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EMU Squares Off Against Defending MAC Champions Thursday Night

Thursday, Jan. 30, 2013 » 7 p.m. » McGuirk Arena (5,300) » Mount Pleasant, Mich.

EMU SQUARES OFF AGAINST DEFENDING MAC CHAMPIONS THURSDAY NIGHT: Looking to snap a three-game losing skid, the Eastern Michigan University women's basketball team makes the 140-mile trek to Mount Pleasant, Mich. Thursday, Jan. 30, for a Mid-American Conference West Division tilt versus Central Michigan University. Game time is scheduled for 7 p.m. at McGuirk Arena.

The Eagles (12-6, 2-5 MAC) are looking to regroup after dropping five of their last six league tilts. On the flip side, the Chippewas (11-8, 7-0 MAC) are white-hot as the lone undefeated team remaining in MAC play.

Veteran broadcasters Chad Bush and Greg Steiner will have the call on WEMU (89.1 FM) beginning at 6:50 p.m. Live video and statistics of the game can also be found on CMUChippewas.com.

ALL-TIME AGAINST CENTRAL MICHIGAN: The Jan. 30 contest marks the 73rd meeting between the Chippewas and Eagles, who first met during the 1976-77 season. CMU leads the overall series, 40-32, but EMU has won 19 of the last 27 meetings dating back to the 2000-01 campaign.

Central Michigan got the better of EMU with a 77-51 victory in Mount Pleasant, Jan. 13, 2013. EMU was led by Natachia Watkins with 16 points on 6-of-15 shooting to go along with four steals and four rebounds. India Hairston chipped in nine points and seven boards while Jesha Collins had a career-best eight points in 20 minutes of work.

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Then in the regular season finale, the Chippewas escaped with a 63-56 victory at the Convocation Center, March 6, 2013. Watkins again paced the Eagles with 18 points as Chelsea Hite chipped in 13 to tie a career-high and Desyree Thomas added 12 points and five steals.

**SCORE, SCORE, SCORE:** Defense should be at a premium Thursday, Jan. 30, when the Eagles and Chippewas collide. Both sides have shown a knack for scoring as Eastern Michigan ranks 20th nationally at 81.1 points per game while Central Michigan checks in at number seven with an average of 84.8 points a contest. The Eagles have passed the century mark in points three times during the 2013-14 campaign, including a season-best 120 during an 85-point victory over Marygrove, Nov. 30. The Chippewas have also reached 100 points on three occasions, most recently hanging 113 in a 26-point decision at Western Michigan, Jan. 25.

Both sides will have to be on their game to surpass the historic Feb. 20, 2010, contest between the two programs. That game featured Central outlasting Eastern, 113-107, in double-overtime. The contest, which featured 40 lead changes and 24 ties, saw the Eagles and Chippewas combine for 220 points to break the Mid-American Conference record for most combined points in a league contest. The previous standard of 214 points in a 121-93 victory by Bowling Green over Kent State, Feb. 23, 1991, had stood for 19 seasons.

It also marked the only time in EMU history that both teams had scored more than 100 points.

**MAC FRESHMAN OF THE YEAR CANDIDATES:** Freshmen Cha Sweeney and Janay Morton are both making a strong candidacy for the MAC Freshman of the Year award. The two are the only freshmen ranked inside the top 20 in scoring, Sweeney is sixth in the MAC averaging a team-best 15.0 points a game while ranking ninth in steals (1.9 spg), 10th in both assists (3.2 apg) and assist-to-turnover ratio (1.3). Meanwhile, Morton cracks the ranking in three-pointers made (5th - 2.2), scoring (8th - 14.7 ppg), free-throw percentage (13th - 76.7) and steals (15th - 1.4 spg).

No EMU student-athlete has won the award since Alysaa Pittman claimed the honor following the 2006-07 campaign.

**TOP FRESHMEN SCORERS:** Cha Sweeney and Janay Morton are one of just 14 freshmen ranked nationally in the NCAA's top 250 scorers. The first-year players include: Kelsey Plum, Washington (20.0), Malia Tate-DeFreitas, Hampton (19.1), Sara Dickey, Evansville (18.1), Kaela Davis, Georgia Tech (17.6), Raven Bankston, Delaware St. (17.5), Larryn Brooks, Indiana (17.4), Kaylah Keys, High Point (16.8), Fanni Szabo, Dartmouth (16.5), Diamond DeShields, North Carolina (16.3), Nia Coffey, Northwestern (16.1), Erica Williams, Winthrop (15.3), Sweeney (15.0), Morton (14.7) and Natalie Butler, Georgetown (14.6).

**TOO SHORT?:** Standing at just 5-foot-2, Cha Sweeney might have been labeled coming out of high school as someone too short to play Division I basketball. The Toledo, Ohio product has so far proved those critics wrong, as she ranks 226th nationally in scoring and is the shortest player ranked nationally inside the top 250 scorers. Sweeney joins Longwood's Daesha Brown (15.9 ppg), Ole Miss' Valencia McFarland (16.4 ppg) and Nicholls State's Emani White (18.8 ppg) as the only four players nationwide to average 15-or-more points a contest and be 5-foot-4 or shorter.

**LOOKING TO GET BACK ON TRACK:** After a stellar non-conference start to the season, the Eagles have found the Mid-American Conference portion of the schedule to be much more frustrating. EMU has dropped five of its first seven league affairs and has seen its offensive numbers change dramatically. The Green and White's point production has slowed by more than 13 points per contests (86.4 to 72.9), while giving up 13 more a game (65.4 to 72.9). Rebounding has also been a concern, as opponents are grabbing nearly nine rebounds more a contest than the Eagles in MAC play.

**REBOUNDING WOES:** Heading into the season the Eagles knew they might be at a disadvantage on the glass with just one Eagle tipping the 6-foot mark. Despite the size differential, Eastern continues to lead the Mid-American Conference in rebounding offense with 45.9 caroms per contest.
However, the Green and White have been out-rebounded by more than 13 boards a game during the current three-game losing skid. In the setback to Akron, Jan. 24, the Zips dominated the glass with 65 rebounds including 22 by reigning MAC Player of the Year Rachel Tecca.

**CHIPPEWAS AND EAGLES:** Over the past two seasons, the Eagles and Chippewas have met on the hardwood five times, with CMU tasting victory three times during that span. Despite being on the short side of the equation as of late, EMU's 72-71 last-second victory in the 2012 MAC Championship game will still forever linger in the memories of many. All-American candidate Crystal Bradford is averaging a double-double against the Eagles with 12.2 points and 11.2 rebounds a contest. Surprisingly, it has been senior Taylor Johnson who has done the most damage against EMU with a scoring average of 13.4 to go along with making 54.0 percent (27-of-50) of her shots. Natachia Watkins has been the Eagles' top offensive threat dropping nearly 17 points a contest while grabbing five rebounds a game in the rivalry.

**SPEND SUPER BOWL SUNDAY WITH THE EAGLES AND REDHAWKS:** The Feb. 2 contest marks the 53rd meeting between the Miami RedHawks and Eastern Michigan Eagles, who first met during the 1979-80 season. Miami has dominated the all-time series, 37-15, but the Eagles have won three of the last four meetings. A year ago, Miami rolled to a 70-48 win in Oxford, Ohio, Jan. 20, 2013.

**SUPER BOWL = EMU WIN?** For just the fourth time in the program's 38-year history, the Eagles will play on the same day as the National Football League's Super Bowl. EMU has posted victories on two occasions, only dropping last year's matchup, 56-41, to Ball State. Each time EMU has played on the date though, the American Football Conference (AFC) Champions have walked away with victories. So, if EMU's winning tradition holds true to form, the Denver Broncos will also defeat the Seattle Seahawks in Super Bowl XLVIII. The then-Hurons notched a 79-74 overtime victory against Pittsburgh at venerable Bowen Field House, Jan. 20, 1980, while the Pittsburgh Steelers were capturing a 31-19 decision over the Los Angeles Rams in Super Bowl XIV. Then on Feb. 5, 2005, Eastern Michigan finished off Central Michigan, 60-48, in Mount Pleasant, Mich. as the New England Patriots edged the Philadelphia Eagles, 24-21, in Super Bowl XXXIX.

**YOUTH BEING SERVED:** Heading into the 2013-14 campaign, Head Coach Tory Verdi knew he would be leading a very young team this season as the Eagles welcomed eight newcomers to the roster. In 18 games, the newcomers have combined for 54.7 percent (798 points) of the squad's offense.

**NORTHWEST OHIO COMES TO YPSI:** Eastern Michigan has long had a history of pulling student-athletes from Northwest Ohio, but Head Coach Tory Verdi has taken it to a whole new level. The Eagles feature three products from the Toledo area including Olivia Fouty (Sylvania Northview), KaBria Walker (Toledo Rogers) and Cha Sweeney (Toledo Rogers). The three have combined for 29.9 percent of the team's rebounds and 33.8 percent of its offense.