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Recommended Citation
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EMU Gymnastics Begins 2014 Campaign With Tough Quad Test

Eagles flock to Kent, Ohio to compete against No. 21 Kent State, George Washington and No. 16 Rutgers

1/15/2014 12:47:00 PM

YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) - The Eastern Michigan University gymnastics team will lift the lid on its 2014 campaign with a trip to Kent, Ohio for a quad meet, Jan. 17, against host Kent State University, George Washington University and Rutgers University. The meet will begin at 7 p.m. from the Memorial Athletic and Convention (M.A.C.) Center, and the matchup with the Golden Flashes will count as a Mid-American Conference dual.

"We are very excited about this very strong team led by upperclassmen," noted EMU Head Coach Steve Wilce, who returns to guide the Eagles in his 32nd season. "This team has a lot of depth and experience, and we also added six new faces."

Key Returners: Despite losing four seniors from last year's squad (Brittany Cassar, Camille Cicchini, Amanda Fuller and Kristina Kurkmiles), the 2014 Eagles return two Second Team All-MAC members Khadijah Hudson and Anna Willette. Hudson had a breakout freshman campaign in which she racked up six individual wins on her way to representing the Green and White at the NCAA Regional in Tuscaloosa, Ala. In 2013, the Hebron, Ky. native earned two MAC weekly awards, including MAC Gymnast of the Week, March 6, for recording the third best all around score (39.175) in school history as well as tying the 10th highest mark on floor (9.875). Willette, the other
EMU all-conference honoree, turned in a sensational sophomore season as the MAC's top vaulter, averaging a 9.828 through all 11 meets, including marks of 9.875 in three different meets, ranking fifth in EMU laurels. She completed the season with a runner-up finish on the vault at the 2013 MAC Championship, posting a 9.800.

Aside from Hudson and Willette, Eastern will also be led by a pair of captains (senior Ashley Quinton and junior Paulina Miller) as well as three additional seniors (Shawna Ciaramella, Miranda Jarvis and Taylor Patterson) and two redshirt juniors (Chantelle Loehner and Kaylee Meyers). In her final year as an Eagle, Quinton will compete as a specialist on bars. Recording a career-high 9.825 in a runner-up showing at Bowling Green was the highlight of the 2013 season for the Calgary, Alberta native. As for Miller, she brings experience on the vault, beam and floor after competing in all 11 meets just a season ago. The EMU co-captain secured the 10th best floor score in program history as she won the Eagle Invitational with a 9.875.

**Fresh Faces:** EMU also welcomes six new Eagles looking to make immediate impacts as freshmen: Kelsie Brooks, Natalie Gervais, Bianca Jordaan, Sydney McEachern, Lacey Rubin and Taylor Young. Gervais was one of the top young gymnasts in Canada, representing her country at the 2013 World University Games in Kazan, Russia while fellow Canadian, Jordaan, claimed the national championship on the vault in 2011.

**Swinging on the Bars:** Ashley Quinton, Carrina Lo Bello, Khadijah Hudson, Taylor Patterson, and Anna Willette return to compete on bars after completing strong and consistent routines throughout last year. Nikki Paterson and Kaylee Meyers will also be in the mix as the upperclassmen have both seen action on bars. Junior Ariyanna Smith, along with freshmen Bianca Jordaan, Lacey Rubin, Natalie Gervais, and Kelsie Brooks will look to earn a spot in the rotation as well. "Ariyanna has a very strong and dynamic bar routine that could add a lot to the team," noted EMU Associate Head Coach Andrea Price. "Bianca and Lacey have very strong routines and both of them have "E" skills while Natalie and Kelsie are very clean on bars and very pretty to watch."

**Balance on the Beam:** Expect Anna Willette, Shawna Ciaramella, Kimberly Ebeyer, Kaylee Meyers, and Carrina Lo Bello to start off in the beam rotation. Returning Eagles Paulina Miller and Nikki Paterson are looking strong throughout practice and have improved this year, looking to fill the final spot in the lineup. "We have some new faces on beam this year; Sydney McEachern is very dynamic and has a big dismount," added Coach Price. "Natalie Gervais is very clean and consistent and could have a major impact on this event with her very clean lines. Taylor Young is proven to be a 'beamer' and is very consistent in practice. Also, Lacey Rubin is very aggressive and should develop into a strong athlete on beam."

**Valiant Vaulters:** On vault, another core group of Eagles led by Paulina Miller, Khadijah Hudson, Anna Willette, Ashlin Chambliss, and Carrina Lo Bello come back as veterans in the event. Watch for sophomore Kimberly Ebeyer to be a contender on vault with her consistent ability. Freshmen Bianca Jordaan, Sydney McEachern, Kelsie Brooks, and Taylor Young are strong options for the rotation and bring depth to the event.

**Floor Flyers:** NCAA Regional Qualifier Khadijah Hudson will lead the floor routines alongside co-captain Paulina Miller, who recorded the 10th-best mark in EMU history last year with a 9.875. Chantelle Loehner was one of the most consistent scorers a season ago and is expected to continue her success. Coach Price, in her 11th season at EMU, gave her take on a few other gymnasts vying to compete on the floor. "We are excited to have Kaylee Meyers back and for her to be a real impact on floor this year. Last year, due to injury, she only saw a few meets and we feel she can make a big impact on this event. Shawna Ciaramella has really upgraded her routine and looks the best she has ever looked. Kimberly Ebeyer is looking strong and has strong dance on floor and should be a new face here. Nikki Paterson is really coming into her own and is very clean. Freshmen on floor would be Bianca Jordaan and Sydney McEachern. Both of these athletes bring strong tumbling ability, and we are excited to see what they can do in competition. Taylor Young, Natalie Gervais, and Kelsie Brooks are strong athletes on floor, and we are
anxious to see them develop on this event."

**Focusing on the Golden Flashes:** Kent State enters 2014 as the preseason favorites to win the MAC Championship, voted by the MAC coaches in their annual poll. Last year, the Golden Flashes went undefeated in regular season conference play and finished No. 23 in the nation, placing sixth at the NCAA Regional in Tuscaloosa, Ala. 2013 MAC Co-Gymnast of the Year Marie Case returns for her senior season to lead KSU.

In its first meet of the year, Jan. 12, Kent State flew past Southeast Missouri State, 194.725-192.375, to earn a top-25 ranking with 21st-highest score in the country. Case won three of the four events with a high score of 9.825 on the bars. Freshman Olivia Trout completed the event sweep with a victory on the vault, tallying a 9.825 in her first meet as a KSU gymnast.

**Scouting the Scarlet Knights:** Rutgers enters the quad meet after opening the season up with a decisive 195.075-191.750 victory over New Hampshire, Jan. 11. The meet score broke the program record for the highest total in a season-opening meet while also rising to the fifth-best mark in Rutgers history. The impressive mark moved the Scarlet Knights up to the No. 16 spot in the national rankings. Luisa Leal and Alexis Gunzelman competed in all four events, recording marks of 39.225 and 38.975, respectively. Four different Scarlet Knights won various events as freshman April Baker and Leal tied for first on the vault with scores of 9.825. A personal-best 9.800 from junior Emma Hoffman paced Rutgers on the beam, while Gunzelman's 9.825 took the beam and Leal wowed judges on the floor with a 9.900.

**Capsule on the Colonials:** George Washington kicked off its season with a bang, winning the four-team Lindsey Ferris Invitational, Jan. 12. The Colonials' total of 193.025 was enough to get past Cornell (188.750), Temple (186.775) and Penn (183.125). Led by Kayla Carto's 38.425 win in the all around, George Washington stood at the top of the podium in each event. In her first meet as a Colonial, Chelsea Raineri tallied a pair of 9.850s to claim the vault and floor exercise. Senior Kiera Kenney received a 9.825 on the bars from the judges, and Betsy Zander held the high score on the beam with a 9.725.

**2014 Schedule:** Following the quad meet at Kent State that kicks off the 2014 season, the Eagles remain on the road for a dual against MAC foe Bowling Green, Jan. 25. Beginning in the month of February, EMU partners with Central Michigan for the annual Michigan/Illinois Challenge, Feb. 1, battling Illinois-Chicago and Illinois State. After teaming up with the Chippewas, the two in-state rivals square off in a conference dual at Bowen Field House, Feb. 7, kicking off the home slate for the Eagles. The Green and White has back-to-back home meets against their rivals as Western Michigan comes to Ypsilanti, Feb. 15. The longest road trip of the season occurs when EMU flocks west to Colorado to face the Air Force Academy in a pair of meets, Feb. 26 and March 1. One week after the latter dual against the Falcons, March 8, Eastern hosts Air Force, Northern Illinois and Temple for the Eagle Invitational. Six days later, Coach Wilce and his team wrap up the dual portion of the schedule with a meet at Ball State, March 14. The Eagles will then close out the 2014 season by hosting six other conference opponents for the 2013 MAC Championships, March 22, inside the Convocation Center.