



**EVANSVILLE 82, IPFW 77**

**First Round, Wednesday March 18, 2015**

EVANSVILLE, Ind. – D.J. Balentine started the game by hitting his first nine shots before finishing with a season-high of 35 as the University of Evansville men's basketball team defeated IPFW by a final of 82-77 to advance to the second round of the CollegeInsider.com Tournament.

With the win, Evansville will head to Eastern Illinois to face the Panthers on Monday at 7 p.m. in Charleston, Ill.

"It is a good win over a quality team and to get 20 wins is great for our players and program," UE head coach Marty Simmons said. "We talked about it in the preseason, it is fortunate that we earned this opportunity. I am happy for our players, they put the time and effort into it. Twenty wins is something that is not easy to do. Our goal is to be even better and we are going to do everything we can to survive and advance."

Simmons was also proud of Balentine and the rest of the team.

"He got in a great rhythm and in a lot of different ways - on the break, in our offense, against a zone and in a half-court offense," Simmons explained. "He was really in a zone and his teammates did a good job of recognizing when he was open."

Balentine finished hitting 12 out of 18 attempts to post his season-high. He was 6/9 from outside and hit five free throws. Egidijus Mockevicius played just 21 minutes, but that was enough to register his 18th double-double of the season. He finished with 15 points and 10 rebounds.

As a team, the Purple Aces (20-12) shot 50% for the game while holding IPFW (16-15) to 46.6%. UE also outrebounded the Mastodons by a 39-30 tally.

Each team came into the contest with layoffs of 10 days or more, but that did not show one bit on the offensive side. Evansville opened up the game hitting six of its first eight shots on its way to a 13-8 lead.

D.J. Balentine had 9 of them while hitting his first four shots in the run.

IPFW also started off strong, going 4-for-6 to start the game while knocking down a pair of 3-pointers. They tied the game up at 13-13 four minutes in as Joe Reed scored off of a steal.

Despite that rally, Balentine took matters into his own hands. His early run turned into a perfect 9-for-9 start with 22 points. That also included a 4-4 start from outside, the last one gave UE a 30-17 lead with 9:01 remaining in the first half. With under five minutes left in the stanza, Duane Gibson took it coast-to-coast to give UE its largest lead of the half at 36-20.

Following his bucket, the defenses of each team took over. Evansville hit one out of seven shots over a stretch while IPFW was 1-10. The Mastodons would cut the deficit to 11 with just over a minute left, but a 5-0 run to complete the half saw UE take a 43-27 lead into the locker room, matching its largest advantage. Blake Simmons capped off the half with a triple to make it a 16-point lead.

Balentine led everyone with 23 points as the break while Egidijus Mockevicius notched six. The Aces shot 58.1% in the period while holding IPFW to 35.7%.

Out of the break, Evansville looked to have the upper hand, going on a 9-2 run to take its largest lead of the day at 52-29. It was Balentine finishing the run once again with his fifth trey. Adam Wing also played a large role in the run, scoring four in a row with one coming on a great put back.

Isaiah McCray hit three 3-pointers in as part of a 9- stretch as the Mastodons cut the gap to 15 at 56-41 with just over 13 minutes remaining. Over the next four minutes, the Aces were able to add to the edge and held a 65-48 lead with 9:19.

Over the next eight minutes, IPFW made a huge rally, outscoring Evansville by a 24-11 margin to get within four points with just over a minute remaining. At one point, the Mastodons hit seven shots in a row.

Despite the rally, the Aces held strong. Four points in a row by Balentine saw UE extend its lead to eight at 80-72. IPFW responded with five in a row to get within three inside the final 10 seconds, but two more Balentine free throws clinched the win.

Adam Wing and Blake Simmons had strong games for UE. Wing totaled 8 points and 7 rebounds while Simmons checked in with 8 points and 6 caroms.

Four Mastodons finished in double figures, led by Steve Forbes. He hit 8 out of 15 attempts to register 20. McCray finished with 19 points, 15 of which came from outside. Joe Edwards had 13 while Max Landis completed the evening with 10.