


Cougars Drop Season Opener at Kansas

by Eric Hess


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62

SIUE 0-1,0-0 OVC



98

Kansas 1-0,0-0 Big 12

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SIUE	6	11	31	14	62
Kansas	23	23	23	29	98

LAWRENCE, Kan. – [Mikayla Kinnard](#) scored all of her team-leading 14 points in the second half Wednesday but the SIUE women's basketball team opened the 2021-22 season with a 98-62 loss to Kansas at Allen Fieldhouse.

[Ajulu Thatha](#) and [Gabby Nikitinaite](#) added 11 points for the Cougars, which dropped to 0-1.

SIUE Head Coach [Samantha Quigley Smith](#) said this is a game that is preparing the Cougars for the road ahead.

"We're preparing for next week. We're preparing for the OVC (Ohio Valley Conference). We're preparing for January," she said. "We're learning, and we're learning quickly. We're learning early. A group like this needs that."

Kansas shot 54.5 percent from the field as a team. Aniya Thomas came off the bench to lead the Jayhawks with 25 points.

"We're finding our way in this offense and in this defensive pressure," said Smith. "It was fun to do it against an elite team. They are a Big 12 team and you force 27 turnovers. I think that's something you have to look at as a positive for us."

The Jayhawks used a clear size advantage to score 44 points in the paint. Those buckets down low along with 12 three-pointers gave Kansas, 1-0, the upper hand.

"Getting a test this early with a team that is a lot bigger is important for us in preparing for Memphis and the next week," said Smith.

SIUE next travels to Memphis for a 2 p.m. contest Sunday.

The Cougars fell behind early in the season opener, trailing 23-6 after one period and 46-17 by the halftime buzzer.

"We had a rough first quarter so it's kind of hard to recover from something like that," said Smith.

SIUE challenged Kansas by outshining and outscoring the Jayhawks in third quarter 31-23. Kinnard had 12 points in the period while Nikitinaite added nine.

"I think she (Kinnard) settled down and got a feel for the game, which we obviously needed," Smith said. "We saw some bright spots. We forced 27 turnovers and had 15 offensive rebounds."

Smith also reflected on the trip and being able to show her team where the game of basketball got started.

"This has been a phenomenal experience coming to Kansas with the basketball history and where James Naismith started everything," said Smith. "Our team got to see a museum yesterday. Just that experience of being in a place. It's a holy grail of basketball."