opened up MAC play.

FINDING THE GAME AT HOME: The Eagles' contest with the Zips will hit the airwaves of 89.1 FM (WEMU). In addition to the WEMU broadcast, the game will be televised on Time Warner Cable Sports, while also being available on ESPN3 and the WatchESPN app. Comcast Michigan will also carry the broadcast.

Veteran "Voice of the Eagles" Chad Bush will serve as EMU's play-by-play announcer for the WEMU broadcast, while [Sean Hostetter](#) will handle the analyst duties for the Wednesday evening contest, while Michael Reghi and Tony White will be on the television broadcast for Time Warner Cable.

ALL-TIME AGAINST THE ZIPS: The Eagles are behind in the all-time series with Akron, 19-21. Since taking over the EMU basketball program, [Rob Murphy](#) has seen Akron twice and has yet to top the Zips in either of those contests. This season, Murphy will have two chances knock off Akron, as it is one-of-two extra cross-divisional opponents the Eagles will square off with twice, along with Bowling Green.

Last season, three Eagles eclipsed double digits in scoring as [Glenn Bryant](#) led the way with 11, while [J.R. Sims](#) and [Anthony Strickland](#) each tallied 10 points off of the bench. Eastern's bench outscored the Akron bench, 27-11, but the Green and White only shot 19-of-51 from the field for a 37.3 shooting percentage. The Zips made over half of their shots, going 25-of-47 for a 53.2 percent clip, including 9-of-23 from three point land.

MURPHY VERSUS THE MAC: Third-year Head Men's Basketball Coach [Rob Murphy](#) holds a 19-17 all-time record against Mid-American Conference opponents in his third MAC season. The Detroit, Mich. native won the MAC-West Division Title in 2011-12 during his first season as the head man at EMU, before going 7-9 last season. Murphy and his squads have seen most of their success against teams from their own divisions, going 14-8, while they are just 5-9 against the East Division which Murphy looks to improve during the 2013-14 season.

THAT'S AS MANY AS LAST YEAR: With the 72-59 win over Central Michigan, Jan. 18, the Eagles won their second road MAC game of the 2013-14 season. Last season, the Green and White only won two MAC games away from the Convocation Center. With six left to go, [Rob Murphy](#) and his squad look to win at least two more road games, which would give Murphy a new career-best four road conference victories.

KARRINGTON'S CAREER-BEST: Junior [Karrington Ward](#) had a career-night against Central Michigan, Jan. 18. The Lockport, Ill. native pulled down a career-high 15 rebounds against the Chippewas. That number is the most by any Eagle in a single game this season. In fact, 15 rebounds is the single most by an Eastern Michigan basketball player since Brandon Bowdry caromed 19 during the 2010-11 season versus Detroit, Dec. 11, 2010.

DEFENSIVE EXPERTISE: The EMU squad has shown that it is one of the elite defensive units in college basketball this season. According to the NCAA statistics as of Jan. 20, 2014, the Eagles rank 38th in scoring defense, allowing 63.6 ppg, while they're No. 24 in the country in blocks at 5.9 per contest. The Green and White is swiping the ball 9.1 times per game, ranking as the 13th-most steals per game, and holding teams to just a 28.4 three point field goal percentage, good for 14th in the country. The Eagles' most impressive stat is that they are holding teams to a 36.9 field goal percentage. This number ranks as the fourth-best in the nation.

THE ORDER OF THE THIEVES: Eastern is currently averaging 9.1 steals per game, which is not only the most in the Mid-American Conference but that number is also the 15th-most at the NCAA Division I level. So far this season, the Green and White has picked the opposition's pocket 10-or-more times in six different games, including a season-high 18 in the Eagles' 56-37 win over Western Michigan, Jan. 14. Those 18 steals are the most since EMU stripped Davidson 18 times during the 2006 season, Nov. 10.

NEVER SCARED: Outside of the tough Mid-American Conference schedule that EMU drew this season, the Eagles did not shy away from playing top notch competition. According to ESPN.com's rankings, the Eagles own the 15th highest strength of schedule in the nation. Furthermore, CBSSports.com has the Green and White's strength of schedule as the 12th-highest in the country.

In addition to the EMU strength of schedule, the Eagles hold the 48th-best RPI according to ESPN.com and ranked 44th by way of CBSSports.com. The Green and White look to use those numbers to their advantage come tournament time, as they try to make a push to the big dance.

TALLEY FINDS HIS GROOVE: After averaging just 6.5 points per game through the first eight games this season, [Mike Talley](#) has found his step offensively. Since that mark, the transfer has been posting 14.1 points per game, including three 20-plus point performances and seven double-digit scoring affairs.

GIVE ME SOME MORE MACtion: Heading into the 2013-14 season, it was announced that the Mid-American Conference would be expanding its regular season. Instead of the previous 16-game schedule, the member institutions will now play an 18-game conference slate. In order to fill those extra two games, each team will another pair of cross-divisional contests. EMU's two extra games will be filled by Bowling Green and the 2013 MAC Tournament Champion, Akron.

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. To this point, EMU has blocked 101 shots and they average 5.9 per contest which is the 24th-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 47 blocks already this season. The Detroit, Mich. native is also earning his spot in the EMU record books. The seven-footer has blocked 143 shots in his career, good for the third-most in Eastern Michigan history. He is 24 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 tied in the No. 28th spot in the country with his 2.8 per game this season.

[Glenn Bryant](#) has been no slouch at turning away the opposition. He is averaging 1.9 blocks per contest. His 73 career blocks have him tied with Tyson Radney as the eighth-best shot blocker in EMU history.

THE QUICKEST HE'S GOTTEN TO 10: With the win in the Eagles' game with Western Michigan, EMU Head Coach [Rob Murphy](#) got his 10th win of the year in just 16 games which is much quicker than his first two seasons as the head man. In 2011-12 it took 21 games to get the 10th, while it took 20 last season.

FREE ONES STARTING TO FALL: After shooting 64.1 percent from the free throw line in the first 12 games of the season, the Green and White has started to get the feel from the charity stripe. Since the 12th game of the year, Eastern is knocking down 75.6 percent of their free ones, including a season-best 83.3 percent (15-of-18) in its road loss at Buffalo, Jan. 11.

CHECK THE SPECIALTY STATS: The Eagles are averaging 29.1 points per game in the paint, 23 points off the bench, 18 points per game off turnovers, 9.6 second-chance points and 11.6 fast break points per game.

TRIPLE TROUBLE: Eastern Michigan has seen its three-point shooting percentage drop significantly over the past eight games. Since EMU's win over Green Bay, Dec. 10, 2013, the Green and White has not shot better than 28.6 percent from beyond the arc, except for in one contest, and has shot just 23.2 percent from three-point land over that span.

DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE: Redshirt-freshman guard [Raven Lee](#) has shown some up-and-down play during the

2013-14 season. Lee scored in doubled figures in four out of the first five games this season, including a 38-point outburst against UT-Arlington, Nov. 23. Since that performance, the Detroit, Mich. native has not eclipsed the 20-point mark and has been in double figures just four times in 11 games.

ON THE ROAD THIS YEAR: Eastern Michigan has really struggled in games on the road this season. Overall, the Eagles are 3-5 away from Ypsilanti and are averaging just 63.6 points per contest, while allowing 70.9. 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 13 points per game inside the Convocation Center. However, when on the road, Ward notches just 11.6 points per contest, while Lee scores 7.4 points per tilt.

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. Throughout this season, the Eagles are averaging 69.2 points on the offensive side, while allowing just 63.6 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.

HAPPY AT HOME: The Eagles have enjoyed much success within the doors of the Convocation Center this season. With an 8-1 record, EMU has shot 47.3 percent from the floor, while hitting 38.6 percent of its shots from three-point land. Eastern is scoring 74.2 points per contest, while holding its opponents to 57.2 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 30-10 record inside the Convocation Center.

BRYANT MAKES THE #SCTop10 WITH HIS THUNDEROUS THROW DOWN: With 13 minutes to go in the first half of EMU's win over Western Michigan, Jan. 14, [Glenn Bryant](#) poked away a pass on the perimeter and raced alone toward the other end of the court. When he and WMU freshman Tucker Haymond met at the other basket, Bryant rose above him and threw down a one-handed dunk that sent the Convocation Center in a frenzy. ESPN's Sportscenter soon picked up the highlight on its Twitter feed, saying Bryant channeled Blake Griffin with the dunk. The play came in at No. 4 on the show's Top 10 plays that night.