

SIUE men knock off EIU for first time ever 72-64 in Charleston

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CHARLESTON, Ill. – SIUE men's basketball scored its first-ever win in Charleston, knocking off Eastern Illinois 72-64 Saturday night at Lantz Arena.

SIUE improved to 5-20 overall and 2-11 in the OVC. The Cougars had been 0-6 all-time in Charleston before Saturday's win. EIU dropped to 11-15 overall and 7-6 in the OVC.

The guys have stayed the course," SIUE Head Coach Jon Harris said. "I thought the second half against Murray was something for us to try and build off of. I thought the guys did a tremendous job of that tonight."

The Panthers got out to a fast start, leading 12-3 at the first media timeout. The Cougars answered with a 13-0 run and led 16-12 following a pair of [Burak Eslik](#) free throws with 11:34 to play in the half. The Cougars had two more runs of six points each, including to end the half, and carried a 32-25 lead into the break.

Following halftime, Eastern Illinois again started fast and pulled within one when Luke Piotrowski knocked down free throws to make it 34-33 with 17:20 to play. SIUE responded with an 11-2 run punctuated by three-pointers on back-to-back possessions by Eslik with 13:44 to play.

EIU got as close as four points on a foul shot by Cornell Johnston with 1:22 to play. Eslik answered with a layup to move the lead back to six (63-57). Eslik secured the win with eight free throws over the final 44 seconds.

"Bottom line is we won the second half by one," Harris said. "We were patient. We had a few too many turnovers, but the guys stayed the course and found a way to get a win. That's really a credit to them for continuing to scratch and claw."

Eslik paced the Cougars with 29 points, the second best offensive night of his career. He was 7 for 14 from the field and 12 for 12 at the free throw line. It is the sixth 20-point game of his career. It is the second time this season he has been perfect from the free throw line.

"He was tremendous," Harris said of Eslik. "He let the game come to him. He didn't force the issue."

[Grant Fiorentinos](#) was the only other SIUE player in double figures. He finished with 14 points and was 6 for 10 from the field. He added five rebounds.

"Grant was huge," Harris added. "He has been a good scorer for us really all year. The thing I applaud Grant for more so than scoring is he was able to get five rebounds. He did a good job on the defensive end."

[Mike Chandler](#) six points and led SIUE with eight rebounds. He added two assists and three blocks.

The Cougars were 23 of 28 from the free throw line, including connecting on 14 of 16 attempts during the second half.

"One thing we talked about before the game was to win the free throw battle," Harris said. "We are much more effective when we shoot and make more free throws than our opponent. We were able to do that at least as far as the makes tonight."

SIUE controlled the glass, outrebounding Eastern Illinois 46-25. The Cougars had 16 offensive rebounds and scored 18 second chance points.

"We shot 42 percent from the floor, which is a pretty good number," Harris said. "You add 16 offensive rebounds and that is why we were able to win the ballgame. We did a tremendous job on the boards."

Trae Anderson scored 29 points and added eight rebounds to lead the Panthers. No other EIU player finished in double figures scoring. Piotrowski scored nine points.

The Cougars continue a three-game road trip with games at Southeast Missouri and UT Martin. SIUE tips off at SEMO Thursday at 7 p.m.

"Each game is an opportunity to grow, get better and establish an identity," Harris said. "With the last three halves of basketball, we're coming closer to the blueprint. We have to find a way to maintain that going down the stretch."