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Eagles Will Partner With Chippewas For Michigan/Illinois Challenge

Quad meet set to begin at 2 p.m., Feb. 1, in Mt. Pleasant, Mich.

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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) - The Eastern Michigan University gymnastics team returns to the mats, Feb. 1, partnering with Central Michigan University in the Michigan/Illinois Challenge in Mount Pleasant, Mich. CMU will host the quad meet against Illinois State University and the University of Illinois-Chicago, with the action beginning at 2 p.m. inside McGuirk Arena. All four teams will compete against each other, but the two schools from each state will combine their scores to see which state wins the annual competition.

Last Season's Challenge: Last year, Feb. 2, 2013, the two in-state rivals combined for a score of 388.725 to defeat the Illinois schools of Illinois State and Illinois at Chicago, 388.725-385.90. The Eagles finished third with their individual team score of 192.850. Central Michigan took first individually with a mark of 195.875. Illinois State scored 194.100 to take second, and UIC finished fourth with a 192.800.

EMU's best event that night came on the vault where the Eagles scored 49.025. Anna Willette once again led the Eagles in two events with a pair of third place finishes. On the vault, the Pylesville, Md. native recorded a career-high 9.875 while scoring a 9.800 on the bars. Brittany Cassar and Kaylee Meyers both tallied 9.700 on the beam for Eastern. Then-freshman Khadijah Hudson tied her career high with a 9.800 on the floor exercise to lead the Green and White.
**Ready for the Redbirds:** Illinois State enters the challenge with a 1-4 record, coming off a setback to Lindenwood, 189.950-190.175, in its latest meet against the Lions, Jan. 24. The Redbirds tallied a season-high 190.400 against Penn in their only victory of the season, Jan. 18. ISU is led by junior Sami King, who is a native of nearby Canton, Mich. In four meets this season, King has claimed the all around title in three of them, including a season-high score of 39.000 in the opener vs. Ball State, Jan. 4. King has been a leader on the mats throughout her collegiate career, qualifying for NCAA Regionals in the all around her previous two seasons.

**Isolating Illinois-Chicago:** UIC, similar to Illinois State, comes into the meet sporting a 1-4 record after defeating Lindenwood in its previous matchup, 192.225-189.700, Jan. 26. The score against Lindenwood was the highest out of the three meets the Flames have competed in this season. Senior Catherine Dion led UIC in the victory, claiming titles on bars and beam as well as in the all around competition. The Canadian recorded a 39.075 total score, eclipsing the 9.700 mark in all four apparatuses that included a score of 9.825 on bars.

**Checking on the Chippewas:** The host Chippewas are ranked No. 23 in the country, averaging a team total of 194.750 to go along with their undefeated 4-0 record. Central is nationally ranked for the second time this season after sitting in the 22nd spot two weeks ago. Last time out, CMU opened up MAC play with a decisive 195.800-192.350 victory over Ball State, Jan. 26. Senior Brittany Petzold leads the squad, touting the 21st-best all around average in the country at 39.175. Her younger sister, Kirsten, is a sophomore on the team, ranking second in the MAC on vault a season ago just behind EMU's Anna Willette. She recorded a career-high 9.925 in Sunday's (Jan. 26) win over Ball State.

**Eagles Drop Dual to Bowling Green:** EMU fell to the Bowling Green State University Falcons, 194.600-192.525, in a MAC dual inside Anderson Arena, Jan. 25. On vault, reigning MAC Co-Specialist of the Week Khadijah Hudson finished runner-up in the event with a 9.800 to pace the Eagles. Teammate Anna Willette reached the goal mark of 9.700 for fifth place before tallying a 9.775 to lead EMU on beam, finishing third as an individual. A 9.725 by Carrina Lo Bello paced the Green and White on bars, while team co-captain Paulina Miller notched a team-best 9.725 on the floor exercise.

**Top O’ The MAC:** After receiving all-conference accolades a season ago, two Eagles have quickly soared to the top of the MAC charts to begin the season. Sophomore Khadijah Hudson currently leads the conference's vaulters with a 9.825 average and a season-high 9.850. Teammate Anna Willette, the top vaulter in the MAC a season ago, is now soaring to the top of the conference on beam. The Eastern junior is ranked third through the early portion of the 2014 campaign, boasting a 9.712 average that includes a 9.775 against Bowling Green, Jan. 25. Both Eagles were All-MAC Second Team honorees in 2013.

**Facing the Nation’s Best:** Head Coach Steve Wilce and his squad has had their hands full to start the 2014 season. Four of the first six opponents on the schedule are nationally-ranked. The Eagles opened up the season with a quad meet at Kent State, when the Golden Flashes were ranked No. 21 in the country. In addition to KSU, No. 16 Rutgers University competed in the meet. Eastern will partner with No. 23 Central Michigan for the Michigan/Illinois Challenge, Feb. 1, before hosting the Chippewas the following week, Feb. 7, at Bowen Field House for a MAC dual.

**Home Opener With CMU Awaits:** After teaming up for the Michigan/Illinois Challenge, the Eagles and Chippewas will square off in a head-to-head Mid-American Conference dual at Bowen Field House, Feb. 7, at 7 p.m. The Friday night contest will lift the lid on the 2014 home schedule for the Green and White, the first of four meets hosted by Eastern.