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Slow Start Sinks EMU Hoops in 78-68 Loss to Akron

Karrington Ward scores 20 to lead the Eagles (11-7, 3-2 MAC) in the setback



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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) – The Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team dropped a Mid-American Conference cross-divisional contest to the MAC East-leading University of Akron, 78-68, in the Convocation Center. With the setback, the Eagles drop to 11-7 (3-2 MAC), while Akron improves to 12-6 (4-1 MAC). The squad suffered a series of ups-and-downs, as Akron came out of the gates with a 10-0 run and increased its scoring margin to as many as 19 points throughout the matchup.

The Eagles were led by [Karrington Ward \(Lockport, Ill.-Lockport Township \(Moraine Valley C.C.\)\)](#), who put up 16 of his 20 points in the second half. The junior also finished with six rebounds, tied with [Da'Shonte Riley \(Detroit, Mich.-Detroit Country Day \(Syracuse\)\)](#) for the team-high. Riley tied his career-high with seven blocks, notching all but one in the second 20 minutes of play. Also on the leaderboard offensively were [Darell Combs \(South Holland, Ill.-Thornwood \(Blinn\)\)](#) and [Mike Talley \(Detroit, Mich.-Melvindale ABT \(Duquesne\)\)](#), who contributed 12 and 10 points, respectively.

As a team, the Eagles were 26-of-72 from the field for a 36.1 shooting percentage. The squad struggled on the outside, hitting just 5-of-21 from three-point range. The Green and White also had a lower output in stolen balls than in previous matchups, as only five steals were recorded for the evening.

The Zips were led by Jake Kretzer, who scored 25 points thanks in large part to seven three-pointers. Demetrius Treadwell was a threat across the board, as he produced a double-double with 18 points and 11 rebounds, and led the team in blocks with five rejections. Akron shot 27-of-58 from the field for a 46.6 percent clip, and hit more than half its three-point attempts. The team's main defensive strength proved to be under the basket, as the team notched 14 blocks over the Eagles.

Akron started the scoring with a three from Kretzer on its opening possession. The Zips continued their fast start with two bunnies and another Kretzer three, leading 10-0 and forcing EMU Head Coach [Rob Murphy](#) to take a timeout just three minutes into the contest. Coming out of the timeout, the Eagles continued to struggle on offense. While Akron finally missed its first shot of the game, EMU couldn't hit on the first seven shots of the game, still trailing with 15:55 to go in the first half.

EMU finally lit up the scoring column as Talley knocked down one out of three after being fouled on an attempt from beyond the arc, breaking the Akron 12-0 run. UA added a bucket from the block and Kretzer's third three of the game before Ross hit the Eagles' first field goal of the game, breaking a 0-of-9 start. However, Kretzer answered with another three to increase the difference to 17. Nonetheless, [Jalen Ross \(Greensboro, N.C.-Greensboro Day\)](#) hit another jumper from virtually the same spot, and [Anthony Strickland \(Ypsilanti, Mich.-Dearborn Heights Robichaud \(Adrian\)\)](#) stole the ball on the next Akron possession, finishing off the fast break with a dunk to cut the lead to 13, 20-7, with 10:22 left in the opening half.

Akron was held scoreless for the next three minutes until a pair of free throws from Demetrius Treadwell found their way through the rim. After Ward went inside for a layup to bring the Eagles close to 10 points, the Green and White was able to slow the Akron offensive front, almost converting on a three from Ross that teased the team as it rolled around the rim before trickling out.

The Eagles built momentum when Strickland tripped up the defense on a reverse layup, and a scuffle under the Zips' basket left Ross with the ball, who threw down-court to Ward who bounded from the left elbow to throw down a dunk. With the excitement that the recent outburst of plays had produced, Akron was forced to take a timeout after the quick turnaround.

Time was apparently well spent in the huddle, as the Zips came out and hit back-to-back-to-back triples to quickly boost their advantage to 18 points, as the Eagles trailed 31-13 with five minutes remaining in the half. Another good shot from beyond the arc from Reggie McAdams swished through the net as the Eagles continued to struggle offensively. In a seven-minute span, the only points that the Green and White made were courtesy of free throws from [Raven Lee \(Detroit, Mich.-Romulus\)](#) and [Olalekan Ajayi \(Winston-Salem, N.C.-Quality Education Academy \(Collin College\)\)](#).

A shot off the glass in the last remaining seconds from [Daylen Harrison \(Akron, Ohio-St. Vincent-St. Mary \(Wyoming\)\)](#) gave the Eagles the last word in the half, but the team still trailed by a considerable margin heading into the locker room, down 39-19. The Eagles shot a dismal 7-of-33 for a 21.2 percent clip. Leading the team with four points apiece was Strickland, Ross, and Ward. The team was more successful on rebounding, as it paced its opposition with 21 boards in the half.

Akron was led by Kretzer, whose five triples accounted for the majority of his 19 points. The Zips shot the ball at a 51.9 percent success rate, including 66.7 percent from three-point land as the team hit 8-of-12. Unfortunately, the Akron defense proved to be as effective as its offense, as the Zips boasted an astounding 10 blocks to go with six steals in the opening 20 minutes.

Darrel Combs opened up the second period by quickly moving to the basket for a drive down the lane for the first basket of the second period, and Ward drilled a jumper on the left wing to give the team 23 points. Feeding off the motivation from the first two plays, Talley powered through the defense to make his way to the rim on two consecutive possessions. A block from Riley kept the Zips at bay, forcing Akron's Coach Keith Dambrot to pause the action for his team at 43-27.

Murphy's well-known defensive prowess was able to significantly slow Akron while the Eagles continued to find opportunities to score. As Riley continued to be a force under the basket and rejected a handful of shots from the Zips, Kretzer hit a rough patch in his three-point game. It seemed that the good fortune that Akron possessed on the outside transferred to the Eagles, as Ward hit back-to-back threes, nearly bringing the Eagles within 10 points as they trailed 47-36.

When a turnover from Nick Harney put the ball in Ward's hands under the Akron basket, the junior just missed a layup after sprinting the length of the court, but [Glenn Bryant](#)(**Detroit, Mich.-Oak Hill Academy (Arkansas)**) saved the play by grabbing the rebound and throwing it down for a dunk. Ward hit yet another three as the Green and White made progress in chipping away at the score, down by just seven points at 41-48 with under 12 minutes left to play.

The Zips took off on an 8-0 run before Bryant grabbed a board and stepped away from Akron's center to hit a short jumper. The Detroit, Mich. native then drove down the left baseline to bounce one in off the glass as the squad trailed, 58-45. When a shot from Treadwell was met by the overpowering strength of Riley's best blocking hand, the Green and White ran the ball down the court and found Combs on the arc. Though his shot did not fall through, Ward grabbed the ball and dropped in an easy putback.

Talley found the net on a three, after which Riley hit a left elbow jumper. As Akron's Quincy Diggs went up for the rebound under the EMU hoop off an attempted three from Talley, he was unable to grasp the rock as he accidentally tipped it in to give the Green and White a couple free points and break the 10-point deficit barrier as the Eagles fought back to trail by a 63-54 margin.

The Eagles kept even pace with the Zips, but were unable to break past the nine-point gap as the score quickly jumped to 66-75. The contest ended as both teams hit free throws to close out scoring, as Akron finished with the upper hand at 78-68.

The Eagles remain at home for its next contest, hosting Ohio University in a Saturday morning matchup, Jan. 25. Tip from the Convocation Center is scheduled for 11 a.m. and will be televised throughout the nation on ESPNU. The first 500 fans in attendance will receive entrance to a free breakfast bar, sponsored by Tim Hortons and a "Beat Ohio" t-shirt.