

SIUE Women's Basketball Downs Tennessee State On Thursday

by Owen Hetherington
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EDWARDSVILLE – [KK Rodriguez](#) collected a career-high seven rebounds while three Cougars scored in double-figures as SIUE defeated Tennessee State 76-69 on Thursday evening at First Community Arena.

The Cougars improve to 3-11 overall and 2-1 in Ohio Valley Conference play. Tennessee State drops to 5-9 and 0-3.

"I'm incredibly proud of our group," Head Coach [Samantha Quigley Smith](#) said. "That's a good Tennessee State team that forces a lot of turnovers. They're one of the most athletic teams in the conference. We guarded well and grabbed big rebounds when we needed to."

SIUE grabbed the opening five points in the second quarter and never looked back, holding its lead for the remainder of the contest. The Cougars grabbed an 11-point lead, their largest lead of the night midway through the second on a 9-0 run.

The Cougars shot 48 percent (13-27) from the floor and 2-3 from long range, taking a 43-35 lead at the break. SIUE forced 16 turnovers in the first half and finished the game with a season-best 25 turnovers.

"We we're really dialed in from a defensive standpoint," added Smith. "It's not just about when the ball is in our hands when everyone's eyes light up. It's about when the ball is not in our hands and all those things that we're doing when the ball is away from us. All around, we did a great job of making things difficult for them."

The Cougars finished the game shooting 44 percent from the field and 6-16 from deep.

SIUE also turned in a 20-assist outing, its most in a game this season. Rodriguez and [Mikayla Kinnard](#) led the Cougars with four apiece. Six other players contributed at least one assist in the victory.

"I say this to our four little kids at home: sharing is caring," said Smith. "You show how much you care and love a teammate by making an extra pass. You only get multiple players in double-figures by the basketball throughout an offense."

Three players scored in double-figures, led by [Ajulu Thatha](#) with 17. She was 5-11 from the field and 7-9 from the free throw line. Rodriguez added 16 points while [Sofie Lewis](#) contributed 13. Lewis finished the game 4-9 from beyond the arc, tying a season-high in three-pointers made. [Olivia Clayton](#) and [Molly Sheehan](#) each scored nine points.

"Today was just about doing what my team needed," said Rodriguez. "I felt like I needed to step up in the post and rebounding."

The Cougars will travel to Evansville, Indiana to take on Southern Indiana at Screaming Eagles Arena on Saturday. First tip is slated for 5:00 p.m.

"They're becoming a really selfless group, which is awesome to see," said Smith.

"Especially going into January and February when you want to be playing your best basketball."