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Panther Sports News

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CHARLESTON, IL--Eastern Illinois University women's basketball team takes a 10-6 record when they face Loyola University Friday (January 30) in Chicago.

The Panthers then return home to Lantz Gym to entertain Chicago State at 7 p.m. Saturday (January 31). The game marks the beginning of a four-game homestand for Coach Bobbie Hilke's Panthers.

Commenting on her team's performance thus far this season, second-year Coach Hilke said, "We're pretty happy with what we've done. We just hope we can put it all together the last half of the season."

The Panthers are averaging over 75 points as a team, with three players in double figures. They have displayed some outstanding performances to date, including a 71-68 loss to AIAW Division II National Champ, University of Dayton, a 94-77 romp over regional powerhouse Northern Michigan and a thrilling 69-68 win over in-state rival Western Illinois.

JoAnn Archer (Mundelein) is the Panthers' leading scorer with a 17.2 average. She is followed by sophomore guard Nancy Kassebaum (Belleville-East) with 15.6 and senior Linda Ellsworth (Menasha, WI-Portage Central) at 14.9.

Having already played against some of the top teams in the nation, the remainder of the schedule consists mainly of Division II schools within the state.

"The second half of our schedule are the games that really matter. They are extremely important in regards to how we are seeded in the state tournament," said Hilke.

"We've played really tough competition up to this point and we feel we've held our own. From here on out we'll have more knowledge of the teams we'll be up against. We'll know what to expect from them and will be better prepared."

Although Eastern has been at a distinct height disadvantage in the majority of its games, the Panthers have dominated the boards in nearly every encounter.

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Ellsworth has pulled down an average of 8.5 rebounds per game while Archer has grabbed a total of 93, good for a 5.8 average.

"At the beginning of the year, our rebounding needed more work than any facet of our game. We've come along fairly well in that we're outrebounding teams bigger than us," said Hilke.

"Another aspect of our team that I'm very pleased with is steals. We're double-teaming well at critical times," Hilke added.

Leading the way for the Panthers in steals is All-Stater Nancy Kassebaum with 72 in 16 games.

According to Hilke, her team's shooting percentage is perhaps its weakest point. From the field the Panthers are only 47% while at the free throw line they are connecting on only 63%.

"I really believe that our shooting percentage is better than it looks. We just need more determination to go to the basket," said Hilke.

Although Eastern has had no set line-up throughout the season, Hilke is quick to point out that her squad is a specialized team. "We try to utilize each person's strengths in special situations. We're really based on a specialty concept."

Based on that principle, "it will be our team defense that will start winning some games for us," said Hilke.