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## Baseball Set to Square Off Against Nationally-Ranked Kentucky

Eagles and Wildcats will match up in a three-game set, Feb. 28-March 2 at Cliff Hagan Stadium



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**YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com)** -- After splitting a doubleheader against Austin Peay State University, Feb. 25, EMU will begin its trip back north, making a stop in Lexington, Ky. to square off against the No. 30-ranked University of Kentucky in a three-game series, Feb. 28-March 2. First pitch for game one is scheduled for Friday at 4 p.m. at Cliff Hagan Stadium. Eastern will look to improve upon its 4-4 record, but will have its hands full on the road against the nationally-ranked Wildcats, who are 6-2 through their first eight contests of the 2014 campaign.

**LEADERS OF THE MAC:** Through the first two and a half weeks of the 2014 season, the EMU bats have proven to become a huge threat to opposing pitchers. Eastern leads the MAC in several hitting categories: runs (66), doubles (27), triples (3), RBI (59) and walks (40). Moreover, the Eagles rank second in the conference in batting average (.294), slugging percentage (.457), on-base percentage (.395), steals (17) and home runs (5).

Individually, four Eagles top the MAC charts. [Sam Ott](#) leads the league as the only one reaching double digits in runs scored (12) while his seven walks are tied for second with [Austin Wilson](#) and behind fellow co-captain [Adam Sonabend](#), who has nine. [Lee Longo](#) leads the conference in two categories with seven doubles and 25 total bases.

On the mound, reliever [Charlie Land](#) is one-of-five pitchers in the conference that has pitched a minimum of one inning per team game without allowing an earned run. Land has thrown 8.2 innings without surrendering an earned run, striking out 10 and holding opposing hitters to a .167 clip in the process.

**SCOUTING KENTUCKY:** The Wildcats enter the weekend series after a victorious home opener over Wright State University, 7-1, on Tuesday, Feb. 25. UK has won its past four games to accompany its 6-2 record; moreover, Kentucky opened up the season with an 8-3 victory No. 1 Virginia in a Valentine's Day contest to propel them into the national rankings. The projected rotation set to face the EMU bats will be left-hander A.J. Reed (2-0, 1.50 ERA) in the opener, righty Chandler Shepherd (1-0, 5.73 ERA) for game two and right-handed sophomore Kyle Cody (1-0, 1.93 ERA) in the series finale. Reed, Shepherd and four other Wildcats were selected as Preseason All-Southeastern Conference, posing as tough competition for the Green and White.

A First Team Preseason All-America selection, Reed leads the Wildcats both on the mound and at the dish. The UK junior boasts a 2-0 record and 1.50 ERA on the rubber, including the win against the top-ranked Cavaliers. At the plate, Reed is a .424 hitter this season, tallying 17 RBI, 10 runs, six homers and three doubles. Last weekend at the Old Dominion Tournament, he became the first player in program history to hit five home runs in the three-game stretch. In one of those games, he homered twice in one inning with one being a bases-clearing grand slam. For his superb weekend, Reed was named the NCAA.com National Player of the Week as well as the National Hitter of the Week by the National Collegiate Baseball Writers Association.

**RECENT HISTORY VERSUS RANKED OPPONENTS:** Head Coach [Jay Alexander](#) and his club are getting used to facing ranked opponents in non-conference affairs. No. 30 Kentucky will be the second ranked team the Eagles have played this season after beginning the 2014 campaign with a three-game series at then-No. 16 Clemson University, who has now moved up to No. 11 in the country. Dating back to last season, the Green and White downed the then-No. 26 University of Notre Dame, 12-6, on the road, May 1, 2013. Taking one-of-three from the Tigers this season and defeating the Fighting Irish in 2013, Eastern Michigan holds a 2-2 record against ranked opponents over the past two seasons, showing that the Eagles can compete with some of the nation's bests.

**NOTABLE STREAKS:** As the reigning two-time MAC West Player of the Week, EMU first baseman [Lee Longo](#) has started his final season as an Eagle in top form, continuing from the end of the 2013 campaign. Going back to the final seven games last year, Longo is riding a 15-game hitting streak eight games into this season. Fellow senior [Sam Ott](#) also has a streak of his own dating back to last season, reaching base in EMU's previous 18 games. During the 2013 season, Ott found a way to get on base in 19-straight games, and he will look to pass that mark this weekend against Kentucky. Finally, after failing to reach base in the season opener, [John Rubino](#) and [Adam Dennison](#) have gotten on the base path in each of the past seven contests; moreover, Rubino's streak is a seven-game hitting streak.

**LAND LOCKED IN:** Junior college transfer [Charlie Land](#) has made a comfortable move to NCAA Division I baseball, appearing in four of EMU's eight games while not allowing an earned run in the process. His scoreless ERA leads the MAC as the Wheat Ridge, Colo. native has kept opposing batters in check with just a .167 average. Throwing 8.2 innings thus far, Land has given up five hits and three walks while striking out 10 at the plate. The 6-foot 3-inch righty, along with teammate [Devon Bronson](#), has been called upon more than any other Eastern arm out of the bullpen.

In the nightcap against Austin Peay, Feb. 25, Land shut the door by punching out three of the four hitters he faced to earn a four-out save. One of Land's strikeouts included the Governors' best hitter of the day, Ridge Smith, in the bottom of the eighth as the tying run was just 90 feet away at third base. In the ninth, Land returned to finish his business, retiring the side to pick up the save and secure the EMU win.

**FIELDING WOES:** While the EMU bats have been on fire to begin the season, the same cannot be said for the

Eagles' gloves. Through eight games, Eastern has committed 21 errors that have led to 14 unearned runs by EMU pitching. In back-to-back Sunday contests, errors in the eighth inning have propelled the opposition ahead, leading to losses for the Green and White. Clemson scored three runs on EMU miscues, Feb. 16, while UT Martin followed with a pair of runs on Eastern errors, Feb. 23. EMU's .936 fielding percentage ranks at the bottom of the MAC. However, in their latest game, the Eagles were error-free en route to a 9-8 victory over Austin Peay in the nightcap of a doubleheader, Feb. 25. It was the first time EMU did not commit an error in a game this season, the first error-less game since the 2013 season finale versus Toledo, May 18, 2013.

**MORE GAMES IN KENTUCKY WITH MOREHEAD STATE:** Similar to the end of last weekend, the Eagles will remain in the same state they played their weekend series. Following the three-game set with Kentucky in Lexington, the Green and White makes the 64-mile trip east to Morehead, Ky. for a pair of games against Morehead State. The battle of the Eagles takes place March 4-5 with both contests starting at 3 p.m.