

After Slow Start, Bison Roll Past Niagara 88-71 to Improve to 3-0 **Muscala Records Near-Triple-Double, Six Bison Score in Double Figures**

[box score](#)

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. - [Mike Muscala](#) logged 18 points, 16 rebounds, seven assists and three blocked shots, and five of his teammates also scored in double figures as Bucknell weathered a slow start before pulling away for an 88-71 over host Niagara on Friday night at the 2K Sports Classic benefitting Wounded Warrior Project. Now 3-0 for the first time since 2005-06, the Bison trailed by 12 late in the first half before outscoring the athletic Purple Eagles 57-28 over the final 22:09.

Bucknell got huge lifts from reserve point guards [Steven Kaspar](#) (11 points) and [Ryan Frazier](#) (12 points), who both set career scoring highs and combined for 23 points on 8-for-11 shooting, four assists and only one turnover. [Bryson Johnson](#) added 15 points and [Cameron Ayers](#) and [Joe Willman](#) both had 12 as the Bison had six players score in double figures for the first time since an overtime home loss to Wake Forest early in the 2006-07 season.

Muscala recorded his third straight double-double to start the season and the 27th of his career. It was nearly a triple double, as he dished out a career-high seven assists, mostly on kickouts to 3-point shooters. Bucknell went 9-for-18 from the arc in the game and shot 52.5 percent overall. Most of that damage came in a monster second half. The Bison shot 64.3 percent after halftime compared to Niagara's 23.3 percent, and Bucknell rolled to a 50-23 scoring advantage in the half.

Niagara (1-2) had hit 26 3-pointers in its first two games, including 16 in the opener at Oregon State, and the Purple Eagles kept up the pace with seven more treys in the first half of this one. They hit their first three of the night and led 15-5 five minutes into the contest, but the Bison pulled even at 17 as Kaspar's 3-pointer capped a 12-2 run.

Niagara quickly answered with a 5-0 spurt and later upped its margin to a dozen at 38-26 on Ameen Tanksley's layup. The Bison cut into that lead with a 7-0 run to end the half, which proved to be the pivotal stretch in the game. Frazier took a charge on Marvin Jordan after the shot had been released and converted both ends of the 1-and-1. Frazier then hit a pull-up 15-footer and [Ryan Hill](#) knocked down a corner 3-pointer to bring Bucknell within 43-38 at the break.

The Bison then stormed out of the locker room with 11 straight points, stretching the run to 18-0. While Niagara was missing its first nine shots, Bucknell was scoring almost every time down the floor. Hill cut the lead to one with a steal and runaway layup, and then Johnson made a beautiful pass to Willman, who beat everyone down the floor for another fastbreak layup that gave the Bison their first lead of the night at 44-43.

Muscala pump-faked around a defender for a 15-footer then made a pretty backdoor feed to Kaspar, who caught the ball and shot the layup all in midair. Kaspar's free throw at the 14:09 mark capped the 18-0 run and gave the Bison a 49-43 lead.

Tanksley ended Niagara's 8:11 scoring drought with a 3-pointer, but then Kaspar made two straight charges to the basket, one that he finished and another that was tipped in by Muscala. The Purple Eagles cut a seven-point deficit to three with back-to-back baskets, but not long after that the Bison got hot from long range. Ayers hit a trey and Johnson canned two, the last of which gave Bucknell its first double-digit lead at 66-55 with 8:19 left.

Malcolm Lemmons pulled Niagara within seven with 6:30 to play, but yet another Kaspar slash to the hole and two straight jumpers by Willman made it 74-61 with 5:10 remaining. Muscala made six straight free throws and fed Frazier for a left-corner triple to put the game out of reach in the final few minutes.

"That was a very gratifying win, and I am proud of the composure we showed after getting pushed around for most of the first half," said head coach [Dave Paulsen](#). "No disrespect to Purdue or George Mason, but Niagara was probably the best offensive team we have faced so far. They are scary with their athleticism combined with their ability to shoot the three. But our defensive intensity was terrific in the second half, and offensively we did a much better job getting the ball inside."

Bucknell had 16 assists and only five turnovers, while Niagara had 14 assists and just three turnovers. Kaspar had three assists to go with his 11 points, and starting point guard Hill had six points and no turnovers.

The Bison went 17-for-22 from the foul line, led by an 8-for-10 effort from Muscala.

Bucknell has two more games coming up this weekend at the Gallagher Center. The Bison face defending Western Athletic Conference champion New Mexico State on Saturday at 5:30 p.m., followed by West Alabama on Sunday at 1:30 p.m.