

Troeckler, Bell and Bauman push SIUE women to 68-61 win Sunday

by Joe Pott

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EDWARDSVILLE – SIUE started its women's basketball season in grand style Sunday. The Cougars used a robust fourth quarter to overtake Illinois State, 68-61, in their opener at the Vadalabene Center. SIUE trailed by eight points late in the third quarter before staging a dramatic comeback.

"It's a great way to start the season and the biggest thing about a win like this is that it will really boost our confidence," seventh-year Cougars' Head Coach Paula Buscher said. SIUE won its sixth consecutive home opener, improved to 29-11 in all-time home debuts and evened its series record with ISU at 3-3.

Buscher added, "We did it was a team and had a great effort down the stretch. I really like the way how we played together."

ISU, ahead 31-28 at half, led 51-43 late in the third quarter and 51-45 at the end of it. Then the Cougars went to work. They outscored the Redbirds 23-10 in the decisive fourth quarter. SIUE used a 13-0 spree to turn a 56-53 deficit into a 66-56 advantage with 2:05 remaining.

"Our energy went up and we played better defense," said senior guard Nakiah Bell said.

Sophomore teammate Allie Troeckler noted, "We started playing with a lot of confidence and trusting our teammates."

Bell, Troeckler and senior Sydney Bauman spurred the Cougars' fourth-quarter surge. Bell connected on back-to-back –pointers to give SIUE a 61-56 lead with four minutes remaining. Teammate Zaria Whitlock then contributed a three-point play 30 seconds later to make it 64-56.

"I didn't think the game was ever out of reach for us," Buscher said, "and you could feel the excitement in the fourth quarter when the momentum was going our way."

Troeckler and Bell both scored 13 points to power the Cougars. Troeckler also snared eight rebounds and three assists. Bell registered four treys in her double-digit scoring and Bauman punched in 12 points to go with a dozen rebounds. Bauman recorded all of her points in the second half. The double-double was the fifth of the senior's career.

SIUE withstood the scoring of 6-foot, 2-inch ISU center Simon Goods, a 25-point scorer, four shy of her career high. Goods, the Newcomer of the Year last season in the Missouri Valley Conference, scored 15 points at half and 23 after three quarters. The Cougars then limited her production in the fourth quarter.

"She is tough and hard to guard," Buscher said of Goods. "But we mixed it up on defense against her in the second half and that made a difference."

SIUE made 26 of 62 shots, including 6 of 16 from 3-point land. The Cougars also converted 10 of 15 free throws and outrebounded the Redbirds 37-33. ISU made 22 of 54 shots, but just 4 of 23 from beyond the arc. The Redbirds sank 13 of 14 foul shots.

Now, the Cougars hit the road for a nine game consecutive games, with the first one coming Wednesday at Evansville. They will play Nov. 19 at Missouri. SIUE doesn't return home until Sunday, Dec. 30, when the Cougars entertain McKendree.

"I like the speed we have on this team," Troeckler said. "We also have depth and a lot of confidence. I think this win will boost our confidence even more."

Illinois State returns home to welcome North Dakota on Wednesday. The Redbirds, picked to finish fifth in the 10-team MVC, have 10 more conference games before opening conference play Jan. 4 at home against Northern Iowa.