

the elite eight



Eagles survive and advance to Final Four

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The unofficial motto in the month of March on the basketball court is “survive and advance” and the Ashland women’s basketball team did just that as they end Montana State University Billings’ Cinderella story with a 91-73 win.

The win sends Eagles to 35-0 on the season and back into the Final Four for the second straight season.

Both teams got off to slow starts but it was MSUB who grabbed a 4-3 lead after a lay-up from Vanessa Stavish. The lead was short lived for the Yellowjackets as Ashland stormed back in front with a 13-4 run to capture a 16-8 lead with 3:33 left in the first quarter.

The Eagles led 22-18 at the end of one.

Ashland shot just 38.9% from the field in the first but overcame the uncharacteristic shooting performance in the second quarter shooting a blazing 61.1% and outscoring the Yellowjackets 28-22.

The teams went back and forth for the majority of the second as any time Ashland started to make a run, the Yellowjackets would an-

swer, and they did so in the form of redshirt senior forward Alisha Breen.

Breen was terrific for MSUB and was the only reason the Yellowjackets were able to keep pace in the first half as she had 15 points and six rebounds in the first half.

Breen and company had the Eagles in check as the Yellowjackets trailed by just five with 3:12 to go in the second quarter.

This was when Ashland went on their first major run of the game.

The Eagles rattled off seven straight points, capped off by a corner three from Maddie Dackin as they swelled the lead to 12 points, which was their largest of the first half.

MSUB was able to cut the deficit to just 10 points going into the locker room, but the Eagles led 50-40.

The Eagles came out of the locker room, looking like the team that led the nation in scoring this season as within a span of two minutes and 50 seconds, AU had seemingly blown the game open as a Laina Snyder layup made it a 61-42 game and forced a MSUB timeout.

In most games, a 19-point lead spells disaster for opposing teams,

but not for this Cinderella story.

The Yellowjackets started to chip away at the Ashland lead as they applied pressure and started to force turnovers.

At one point in the third, the Eagles turned it over on three straight possessions and allowed MSUB to stay within striking distance as the lead hovered around 15.

That lasted only for a short time, however, as MSUB closed the third quarter on a 11-0 run to cut the lead from 18 down to just seven heading into the final quarter.

“They cut it to seven at one point in the second half and I thought we showed really good poise and toughness down the stretch and went on a run,” Fralick said.

AU responded right out of the gate in the final period as they scored the first seven points to swell the lead back to 14 and the Yellowjackets were unable to recover.

The Eagles started to pile it on and a deep triple from Dackin with 3:32 left in the game gave AU a 21-point lead and broke the glass slipper that Montana State University Billings had worn for seven straight games.

It was a magical run for MSUB,

but they ran into the hottest team in Division II history and become yet another victim of Ashland’s 72-game winning streak as the Eagles won 91-73.

“The way we play, we just have to stick with it and I thought we did that well,” Fralick said. “I thought in the first half we got going and then to begin the second half. I thought we really had a great starts which really gave us some momentum.”

Breen finished with a game-high 25 points on 9-20 shooting. She also grabbed 14 rebounds and dished out eight assists.

Breen will leave MSUB as the conference’s all-time leading scorer. Unfortunately for MSUB, they did not get enough help from Breen’s supporting cast as Stavish finished with 15 points and the team’s second leading scorer on the year, Rylee Kane, had just 10.

Ashland, on the other hand, was more well balanced and got contributions from all over the floor.

Snyder led the way with 22 points and 9 rebounds in 32 minutes. Senior counterpart, Andi Daugherty, was not far behind as she finished with 20 points and six rebounds in

her 33 minutes on the floor.

National player of the year, Jodi Johnson was terrific on the defensive side of the floor as she finished with eight steals and made life tough on the guards for MSUB. She was no slouch on the offensive end either finished with 13 points and nine rebounds, four of which were offensive.

Sophomore guard Renee Stimpert continued her late season push as well with 14 points, eight rebounds, and six assists in what was the most well rounded Eagle performance of the day.

“I think we played really well when we pushed the ball and the pace is fast. That’s been our style of play all year,” Stimpert said. “So I know that’s my job and the guards are running, the first posts touch really helps our offense. I’m just doing my job.”

The Eagles are back in the Final Four now for the second straight season and for the fourth time since 2012.

“We have a lot of people back from our championship team from last season and honestly, I think, our biggest enemy is ourselves,” Daugherty said.

Eagles headed to the Championship with history on the line

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The Ashland University Eagles are on the verge of making more history.

The Eagles are just 40-minutes away from back-to-back perfect seasons after defeating Indiana University of Pennsylvania 92-68 to punch their ticket back into the title game.

It was a perfect storm from start to finish for the Eagles as they trailed for just 26 seconds at the beginning of the game but quickly turned it back around and started to pull away.

IUP took a 6-4 lead with 8:30 left in the first quarter and they were able to keep the game close until the 5:34 mark in the first.

Carolyn Appleby hit a three to cut the Ashland lead to 14-13, but that is as close as they would get.

Ashland turned up the defensive pressure and they did not allow another made field goal in the first quarter. AU used this to turn a one-point lead to an 11-point lead in the blink of an eye.

The Eagles led 26-15 at the end of one and it was a sign of things to come for AU.

With still more than eight minutes left in the second quarter, national player of the year, Jodi Johnson picked up her third foul and had to head to the bench.

The Eagles did not skip a beat.

Brooke Smith came in and personified one of Ashland’s greatest strengths, depth.

She came into the game and immediately sparked the defense and helped Ashland increase their lead to as much as 17 in the quarter after a big three with 2:16 left to play.

“I was really proud of Brooke coming in and filling her spot. It was unfortunate that Jodi got in foul trouble but I think that’s a strength of this team, is every single person we put on the court is an excellent basketball player,” Andi Daugherty said. “So while it was unfortunate to lose the national player of the year, I had confidence in anyone coming in to take her spot.”

IUP called a timeout and regrouped before the half cutting it back to 42-30 at the break.

The Crimson Hawks had weathered the storm for the first half, but little did they know that there was a hurricane waiting for them on the other side of the break.

Starting the second half, the Eagles tried to put the game away and succeeded. It only took four minutes for Ashland to push the lead to 20 and it wasn’t long until they began to push that lead even further. With under a minute and a half to play in the third, Daugherty took over. She scored on three straight Ashland possessions to push the lead to 70-51 at the end of the third.

IUP did not have an answer in the fourth quarter and Ashland cruised to a 92-68 win.

The 92 points allowed by IUP were their most in a game this sea-

son.

“I just got to give a lot of credit to them and I thought it was a great game,” head coach Robyn Fralick said. “I thought we played really well. It felt like we were hitting on all cylinders.”

Laina Snyder showed up to play and put forth a career night. Snyder had 23 points, 20 rebounds and six assists to pace the Eagles.

“Well, I missed a lot of shots, so I got to get my rebound offense a lot, but I also knew that I could get those rebounds because that’s a place where we could really dominate them,” Snyder said. “We watched them play a couple of nights ago and that’s an area where the team that they beat actually beat them and that was the one category they did. So we knew we needed to capitalize.”

Daugherty was sensational as well finishing with 21 points and seven rebounds while Johnson had 14 points, six rebounds and five assists in just 26 minutes.

Daugherty joined Snyder as the second Eagle player to reach the 2,000 point plateau this season.

“My senior class has played a lot of games and we’ve gotten on some really good teams, so both Laina and I having the opportunity to score 2,000 points, and Julie 1,000 point, I don’t know if that’s ever been done in the senior class, scoring that many points,” Daugherty said.

One of the keys coming into the game for Ashland was to limit the



Maddie Dackin hit hard as she goes up for a layup.



Andi Daugherty drives towards the basket in the first half.

Crimson Hawks leading scorer Megan Smith and they did exactly that. She scored the first bucket of the game for IUP but then the Eagles held her scoreless until the 2:01 mark left in the third quarter.

In the end, Smith finished with 21 points but many of them came when the outcome of the game was already decided. Appleby chipped in 17 points and Brittany Robinson

added 14 for the Crimson Hawks who finished 30-4 on the season.

The Eagles have now won 73 games in a row and would be the first team in Division II to finish back-to-back perfect seasons.

“That will be Laina, I, and Julie’s last game, which is sad but as she said, there’s no other way we would want to go out,” Daugherty said.