

Cougars Drop Road Test at Eastern Illinois

by Joe Pott

February 28 2024 6:47 AM



CHARLESTON – [Damarco Minor](#) and [Lamar Wright](#) each turned in double-doubles, but Eastern Illinois used a long first-half run to propel itself to an 84-79 win over visiting SIUE Tuesday night. The Cougars fell to 16-14 overall and 9-8 in Ohio Valley Conference play. Eastern Illinois is 14-16 overall and 8-9 in the league.

The two teams will meet again Wednesday in the first round of the OVC Tournament.

After Eastern Illinois took an initial 9-4 lead, the Cougars rallied for 15 of the next 17 points to lead 19-6. SIUE had its largest lead at 27-15 when Eastern Illinois began its run. The Panthers outscored the Cougars 22-1 over the next 6:30 in the game to lead 37-28.

"We didn't do a good job in that stretch extending it," SIUE Head Coach [Brian Barone](#) said. "We had a turnover, and we took some poor shots. We were feeling a little too good about the opportunity we had. We got away from what we needed to do."

The Cougars trimmed the EIU lead to 39-34 at halftime.

The Cougars got as close as six points in the second half when a [Ray'Sean Taylor](#) three-pointer made it 55-49 with 11:56 to play.

"We righted the ship a little bit in the second half," Barone said. "We had a chance to cut it to three and gave it up at half court."

SIUE committed 12 turnovers in total, and Eastern Illinois capitalized. The Panthers scored 20 points from Cougars turnovers.

"We had too many live-ball turnovers," Barone said. "That's turnovers that we didn't have the opportunity to defend. That's a product of trying to do a little too much individually."

Minor scored a team-high 24 points and added 12 rebounds for his ninth double-double this year. [Lamar Wright](#) scored 15 points and grabbed a career-high 12 rebounds for his second double-double of the year.

[Ray'Sean Taylor](#) and [Shamar Wright](#) each scored 10 points. [Brian Taylor II](#) added seven points and [Dorion Staples](#) scored six points while collecting a career-high six rebounds.

"It's frustrating, we didn't do what we needed to do," Barone added. "I didn't like how we played in certain stretches, but I still like what we have on that bench."

SIUE hauled in a season-high 50 rebounds and won the rebounding edge 50-38. The Cougars scored 42 points in the paint to 28 from EIU.

"We're tired," Barone said. "They've given us everything they had. Our guys have really been digging deep. Eastern Illinois came in and did what they needed to do tonight."

SIUE connected on just 39 percent of its shots and was 16-24 at the free throw line.

Eastern Illinois shot 45 percent overall and knocked down 50 percent of its shots in the second half. The Panthers were 26-35 (74 percent) at the free throw line.

Tiger Book scored a career-high 33 points to lead the way for EIU, Nakyel Shelton scored 12 points.

SIUE finishes the regular season with its fourth consecutive road game Saturday afternoon at Western Illinois. Tipoff is slated for 3:30 p.m.

"We want to go get this one on Saturday," Barone added. "You can catch momentum going into the tournament. We need to capitalize by finishing the right way."