

Muscala, Defense Lead Bison to 62-49 Win over New Mexico State and 4-0 Start

Muscala Records 24 Points, 9 Rebounds

[box score](#)

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. - Mike Muscala poured in 24 points and grabbed nine rebounds to lead Bucknell to a 62-49 victory over defending Western Athletic Conference champion New Mexico State on Saturday evening at the Gallagher Center on day two of the 2K Sports Classic benefitting Wounded Warrior Project. Bryson Johnson added 11 points, Joe Willman had 10, and the Bison got a huge lift from its bench down the stretch to help the Bison improve to 4-0.

Muscala fell one rebound shy of his fourth straight double-double to start the season, but he recorded his 26th career 20-point game on an 11-for-19 shooting night against the Aggies' massive front line. Willman added six rebounds and freshman Dom Hoffman played critical late-game minutes and finished with four points and five rebounds.

Even after playing a fast-paced Niagara team less than 24 hours earlier, Bucknell turned in its best defensive effort of the season. The Bison held the Aggies to only 14 field goals and 29.2 percent shooting in the game, came up with six steals and outrebounded them 35-30. At the other end, Bucknell shot 59.1 percent in the second half and 49.0 percent for the game, and the Bison won by double digits despite making only three 3-pointers and getting outscored 15-11 from the foul line.

Daniel Mullings led New Mexico State with 22 points. Tyrone Watson was the only other Aggie in double figures with 13.

Bucknell led 28-22 at the half, but a four-minute scoring drought early in the second helped the Aggies pull within two at 32-30. The Bison never relinquished the lead, however, as Steven Kaspar made a sweet feed to a cutting Brian Fitzpatrick for a dunk. Joshea Singleton then checked in for the first time this year and gave Bucknell some key minutes. Twice he got fouled driving to the hoop, and he made three of the four free throws to extend four-point leads.

At the midpoint of the second half Cameron Ayers had yet to score, but he swished long jumpers on three straight possessions to ignite Bucknell's game-clinching run. Ayers' six-point flurry stretched a 37-33 margin all the way up to 43-33. Then it was Muscala's turn. The senior center accounted for eight straight Bucknell points, the last two coming on a powerful flying jam after he outran 7-5 Aggie center Sim Bhullar down the floor. That put the Bison ahead 51-39 with 5:48 left.

New Mexico State pulled within 53-43 on a Mullings 3-pointer, but then Hoffman scored off an inbounds play, grabbed a defensive rebound, and then scored again on a tip-in to give Bucknell a 57-43 lead with 3:40 left.

Johnson's bomb from 28 feet with 2:07 left made it 60-44 and the Bison cruised home from there.

New Mexico State led 8-4 early, but at the 14-minute mark Bucknell surged in front with a 14-0 run. Willman hit three jumpers and Johnson canned two 3-pointers in that stretch. Willman's fadeaway from the left baseline gave the Bison an 18-8 lead.

The Aggies answered back with eight straight points to pull within 18-16 before Muscala ended Bucknell's 6:21 scoring drought with a power move to the basket. Willman's pull-up jumper from 16 feet with two seconds left gave the Bison a 28-22 halftime lead.

Muscala (12), Willman (10) and Johnson (6) combined for all 28 of Bucknell's first-half points.

While Muscala scored a season-high 24 points, he also held New Mexico State's 6-10 starting center Tshilidzi Nephawe without a shot or a point, and he had four turnovers and three fouls in 19 minutes. The 7-5, 355-pound Bhullar scored all four of his points from the foul line.

Bucknell wraps up action at the 2K Sports Classic on Sunday against West Alabama at 1:30 p.m.

