

Cougars Clinch Tournament Berth With Win

February 20 2015 9:46 AM



EDWARDSVILLE, Ill. – SIUE men's basketball locked up its second straight [Ohio Valley Conference](#) tournament bid with a 75-72 victory over Southeast Missouri Thursday at Vadalabene Center.

Thursday's win is No. 600 in the history of SIUE's men's basketball program.

"Anytime you have goals over the course of the year and you achieve one, you feel good about it," SIUE Head Coach Lennox Forrester said. "But we understand the work is not done."

SIUE improved to 11-14 overall, matching its win total from last season. The Cougars are now 7-7 in the OVC, which also matches last year's win mark. Southeast Missouri fell to 12-15 overall and 6-8 in the OVC.

It what truly was a game of runs, it was SIUE who, for the second consecutive game, got out to a fast start. The Cougars opened up a 7-1 lead before the first media timeout. SIUE pushed its lead to 30-17 before Southeast Missouri pushed back.

Isiah Jones personally ran off the next 13 points for Southeast Missouri to knot the score 30-30 with 1:46 to play before halftime. The Redhawks finished the half on a 17-2 run to lead 34-32 at the break.

Southeast Missouri continued its run after the break, swelling the lead to nine points (51-42) with 13:05 to play in the game.

[Kris Davis](#) capped off a 17-4 SIUE run with a layup at 6:55 to make it 59-55 Cougars. Though the Redhawks pulled even once, they did not lead again. [Donivine Stewart](#) gave SIUE its largest lead of the second half with a layup to make it 70-61 with just 51 seconds left.

Jones hit three-pointers on consecutive Southeast Missouri possessions to trim SIUE's lead to just 73-70 with 22 seconds left. [Keaton Jackson](#) hit one of two free throws to extend the Cougar lead back to four. Nino Johnson cut it to 74-72 with a dunk with just eight seconds to play. Davis hit one of two free throws with seven seconds left for the final margin.

Davis led three SIUE players in double figures with 15 points. Jackson finished the game with 13 points while [Rozell Nunn](#) added 12. In all, six Cougars scored at least seven points. [Michael Messer](#) and [Jake Newton](#) each scored nine points. Stewart added seven points and four assists.

SIUE connected on 51.8 percent (29-56) of its shots, marking back-to-back games the Cougars have shot 50 percent or better from the field. SIUE scored 46 points in the paint and turned 14 Southeast Missouri turnovers into 23 points.

"Our guys were trying to be aggressive tonight," Forrester said. "SEMO has length and height and a good shot blocker in Nino Johnson, but we didn't want to settle for jump shots. We wanted to get to the lane and let them stop us. Our game plan is always to attack the bucket first."

Jones and Jarekious Bradley each scored 21 points to lead the Redhawks. Bradley added 12 rebounds for the double-double. Johnson added 15 points in the loss.

The Cougars finish their home schedule Saturday with a 7 p.m. game against UT Martin before playing their final regular season game next Thursday at Austin Peay. The OVC tournament begins March 4 in Nashville, Tennessee.

"Last year when we clinched a tournament spot, we lost the last three games going into the tournament and didn't have any type of momentum," Forrester said. "This year, we want it to be different."

Text @RB to 618-202-4618 to sign up for Text Alerts from RiverBender!