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EKU basketball season gets early tipoff Monday night

College basketball is ready to tip off, and Eastern Kentucky University will be one of the teams starting tonight.

EKU will travel to Mississippi State for the season opener as part of the 2K Sports Classic benefiting Coaches vs. Cancer. It's the earliest start to the season ever for both programs. The Colonels will have three new starters in the lineup, guard Mike DiNunno, a Northern Illinois transfer, and freshmen forwards Timmy Knipp and Eric Stutz.

DiNunno had 14 points, eight rebounds and eight assists in the 70-59 exhibition victory over Urbana last week. Stutz had 14 points and Knipp added 10.

"Our guys understand that we have a long way to go," coach Jeff Neabuer said. "We need to play freshmen in significant roles. There is a lot of learning that has to be done to get these guys up to Division I speed."

Neubauer said Stutz took advantage of an opportunity when last year's starting center Jeff Johnson missed three weeks due to a viral illness. Knipp, an Elliott County High School graduate, is stepping into the power forward spot. Junior guard Willie Cruz missed the entire preseason and will not

play due to a hand injury.

EKU is 1-32 all-time against the Southeastern Conference with the only victory against Auburn in 1955-56. This will be the fourth-ever meeting between the Colonels and Mississippi State. The Bulldogs are led by senior guard Dee Bost and junior forward Renardo Sidney.

The Colonels will have eight games in November — all away from home. They won't be at McBrayer Arena in Richmond until Dec. 3 against Brescia.

"This is a process and it could take awhile for us to become a really good team," Neabuer said.

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