

SIUE Outlasts Southern Indiana

by Joe Pott

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EDWARDSVILLE – SIUE men's basketball withstood a late push from Southern Indiana to come away with a 67-64 Thursday win at First Community Arena.

SIUE improved to 2-2 in Ohio Valley Conference play and 9-8 overall. Southern Indiana dropped to 2-3 in the OVC and 5-13 overall.

"We made the big play when we had to make the big play," SIUE Head Coach [Brian Barone](#) said. "As we grow as a team, we're going to continue to learn. Really, we shouldn't have had to have so many big plays."

SIUE opened with a 7-0 start and never trailed in the first half, taking a 33-26 lead into the break.

Southern Indiana opened the second half on an 11-2 run to lead 37-35 at the first media timeout of the second half.

"It's hard because after three minutes your down two," Barone said. "There was a calmness in that stretch. Because we have guys who are great teammates and guys that have been there."

The Cougars followed with a 7-0 run and USI countered with a 9-0 run to lead 46-42.

SIUE then made a 17-2 run to open an 11-point lead (59-48) with 3:11 left. Southern Indiana got the game back with one at 65-64 with 14 seconds left, but a pair of [Ray'Sean Taylor](#) free throws pushed the lead to three.

Southern Indiana had the ball back with 10 seconds left, but A.J. Smith missed a three-point attempt at the buzzer.

"Both teams really cared," Barone said. "You know every game really matters."

The Cougars limited USI to just 36 percent shooting (20-56). The Screaming Eagles were 6-19 (32 percent) from three-point range. The game marked the 10th time this season SIUE has held an opponent to 70 points or less.

"Our defensive effort was great, especially in the first half when we held them to 26 points," Barone said.

[Damarco Minor](#) and [Shamar Wright](#) each scored 16 points to lead the Cougars. Minor was 9-10 at the free throw line and also grabbed nine rebounds. [Desmond Polk](#) finished with 10 points off the bench, marking the second consecutive game he has scored in double figures.

"I'm trusting myself and believing in myself, but also my teammates believe in me," Polk said.

A.J. Smith scored 20 points and added 12 rebounds for USI. Jeremiah Hernandez scored 15 points.

SIUE entertains Morehead State Saturday morning in a nationally televised game on ESPNU.

"We put ourselves in this position through the work that these guys have put in," Barone added. "(ESPN) wants to see two heavy hitters in the conference."