

sports

Men’s basketball works to overcome mid-season slump

PAUL MURRAY
Reporter

The Ashland University men’s basketball team started this season as if they were shot out of a cannon, flying high and winning their first six games.

At the height of this stretch, the team was ranked No. 10 in the nation and blowing teams out by huge margins. 108-39 against Ohio-Chillicothe, 98-74 against Alderson Broadus – the list goes on.

Seniors Drew Noble and Rodrick Caldwell were picking up right where they left off from last season. Freshman Brandon Haraway was scoring at will, and Ethan Conley was leading the conference in 3-point percentage.

On Dec. 5 against conference foe Lake Superior State, the Eagles began to lose some momentum.

The 99-69 loss was their first of the season and was also their first time playing a Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference opponent. The in-conference defense proved to be difficult for the Eagles.

“We came in with a lot of expectations, and at first we met them,” head men’s basketball coach John Ellenwood said. “Then we got into league play. Defensively they were able to shut down what we wanted to do.”

After the Lake Superior State game, the Eagles dropped seven of their next eight. Buckets that came

easy early on were getting more difficult, and the team kept falling just short of victory.

Against Grand Valley State on Jan. 9, The Eagles trailed by 18 points in the last five minutes. Clutch 3-point shots from junior Aaron Thompson and Rodrick

Ellenwood said.

Although the team suffered some devastating losses, they have kept positive during the downspell.

“Our main focus has been to stay together,” Noble said. “The biggest mistake a team can make when going through a slump is to splinter.

Ellenwood would put four minutes on the clock, draw up a scenario for the offense, and give them the task of winning for those next four minutes.

The mentality is to simplify the game and produce more confi-

losing streak, beating the Pride 76-74. Noble scored 20 points while also contributing tremendously defensively, adding three steals and two blocks to the stat sheet.

“Defense has and always will be the most important thing to me,” Noble said. “Regardless of whether the shots are falling or not, you can always shut down your guy and effect the outcome of the game.”

Noble hoped this win would serve as a turning point for the Eagles, as it was their first conference victory of the season. The victory brought the Eagles back to an even record at 8-8, a mark that serves as a refresher point for most teams who are struggling.

Despite the moment of solace, the team lost their next game at Parkside, another GLIAC contender, bringing their overall record to 8-9, 1-8 in conference play.

The path ahead looks just as difficult. Road games at Davenport, Grand Valley and Saginaw Valley State are just on the horizon, as the GLIAC tournament nears closer and closer.

Regardless, the Eagles are confident and optimistic looking forward into the season.

“Once we begin to get that taste of victory, it will all come back,” said Ellenwood.

The Eagles will hit the court next on Jan. 25 at 3:00 p.m. against Saginaw Valley State in Kates Gymnasium.



AU ATHLETICS

Senior center Drew Noble squares up against Grand Valley State players.

Caldwell brought the game within two, and Ethan Conley tied the game with three minutes remaining. But Grand Valley rallied late, winning 69-63.

“We fought to come back, we fought hard. I’m proud of the way they battled, but we have to finish games. We need to make those winning plays down the stretch,”

Our focus has been to control what we can control and fight for each other because we are a family.”

After a loss to Davenport, Ellenwood felt that the team’s confidence began to slip. To combat this, he implemented a new drill in practice.

“Win the next possession” and “win the round” became the

dence in the players, Ellenwood said. Only focusing on winning in those few minutes, rather than focusing on the full game. With each win of a round, the taste of victory would become more and more contagious.

The plan came to fruition on Jan. 16 against Purdue Northwest as the Eagles snapped a four-game

Kari Pickens and WBB team refuse to take an L

JOHN MARGIDA
Reporter

The Ashland University Women’s basketball team is off to a solid start to 2019-20 season with a record of 17-0 overall, 9-0 in conference.

The Eagles are piggy-backing off of an outstanding 2018-2019 season, finishing 29-3, barring the team’s loss in the first round of the NCAA Tournament last March.

As the Eagles sit right now, they are ranked No. 3 in the nation for Division II women’s basketball. They are currently on a 17 game regular-season win streak after their defeat of Wisconsin Parkside this past Saturday.

The team has not been afraid to shoot the ball this season, heading into last weekend they were shooting 51.7% from the field as a team with a 3PTFG% of 44.4%, both of which lead the nation in their respective categories.

The last team to lead Women’s D-II in both categories in the same season was the 2017-18 Eagles who went on to be the NCAA D-II National Runner-Ups.

On Jan. 9 the Eagles were able to get their biggest win of the season as they took down their Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference rival No. 3 Grand Valley State with a 77-68 win. That was a major step forward according to women’s basketball head coach Kari Pickens, as the girls lost both of their matchups last season with the GVSU.

“It was definitely a playoff-type atmosphere and great to see our four seniors step up and play like an experienced and veterans group,” Pickens said. “I’m excited to see where they will take this team in the second half of the season.”

The Eagles were led by their four seniors leaders on the court in this pivotal midseason matchup. The team’s leading scorer was former GLIAC Player of the Year, Jodi Johnson, with 21 points.

Sara Loomis was the second-leading scorer with 19 points but without her contribution on the defensive end, the reigning GLIAC Player of the Year, Laker Cassidy Boensch would have had her way all night under the basket.

Senior Renee Stimpert also contributed 16 points and 10 assists to the Eagles’ big win and Sara Hart helped out with 8 points off the bench and had the 3-pointer that sealed the win for the Eagles.

In the four seasons that the senior

and switching up defenses, and I couldn’t even hear someone that was standing right next to me on the court. I think that is so cool and shows how awesome a sport we’re a part of.”

According to Pickens, the real



AU ATHLETICS

Senior guard Jodi Johnson drives down the court against Davenport.

athletes have been on the team, only four total regular season games have been lost – two of those have been to Grand Valley State.

“Grand Valley beat us twice last year so we wanted payback,” said Stimpert. “The Ashland community is always super supportive and they know the challenge Grand Valley brings. I know throughout the game we were getting back

icing on the cake was the fourth quarter, one of the best so far this season.

“Beating Grand Valley is always a big win since we have such a great rivalry with them,” Pickens said. “They are a very well-coached, very talented team and I was proud of our girls for their fight and grit; especially in the fourth quarter where

we cleaned a lot of things up and played our best quarter when it mattered the most.”

Even though the team has shown great success thus far, they refuse to get too hot-headed.

“It is very important that we don’t celebrate too long after a big win, we have a 12-hour rule where we can celebrate our previous win for 12 hours. We talk about it and then we are on to focus on the next game. I’m just looking forward to leading this team and seeing where we can go,” Stimpert said.

In terms of improvement, Pickens is looking for the team to develop on the defensive side of the ball.

“Our offense has continuously cleaned up a few things and performed better and better. Defensively we are taking steps forward and have definitely grown, we are looking forward to the latter half of the season to fine-tune a few details so we are playing our best basketball in March.”

Along with the No. 3 Eagles are fellow Midwest Region teams No. 1 Drury and No. 4 Grand Valley State making the late-season rematch with the Grand Valley State Lakers on Feb. 8 even more im-

portant for seeding and determining who hosts the GLIAC tournament and the Midwest Region in the NCAA Tournament down the road.

“Our biggest opponent is our next opponent because we can only play who is in front of us that day. We focus on one thing at a time,” Stimpert said.

The women’s team will look to climb the ranks as they currently sit at No. 3 in the nation and improve on their 17-0 start as they will take on Saginaw Valley State on Jan. 25 at 1:00 p.m. in Kates Gymnasium.

*By the time this issue is distributed on Jan. 24, the Eagles will have played a home game against GLIAC competitor Northwood on Jan. 23, altering the season record displayed in this story.

