

MSU Holds Off Eastern Kentucky To Claim Season Opener

[box score](#)

STARKVILLE, Miss. - Mississippi State fought off a spirited comeback attempt by Eastern Kentucky to post a 75-65 men's basketball victory in each team's season opener Monday night at Humphrey Coliseum. The contest was the also the opening-round contest of the 2K Sports Classic, Starkville Regional. The Bulldogs will remain at home for its second matchup in the tournament when Akron comes to the Humphrey Coliseum Wednesday night.

In Monday's contest, the Bulldogs started the contest on fire and built an early 20-8 lead. From there, the Ohio Valley Conference-member Colonels hung tough but could never get over the hump.

"The game really came easy to us early," MSU head coach Rick Stansbury said. "I think that sped us up a lot. You have to give credit to Eastern Kentucky because they do a lot of things that are hard to prepare for. They did exactly what they wanted to do tonight on offense. Fortunately, we made enough plays to win the game."

Stansbury improved to 11-3 in season openers as the MSU coach. In its 100th season of basketball competition, MSU is now 78-22 overall in openers. The Bulldogs have won 22 of their last 27 openers and have won 9 of 11 season openers played at home under Stansbury.

Still, Eastern Kentucky found a way to make the going rough. The Colonels found some long-range shooting late in the half to close within 33-27 at halftime.

Back-to-back 3-point baskets by Dee Bost keyed the Bulldogs' early first-half flurry. A layup by Wendell Lewis extended the lead to 20-8 with 13:49 left in the first half. The Bulldogs then managed two field goals over the next nine minutes. A 3-pointer by Timmy Knipp brought the Colonels within 24-19 with 5:13 left before halftime.

"When Eastern Kentucky found a rhythm, they were hard to stop," Stansbury said. "They are very efficient what they do. They run the ball screen real well. If they make shots then they have a chance to give you a competitive game."

MSU carried a 33-27 lead into the locker room at halftime.

A layup by Arnett Moultrie, followed a steal from Renardo Sidney and fast-break 3-point basket by Bost extended the advantage to 40-30 less than three minutes into the game's final half. The lead stayed around 10 points with both teams trading baskets for a five-minute stretch of play.

A layup by Bost gave the Bulldogs a second half-best lead of 11 points at 52-41 with 10:51 left.

"Dee played a lot of minutes tonight," Stansbury said. "He hit a couple of key 3s and made some big defensive plays. He showed the type of senior leadership that we need on the floor. It's a learning experience for this team. Fortunately, we made some big plays on both ends of the court to pull away."

The Colonels closed within 64-58 on a layup by Eric Stutz with 4:24 remaining. The Bulldogs then scored the next five points to send the crowd of 5,160 home happy.

For the contest, the Bulldogs hit 28 of 58 shots from the field (48.3 percent), 8 of 22 shots from 3-point range (36.4 percent) and 12 of 19 shots from the foul line (63.2 percent). The Colonels hit 26 of 65 shots from the field (40.0 percent), 10 of 33 shots from 3-point range (30.3 percent) and 4 of 6 shots from the foul line (66.7 percent).

MSU held a 43-29 rebounding advantage. The Bulldogs had 16 assists and 14 turnovers, while the Colonels had 11 assists and 10 turnovers.

Moultrie posted his first double-double in the Maroon and White with 13 points and 10 rebounds. For the Bulldogs, it was their first double-double in a first game with MSU since Lawrence Roberts turned the trick in his debut against Tennessee-Martin in 2003.

Bost had a team-high 23 points with six rebounds, six assists, two steals and five turnovers. Hood was also in double figures with 12 points in his MSU debut.

EKU placed four players in double figures, with Joshua Jones scoring 13 points to lead the way. Knipp added 12 points, while Stutz scored 11 points and Mike DiNunno scored 10 points.

MSU and Akron play at 6 p.m. Wednesday in a contest which will be televised nationally by ESPNU. The season-opening three game homestand concludes with South Alabama at 1 p.m. Saturday.