

Huge first half propels Cougars to road win

by Joe Pott

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PHOENIX – SIUE men's basketball scored the first 12 points of the game, built a 20-point halftime lead and held out for a 76-64 win over Grand Canyon in nonconference action Monday night at GCU Arena.

"It's very impressive," SIUE Head Coach [Jon Harris](#) said. "Our guys didn't get fazed by the environment and it was tremendous. This is one of the best environments I've been in at any level. I applaud our guys for coming in, executing the game plan for a full game and sticking together."

The Cougars have won two straight and improved to 4-3 for the season. The win is the second true road win of the year for SIUE. The loss snapped a three-game winning streak for Grand Canyon which fell to 3-3.

[Burak Eslik](#) opened the scoring with a three-pointer to get the Cougars off and running just over a minute into the game. [Jalen Henry](#) scored four points, [Christian Ellis](#) added three and [Carlos Anderson](#) scored two to give SIUE a 12-0 lead at the first media timeout with 15:11 remaining in the first half.

The Lopes got on the board with a free throw after the timeout and then scored their first field goal on a Dewayne Russell layup with 14:35 left in the half which sparked an 8-0 run.

SIUE followed with a 7-0 run to push the score to 21-8 with 10:45 to play. The Cougars' lead hovered between 9-15 points for much of the remainder of the half.

A Kerwin Smith dunk with 1:59 left brought GCU within 12 (37-25), but SIUE finished the half on an 8-0 run, punctuated by an Eslik three-pointer with seven seconds left and the Cougars held a 45-25 halftime lead.

The 45 points are the most in a first half by the Cougars this year and the second-most points in any half.

"We told them (at halftime) to play as if the score was zero-zero," Harris said. "You can never play passive or play scared, play tentative. You have to stay in attack mode."

The Cougars never trailed and extended their lead to as many as 23 when Anderson converted a traditional three-point play with a reverse layup and a free throw with 18:17 to play to make it 50-27.

Grand Canyon made several runs on the Cougars and got as close as 10 points at 69-59, but never trimmed SIUE's lead to single digits.

GCU finished the game at 31.7 percent (19-60) shooting. The Lopes were just 4 for 24 from three-point range.

"I thought our zone really bothered them," Harris added. "We did a good job making our free throws. For the second game in a row we did a pretty sound job defensively. This is a good offensive team and we held them to 17 percent on three's and 19 field goals for the game. We got some shots to fall."

SIUE was 25-53 (47.2 percent) from the field, including hitting seven of 15 attempts from three-point range.

Anderson led five SIUE players in double figures. He tied his career high with 18 points on 6-of-10 shooting. He was 6 for 7 at the free throw line.

"The last few games Carlos hasn't settled," Harri said. We want guys to take what they give you. Carlos did a great job of that tonight. He was aggressive attacking the rim. He made his free throws and he did some good things."

Eslik and Henry each scored 13 points. [Tre Harris](#) and [Keenan Simmons](#) each scored 11. Simmons added 12 rebounds for his second double-double this season and of his career.

"That makes us a tough team for opponents to defend," Harris said of the scoring. "If we can defend on the other end, we're going to have a chance in ballgames."

SIUE outrebounded Grand Canyon 40-36. It is the second consecutive game the Cougars have grabbed at least 40 rebounds and outrebounded their opponent.

"Something we talk about is gang rebounds," Harris explained. "That means five guys have to pursue the basketball on the defensive end. I thought we did pretty good job of that tonight."

Russell led Grand Canyon with a game-high 26 points. Keonta Vernon added 16 points and 14 rebounds.

SIUE remains on the road to face No. 10/13 Indiana Friday night at Assembly Hall in Bloomington, Indiana. Tip is scheduled for 6 p.m. CT.