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Men | Akron 68, Mississippi State 58

Zips upset Bulldogs in basketball opener

Newcomers help out as UA scores an upset on national television

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A season of promise got off to an eye-opening start for the University of Akron basketball team.

The Zips went deep into SEC Country on Wednesday night and made the most of a national-television appearance on ESPNU.

UA, led by Quincy Diggs, Alex Abreu and Zeke Marshall, defeated Mississippi State 68-58 in a 2K Sports Classic game at Humphrey Coliseum in Starkville, Miss.

"It's big from the perspective that not a lot of teams were playing tonight so a lot of people got to see our program," Coach Keith Dambrot said by telephone. "It's big because we really haven't beaten a high major in a while. And it's big because we now have a belief structure that the things we are doing in practice can carry over."

The Zips have five key returnees from their 2011 Mid-American Conference champions, as well as a bevy of newcomers long on talent but short on experience.

Those veterans were steady, and newcomers such as Brian Walsh and Nick Harney showed they can help.

"It was a good team win for us. Our young kids played well," Dambrot said. "We are big and strong. I think we showed that."

Diggs, a junior swingman, made 8-of-13 shots to finish with a game-high 19 points.

Abreu, a sophomore point guard, ran the offense and did his part defensively on Bulldogs star Dee Bost, who had just 13 points after scoring 23 in the opener. Abreu had eight points, six steals, five rebounds and three assists.

Marshall, a 7-foot sophomore center, had five blocks and altered a number of other MSU shots. He added 10 points and six rebounds.

Marshall and Abreu sparked a defensive effort that forced 19 turnovers and held the Bulldogs to 35 percent from the field.

"We did some good things on defense, no doubt," Dambrot said.

In the first half, the Bulldogs led 11-6 before UA went on a 9-0 run to take a 15-11 lead.

Diggs scored the first seven points in the burst with a short jumper, a 3-pointer and a fast-break layup. Harney's inside basket in transition closed it out.

The Bulldogs, who were hampered by foul trouble to Bost, inched back ahead at 23-21, but UA followed that with an 8-0 run.

Abreu sparked it with two layups and then an assist on a breakaway layup by Diggs. Walsh made a drive to close the rally and make it 29-23.

Harney later added baskets on an offensive rebound and a layup to help the Zips to a 37-29 lead at halftime.

In the second half, the Zips had some offensive problems at the start and the Bulldogs got back to 44-40.

Then UA had another flurry, running off six consecutive points when Abreu had assists on baskets by Marshall and

Later, a drive by Walsh gave the Zips their biggest lead at 58-46.

But MSU increased its intensity and got back to 62-56 with three minutes left.

Diggs countered that with a drive and two free throws, and Cvetinovic made a layup that closed out the upset.

The Zips' next game is Saturday night at home against Hiram.

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