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Panther Sports News

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CHARLESTON, IL--Melanie Hatfield darts around the basketball court like a pesky fly. At one moment she hauls down a rebound at one end and leads the fast break basket at the other end of the hardwood. Her jump stops and hanging jumpers are as common in Eastern Illinois basketball circles as "Dandy Don" singing "Turn Out the Lights the Party's Over" at the conclusion of a Monday night football game.

The Lawrenceburg, Ind. native makes her presence known on the court at all times. Hatfield has been associated with a winner since her prep days at Lawrenceburg High School. She was named to the prestigious Indiana All-Star squad after a banner senior campaign and competed against the Kentucky All-Stars in an annual two-game series.

Hatfield was a member of the Gold Medal-winning Blue-Gray team in last summer's Prairie State Games. EIU head coach Barbara Hilke coached the team and teammate Toni Collins was also a member of the squad.

"Melanie is a very gifted athlete," states Hilke. "She makes things happen on the court with her speed and aggressiveness. She has the ability to control a game by herself when she is playing up to her capabilities."

Against Southwest Missouri earlier this season, the cat-quick leaper scored 10 points in less than five minutes to assist in leading the Lady Panthers back from a seemingly-insurmountable 18-point deficit. She is one of the catalysts that make Eastern's offensive machine resemble a Swiss watch at times.

The 5-foot-6 junior is third on the team in scoring with a 11.4 average. She also is among the conference leaders in assists (97) and steals (56). Hatfield had 85 assists and 65 steals all last year.

The all-conference candidate had a field day against Southern Illinois a year ago. Hatfield poured-in 32 points in Eastern's 75-61 loss to the Salukis. She has topped the 20-point mark four times this season with her top effort being a 22-point, six rebound performance against Ball State.

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Hatfield has become a crowd favorite around Lantz Gym with her exciting moves and hanging jumpers. Teaming up with Kim Maxey and Lori Conine in the back court, the trio has given the Lady Panthers solid play at guard. It may be only a matter of time when the Lady Panthers and Hatfield get over the hump in the Gateway Conference.