EMU Women's Basketball January 14, 2014

Eastern Michigan University

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EMU HOSTS BRONCOS FOR IN-STATE SHOWDOWN: The Eastern Michigan University women's basketball team looks to snap a two-game losing skid by returning to the friendly confines of the Convocation Center, Jan. 15, for a Mid-American Conference match up against in-state rival Western Michigan University. Tipoff is slated for 7 p.m.

EMU, after losing MAC contests against Ball State and Northern Illinois, enters the game with an 11-3 (1-2 MAC) record. Meanwhile, the Broncos are 6-8 (2-1 MAC), falling in their previous game at Ohio University, 53-70, Jan. 12. Veteran broadcasters Chad Bush and Greg Steiner will have the call on WEMU (89.1 FM) beginning at 6:50 p.m. Live video of the game can also be found on Eagle All-Access (subscription-based).

ALL-TIME VERSUS THE BRONCOS: The Jan. 15 contest marks the 75th meeting between the Western Michigan Broncos and Eastern Michigan Eagles, who first played during the 1976-77 season. EMU leads the all-time series, 43-31, and has won 15 of the last 18 meetings. Eastern took both regular season meetings, but Western eliminated the Eagles with an 80-72 victory in the MAC Tournament First Round at the Convocation Center, March 9, 2013.

LAST YEAR AGAINST WESTERN MICHIGAN: In the first meeting last season in Kalamazoo, Mich., Eastern Michigan notched a 56-52 victory over Western Michigan at University Arena, Jan. 10, 2013. Bianca Cage scored a career-high 25 points, all coming in the second half, to lead the Eagles. The freshman guard scored 25 of the team's final 33 points in the win. Cage finished 10-of-16 shooting from the floor including 5-of-10 from beyond the arc. The Eagles completed the regular-season sweep with a 73-69 victory, Feb. 23, 2013. The Green and White shot 26-
of 66 (39.4 percent) whereas the visitors shot 25-of-54 (46.3 percent). Western's Michelle O'Brien led all scorers with 21, including 15 points from beyond the arc. Four Eagles scored in double figures including Natachia Watkins with 13, India Hairston with 12, Cage with 14 and Desyree Thomas, who scored 15 and dished out nine dimes. In the postseason contest in Ypsilanti, the Broncos claimed an eight-point decision in the opening round of the 2013 MAC Tournament. The Eagles gave a valiant effort but were never able to get within closer than nine points of the visiting Broncos after an early deficit at the EMU Convocation Center, March 9, 2013. Thomas came within one rebound of recording a triple-double with a career-high 19 points, 10 assists, and nine rebounds. Western's Miracle Woods led all scorers with 29 points.

SHARING AND STEALING THE ROCK: Aside from averaging double figures in scoring, EMU senior guard Desyree Thomas finds scoring opportunities for her team in other ways. She leads the conference in steals with 43 on the season while also tallying 67 assists for third in the MAC. Moreover, the 110 combined assists and steals are the second most out of any player in the league, trailing only Toledo's Andola Dortch, who ranks second in both categories, by three (72 assists, 41 steals).

FAMILIAR FACES: A pair of familiar faces will be on the Western Michigan bench Thursday evening as Head Coach Shane Clipfell and Director of Operations Stephanie Smiley return to Ypsilanti. In the nine seasons at Eastern Michigan, Clipfell helped build the Eagles into one of the top programs in the MAC. EMU compiled a record of 160-103 (.608), including three 20-win seasons, three postseason appearances and two MAC West Division titles. Meanwhile, Smiley was a three-time All-MAC selection at Eastern Michigan and a Kodak All-American Honorable Mention as a senior in 2002. Smiley still holds the EMU's record for career assists with 577 and is second all-time in rebounding with 784.

EAGLES OUT TO SNAP THE SKID: After back-to-back losses the Eagles will look to get back to basics Thursday night, Jan. 15, against the Broncos. During the recent skid the Eagles have struggled to shoot the basketball, managing just a 32.6 percent (42-of-129) field goal ratio. Ball State and Northern Illinois combined to go to the free throw line 16 more times than Eastern Michigan. Another factor has been the team's inability to keep the opponents off the glass, as EMU has been out-rebounded by nearly 10 rebounds a contest (38.5 to 48.0).

APPROACHING 900: Senior Natachia Watkins has scored 882 points in her career and ranks 23rd all-time. There are currently 21 players in the 900-point club for EMU women's basketball.

CLIMBING THE ASSIST CHARTS: Senior Desyree Thomas is currently fifth in the EMU record book with 404 career assists. Stephanie Smiley (1998-02) holds the EMU standard with 577 helpers.

EMU QUICK HITTERS: The Eagles surpassed their entire win total from the 2012-13 season in just nine games ... The Eagles are out-scoring opponents by 23.9 points in victories ... Eight of the Eagles' 11 victories this season have come by double figures ... EMU and Toledo are the only teams in the league that feature four players that average double figures in points.

LEADING THE MAC: The Eagles sit atop the Mid-American Conference in five categories as well as ranking in the top-five in 11 others. The Green and White lead the league in scoring margin (+15.9), rebounding offense (46.9), turnover margin (+9.6), steals (12.6) and offensive rebounds (18.2).

FOUTY TURNING INTO A DOUBLE-DOUBLE MACHINE: Forward Olivia Fouty has 14 career double-doubles, which ranks sixth most in program history since the stat began being tracked during the 1999-2000 campaign.

INTERESTING STATS ABOUT EMU: In its 11 victories this season, EMU has scored 87.5 points while the opposition has posted 63.6 points. In those games, opponents shot 36.7 percent from the field compared to 41.5
percent for the Eagles. In the defeats, the Eagles have only posted 65.0 points, while giving up 78.7 Another factor in the Eagles' success was the ability to control the glass. EMU has grabbed 49.2 rebounds in the wins while forcing opponents to turn the ball over 24.5 times. In the losses, the Green and White are -8.0 on the glass (38.7 to 46.7).

**EMU ADDED A TRANSFER FOR 2014-15:** Head Coach Tory Verdi announced Jan. 13, the addition of Brianna Puni (St. Charles, Mo.-Incarnate Word Academy), who has transferred from Illinois State University and enrolled in classes at EMU.

Puni (pronounced pooh-KNEE), a 6-foot forward from St. Charles, Mo., averaged 4.6 points and 7.9 rebounds in nine games this season. In a 68-64 victory over Florida, she sank 14 points and pulled down 10 rebounds for her first double-double of the season and fourth of her career. She will sit out the remainder of the season due to NCAA transfer regulations and will become eligible following the 2014 fall semester. Puni will have just one semester of eligibility remaining.

**EMU SUPPORTS PLAY4KAY BY WEARING PINK:** EMU will show its support of the Women's Basketball Coaches Association (WBCA) breast cancer awareness and fundraising program, "Play4Kay" (formerly known as WBCA Pink Zone), by sporting pink uniforms Sunday, Jan. 26, in its home game against the University of Akron. Game time is scheduled for 2 p.m. at the Convocation Center.

The annual Play4Kay initiative provides coaches and student athletes around the country the opportunity to "come together as one" to raise awareness for breast cancer research on the court, in their communities and beyond. Throughout February, high schools, universities and local organizations are dedicated to raise funds and awareness to support the Kay Yow Cancer Fund's (KYCF), mission of supporting scientific research focused on women's cancers, as well as projects assisting the underserved community.

**BUFFALO ON THE HORIZON:** The Jan. 18 contest marks the 20th meeting between the Bulls and Eagles, who first met during the 1993-1994 season. EMU leads the series, 13-6, including winning 10 of the last 12 meetings between the two schools. The teams met only once during the 2012-13 regular season with UB claiming a 79-63 decision at the EMU Convocation Center.

The last time the squads played at Alumni Arena in Buffalo, N.Y. was during the 2011-12 regular season when EMU notched a 72-54 victory.