

EOU holds off late comeback attempt

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

The Eastern Oregon University women's basketball team saw its largest lead of the game — 16 points in the fourth quarter — whittled down to three in the final minute, but survived to move to 2-0 and pass an early season test.

Beverly Slater had a double-double with 19 points and 13 rebounds, Jane Nelson added 17 points, and the Mountaineers fended off Simpson University,

68-63, Saturday afternoon at Quinn Coliseum.

"We didn't take care of the ball for a minute there when they were pressing us, but we were able to hold our composure, stick together as a team, figure things out and work through it," Slater said.

When Taylor Stricklin connected on a jumper — the first points of the fourth quarter for either team — to make it 58-42 with 6:22 to play, Eastern seemed to have the game well in hand. But a

barrage by the Red Hawks followed, as their full-court press forced four turnovers in a span of 34 seconds and allowed them to get back in the contest. A layup and a 3-pointer by Natalie Campos cut the margin to seven, and Brianna Clark's jumper with 3:14 to play capped an 11-0 run to make it 58-53.

The Mounties responded with a clutch 3-pointer by Nelson — her fourth of the game on a night when EOU

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Ronald Bond/The Observer
Eastern Oregon's Taylor Stricklin, right, attempts a 3-pointer during the Mountaineers' game Saturday.



Ronald Bond/The Observer
Victor Dias, right, rushed for 147 yards and a touchdown, and Kai Quinn, left, added two rushing touchdowns and passed for 153 yards, but Eastern Oregon's rally from a 16-point fourth-quarter deficit fell short in a 31-25 loss.

Eastern rally falls short

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The Eastern Oregon University football team was, perhaps, just a couple of plays away from securing a sweep in the Small School Civil War.

In the end, though, it was Southern Oregon keeping the trend of road-field advantage alive in the rivalry.

The visiting Raiders scored 17 straight points to build a double-digit lead then held off an Eastern Oregon rally to edge the Mountaineers, 31-25, Saturday in Frontier Conference action at Community Stadium.

"I didn't see any give up in our kids," head coach Tim Camp said. "Physically, we brought it to them. I think we were the more physical team today, without a doubt. (But) hats off to (SOU). They made enough plays and we came up a couple plays short of winning the football game."

The win by the Raiders, their third in a row, was the fifth straight by the road team in the rivalry, and 12th in the last 15 contests.

The home team, though, gave itself an opportunity to get back in the game after trailing by 16 points in the fourth quarter, with the defense playing a big role in the comeback effort.

The Mountaineers forced turnovers on three straight Raider possessions — an interception by Garrett Yunker late in the third and fumble recoveries by Zack Jacobs and Yunker early in the fourth — and turned the last two of those into points. A 15-yard touchdown run by Victor Dias — who rushed for a season-high 147 yards — trimmed Eastern's deficit to nine, and a 24-yard Jaiden Machuca field goal made it a six-point game with nine

minutes to play.

"I thought our kids played hard. They really did. (Being) able to come back and put yourself in position to win at the end is all you can ask for," Camp said.

EOU got two more possessions in the fourth but was unable to complete the rally. A drive to midfield stalled when Tre Holmes and Jake Regino sacked EOU quarterback Kai Quinn, and a fourth-down completion to Tanner Zenke fell short of the line to gain. EOU got the ball back one final time with 13 seconds left, but a final deep pass to Saige Wilkerson was caught at the SOU 15 as time expired.

The play before, Eastern receiver Christian Blaser was ruled out of bounds on a pass with one second to play near the 15 that would have given the Mountaineers a more legitimate chance to score on the final play than a Hail Mary.

"That would have been big for us (to) be able to throw the ball in the end zone at the end," Camp said.

Eastern did what it wanted to do in several facets of the game, including own the running game.

"I like the direction of the offense. It's more who I am and it's making the defense more physical," Camp said.

Dias' big day on the ground helped the Mountaineers to a second straight 200-plus yard rushing effort. Southern, by comparison, had just 79 yards rushing. "He was running downhill. He did what I asked him to do," Camp said of Dias. "He had the hot hand, and that's why I played him."

EOU also cut its penalties in half, committing just seven a week after having 15, keeping SOU in check on third down (the Raiders



Ronald Bond/The Observer
Garrett Yunker celebrates after recovering a fumble during the fourth quarter Saturday afternoon.

were 2-for-12), winning the time of possession battle, and forcing four turnovers while committing two.

But one of those, a fumble on a punt return early in the third quarter as the rain picked up, gave Southern new life after it went three-and-out to start the second half. Hykeem Massey scored on an 11-yard reception two plays later for a 24-15 SOU lead. The margin swelled to its largest after an Eastern three-and-out and a 50-yard drive by Southern, which Trent Banner finished with a 2-yard run with 5:54 to play.

"The one thing that sticks out in my mind is the big stop coming out the third, and then them punting the ball and then we fumble it. We give the ball back on the special forces," Camp said. "That's tough."

EOU held the Raiders to 261 yards of total offense, with Southern largely gaining yardage off the arm of quarterback Wyatt Hutchinson, who was 20-for-31 passing for 182 yards and two scores. The Raiders' success in the passing game was due to Hutchinson effectively reading the run-pass option. "That's them hitting the zones where they are reading (the linebackers), and we needed to stay put and rally to the run," Camp said.

Quinn was 10-for-17 passing for 153 yards and added 22 yards rushing and two first half scores, the second of which gave EOU a 15-14 lead with 5:46 to play in the first half.

EOU finished with 360 total yards.

Eastern (2-5 overall, 2-4 Frontier) travels to Butte to face Montana Tech Saturday.

Mounties breeze past Walla Walla



Ronald Bond/The Observer
Cambree Scott had eight kills in Eastern Oregon's sweep of Walla Walla Saturday night.

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Eastern Oregon University's volleyball team used balance on the offensive end to shake off another slow start and earn a sweep over Walla Walla.

Cambree Scott had eight kills, Breanna Shaffer added seven, and the No. 5 Mountaineers got past the Wolves, 25-20, 25-12, 25-14, Saturday in Cascade Collegiate Conference action at Quinn Coliseum.

"We have been starting matches a little bit slower, and that is something we will continue to work on, but I think the important thing is as the match progresses we are progressively getting better," head coach Kaki McLean-Morehead said. "That's a good thing. That's something that will benefit us later on."

The match against the Wolves, who are winless in CCC action, never was in doubt, but Walla Walla did hang around in the first set and got as close at 19-18 after three straight aces by Anja Cole.

"We were doing the right things (but) they just weren't going our way, and (the Wolves) were playing really tough," Scott said. "We weren't making a ton of big errors. We were trying to put the ball in the right places, it just wasn't going our way at first."

A pair of Walla Walla errors, though, helped EOU reassert control, and a kill by Scott and another by Taylor Tibbetts two points later gave Eastern the set.

Scott said communication to work through the stages of early-match struggles is key to getting into the flow the team wants to be in.

"We come together and talk about it, and figure out

what we're doing wrong and push forward from there," she said. "Once we get going, we start to play like us."

The rest of the match was all EOU as it found a rhythm.

Three kills by Jet Taylor, two by Shaffer and two by Scott were all part of a 9-1 run that built a 13-3 lead in the second. The margin in the set reached as much as 15 points after kills by Scott and Megan Bunn and a Walla Walla error.

Tibbetts had two kills and teamed with Scott for a block on a similar run to start the third set — this one of 9-2 — and the lead reached as much as 18-7 on a Kaci Cox kill.

"Offense was distributed fairly evenly, which was nice," McLean-Morehead said.

Along with Scott and Shaffer, Taylor added six kills and Bunn had five. EOU also saw both Madison Pilon (20 assists) and Brooke Dodge (10 assists) get into double figures as it ran a 6-2 rotation most of the night.

"It was a good opportunity for them to grow and get better (in the 6-2)," McLean-Morehead said.

Pilon added seven digs, and Kiley McMurtrey led the category with 14.

Eastern (23-1 overall, 13-1 CCC), which could climb higher when the latest NAIA coaches poll comes out Wednesday, visits Northwest Friday and Evergreen Saturday in Washington.

"We definitely need to make our blocking a focus this week. Evergreen exploited that weakness last time, and Northwest is a lot like us. We need to throw a few more tricks in our bag (on offense)," McLean-Morehead said looking ahead to the next matches.