

Saturday, Nov. 21, 2009

FRESHMEN SPARK EASTERN OVER MANHATTANVILLE, 65-55
In women's basketball tip-off tournament, Bowdoin also advances with win

WILLIMANTIC, Conn. -- Freshmen Tanisha Carter (East Hartford, CT) and Samantha Riccio (Avon, CT) combined for 27 points on 10-of-15 field goal shooting, and teamed for 15 rebounds to lead the Eastern Connecticut State University women's basketball team to a 65-55 first-round win over Manhattanville College in the opening round of the Eastern Connecticut State University Tip-Off Tournament Saturday evening at Francis E. Geissler Gymnasium.

Having qualified for the tournament finale for the 26th time in 30 years, Eastern faces Bowdoin College Sunday at 3 p.m. Bowdoin pulled away from Springfield College, 88-60, Saturday night to earn a spot in the tournament final for the second time in as many tournament appearances. Bowdoin routed Eastern, 72-39, in the 2005 final.

Springfield faces Manhattanville Sunday at 1 p.m. in the third-place contest.

Riccio was 3-for-4 from three-point range to total a game-high 16 points in her first collegiate game, while Carter had a double-double in her collegiate debut with 11 points and a game-high 11 rebounds. The Warriors lost four starters from last year's 25-4 Little East Conference regular-season champion team,, returning only junior Jessica Moriarty (East Haven, CT).

The Warriors never trailed after the opening minutes and moved out to a ten-point lead with nine minutes left in the first half, but were unable to fully shake the Valiants until the final four minutes despite building a lead of as many as 14 points in the opening minutes of the second half.

A nine-point Manhattanville run cut a 13-point Eastern lead to four with 11 minutes left before Moriarty scored on an offensive rebound and Riccio nailed a three-pointer to make it 46-37 a minute later.

Moriarty followed the freshmen duo with 12 points, six steals and six rebounds and Amanda Pierlioni (Plainville, CT) added ten points and five rebounds.

Simona Gordon (Cambridge, MA) had a team-high 15 points for Manhattanville, Courtney Turner (Staten Island, NY) adding 13 points and a team-high eight rebounds and Nina Johnson (White Plains, NY) 13 points for the Valiants, who competed in last year's ECAC tournament. Gordon scored nearly half of her team's points in the first half when she was the only Valiants with more than one field goal.

The victory was the 299th in 16 seasons for Eastern head coach Denise Bierly, who is averaging just under 20 victories per season.

Both Eastern and Bowdoin won over 20 games last year, were nationally-ranked, and competed in the NCAA tournament.

Balanced Bowdoin pulls away in second half

Against Bowdoin, Springfield never led but trailed by only seven three minutes into the second half before the Polar Bears began pulling away. Bowdoin outscored the Pride 50-30 in the second half by doubling its opponent's rebounding total and committing only six turnovers. The winners got scoring from nine different players in the second half, while Kelly Murphy (Mechanicville, NY) scored 12 of her team's 30 points.

Caitlin Hynes led Bowdoin's balanced effort with 15 points (6-for-11 from the floor), Daitlin Donahoe (Amherst, NY) adding 13 points (6-for-9) , Sabrina Cote (Dexter, ME) 11 and Jill Henrikson (Bath, ME) ten. Leah Rubega (Norwich, CT) grabbed a game-high eight rebounds in only 22 minutes for the Polar Bears, who forced Springfield into 24 turnovers.