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Men's Basketball: Eastern Set To Host Ohio in Nationally Televised Contest January 24, 2014

Eastern Michigan University

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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) - Coming off of a disappointing 10-point, 78-68, loss at the hands of Akron University, Jan. 22, the Eastern Michigan University men's basketball team looks to get back on the right side of the ledger when it takes on Ohio University Saturday, Jan. 25, in a nationally televised contest with the Bobcats at 11 a.m. Both teams come into the cross-divisional matchup with winning records, including 3-2 tallies in Mid-American Conference play.

NOT THE START THEY WANTED: The Green and White started MAC play with three-of-four contests on the road. The Eagles finally get to come home for three straight, but they did not start the homestand off on the right foot, coming up short in a contest with Akron on Wednesday, Jan. 22, at the Convocation Center. Eastern Michigan was outshot 46.6 percent to 36.1 percent in front of its home crowd, falling 78-68 in its first of three cross-divisional games in a row. EMU will have two chances at redemption moving forward, first with Ohio, Jan. 25, before welcoming Bowling Green to the Convo, Jan. 29.

FINDING THE GAME AT HOME: The Eagles' contest with the Bobcats will hit the airwaves of 89.1 FM (WEMU). In addition to the WEMU broadcast, the game will be televised on ESPNU, while also being available on ESPN3 and the WatchESPN app.

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 Saturday morning contest, while Dan Gutowsky and Sean Harrington will be on the nationally televised broadcast for ESPNU.

ALL-TIME AGAINST THE BOBCATS: The Eagles have been on the short end for the most part of the all-time series with Ohio, trailing at a 23-44 tally. Since taking over the EMU basketball program, Rob Murphy has seen Ohio twice and owns a 1-1 record against the Bobcats. Eastern got the best of Ohio during Murphy's first season, 2011-12, when it topped OU, 68-55. That Ohio team later made an NCAA Tournament run which saw the Bobcats in the Sweet Sixteen. Last season was a different story as the Green and White dropped a 73-50 decision at the Ohio Convocation Center.

Last season, Eastern was led offensively by J.R. Sims who posted 12 points, while Derek Thompson chipped in nine and Glenn Bryant added seven. Matt Balkema hauled in six rebounds to lead EMU and Jamell Harris caromed five of his own. Defensively, Sims had three steals, while Harris picked up two blocks and Bryant had one. As a team the Green and White shot 16-of-58 (27.6 percent) from the field and 5-of-17 (29.4 percent) from three-point land.

COACHES VS. CANCER SUITS AND SNEAKERS: This weekend is Coaches vs. Cancer weekend for the National Association of Basketball Coaches. Coaches vs. Cancer weekend is when NABC coaches across America will be wearing sneakers to show their support for Coaches vs. Cancer – a joint effort of the American Cancer Society and the National Association of Basketball Coaches that empowers basketball coaches to help make a difference in the fight against cancer.

MURPHY VERSUS THE MAC: Third-year Head Men's Basketball Coach Rob Murphy holds a 19-18 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 5-10 against the East Division which Murphy looks to improve during the 2013-14 season.

A TALE OF TWO HALVES: Eastern Michigan came out flying high in the second half of its 78-68 loss versus Akron, Jan. 22. The Eagles scored 22 points in the first nine minutes of the second half, however the first half was a much different story for the Green and White. EMU did not convert on a field goal attempt until there was 11:42 remaining in the first half of the game. Additionally, Eastern shot just 21.2 percent (7-of-33) in the first half of the contest, before coming out and shooting a scorching 48.7 percent (19-of-39) in the second half.

LUCKY NUMBER SEVEN: Senior center Da'Shonte Riley has become well known nationally for his shot blocking ability. In fact, the Detroit, Mich. native has blocked the second most shots in a single game in EMU history on three different occasions. Riley has seven blocks in three games in his career, including twice this season. Riley swatted seven against Buffalo, Jan. 24, 2012, before replicating that feat this season against Albion, Nov. 8, and versus Akron, Jan. 22.

CAN'T BEAT CHRISTIAN: The Ohio Head Men's Basketball Coach, Jim Christian, has boasted a perfect 7-0 record against Eastern Michigan in his career. Christian returned to the Mid-American Conference last season after four seasons at Texas Christian University. Christian is the all-time winningest coach in the MAC, after posting 20-or-more wins in all seven seasons he has spent as a coach in the conference. Christian spent six years at Kent State (2002-08) where he racked up 138 wins before departing for TCU. After four years in Fort Worth, Texas, he returned to Ohio to coach the Bobcats, where he won 24 games in his first season.

NO LUCK ON THE SMALL SCREEN: The EMU basketball squad has played in six games that have been aired on television this season. In those six games, the Green and White is just 1-5. Despite the discouraging numbers, three
of those games were against AP Top-10 ranked teams such as Duke, Kentucky and Syracuse. Eastern looks to right the ship with a win versus Ohio.

20-PLUS FOR TWO: Karrington Ward and Mike Talley have each shown the offensive ability that Head Coach Rob Murphy spoke so highly of before their arrival. Both Talley and Ward have posted at least three games with 20 points or more. Since Coach Murphy took over the helm of the EMU program, he has not had more than one player post multiple performances of 20 points in a season. In fact, Darrel Lampley is the only student-athlete in his tenure to score 20-plus points more than three times in a single season.

CAN'T FIND THE RIGHT MIX: Head Coach Rob Murphy has been doing some tinkering with the starting lineup this season. So far, we have seen five different starting rotations, with the lineup of Glenn Bryant, Raven Lee, Da'Shonte Riley, Mike Talley and Karrington Ward having the most starts (7).

THE ORDER OF THE THIEVES: Eastern is currently averaging 8.9 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 12th 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 63rd-best RPI according to ESPN.com and ranked 56th 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 13.7 points per game, including three 20-plus point performances and seven double-digit scoring affairs.

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 was 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.

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.

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 74.0 percent of their free ones, including a season-best 83.3 percent (15-of-18) in its road
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 23.3 percent from three-point land over that span.

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 6.11 per contest which is the 19th-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 54 blocks already this season. The Detroit, Mich. native is also earning his spot in the EMU record books. The seven-footer has blocked 150 shots in his career, good for the third-most in Eastern Michigan history. He is 17 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 two seasons for the Green and White, while Wilson appeared on the EMU roster for four seasons (1992-96). Riley is tied in the No. 19 spot in the country with his three per game this season.

Glenn Bryant has been no slouch at turning away the opposition. He is averaging 1.8 blocks per contest. His 73 career blocks have him tied with Tyson Radney as the eighth-best shot blocker in EMU history.

DR. JEKYL AND MR. HYDE: Redshirt-freshman guard Raven Lee has shown some up-and-down play during the 2013-14 season. Lee scored in double 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 13 games.

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.