

# SIUE seniors savor 78-59 victory over EIU

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EDWARDSVILLE – SIUE seniors [Josh White](#) and [Burak Eslik](#) teamed for 42 points in guiding SIUE men's basketball past Eastern Illinois 78-59 before 1,805 fans at the Vadalabene Center.

SIUE snapped a 15-game losing streak and finished the season 6-24 overall and 1-15 in the OVC. It was the Cougars' first victory since Dec. 28 and they thoroughly savored it.

"Before the game, we talked about how it was a special night," said Eslik, who scored a team-best 22 points. "We wanted to leave it all on the court. And we did that."

White poured in a career-high 20 points his final game to enjoy the Cougars' lopsided win.

"It was a testament to the guys we have, because we stuck together all season," White said. "Definitely, this felt good. I was getting emotional in practice Friday because I knew this was my last game."

He added, "I got an opportunity to play here and I will always cherish and remember it. I was thankful to be a part of it."

Nobody was happier about the Cougars' sharp outing than second-year Head Coach [Jon Harris](#). He praised the players for their snappy performance.

"I felt like we won 20 games," he quipped in the aftermath of the emotional victory. "I think the win is more for the guys than anything else. It's evidence to them that we have been doing things in a right way."

Harris added, "We (coaching staff) have never wavered. We're trying to build a foundation on and off the court here."

[Devin Thornton](#), another senior, tossed in 12 points, while junior [Jalen Henry](#) contributed 13 points and six rebounds. Redshirt-junior Glen Pierre Jr. also played his final game for SIUE.

The Cougars shot in front early, grabbing a 23-18 lead, thanks mainly to Eslik's nine points. Eslik tallied 13 first-half points as SIUE led 37-29 at the break.

EIU, 14-15 overall and 6-10 in the OVC, crept to within 39-35 early in the second half, but SIUE wouldn't let the Panthers get any closer. The Cougars forged in front 53-43 midway through the second half and stretched their advantage to 68-53 with three minutes to go. Muusa Dama led the Panthers with 18 points and 12 rebounds, yet it was enough.

"I'm excited and proud of our guys and the way they played," Harris said. "It's really special for them to finish the way they did. They are a special group. Now, we needed to stay the course and continue to believe."

Eslik believes the Cougars will keep improving since they display a positive attitude.

"We are like a family and everybody did something to help," Eslik said. "We knew we weren't going to play in next week's conference tournament, so we played like we had nothing to lose."

Harris can see that positive approach and family attitude carrying on into next season.

"Burak and Josh talked about it being a family and those seniors really stepped up tonight," Harris said. "This group didn't want to let the seniors down. The guys wanted this game for all the right reasons and we did some good things on both ends of the court.

"We have to continue to push forward and this will be a huge off-season for us," Harris continued. "We need to add some key pieces, but we like what we have coming back for next season."