



NKU escapes with 67-61 victory over Missouri S&T

Brannen blocks potential tying shot in final minute, top-ranked Norse remain unbeaten (16-0)

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, Ky. – The winning streak continues to grow, but that target on their collective backs is getting larger, too.

That's the price the Northern Kentucky University women's basketball team has to pay for being unbeaten and the defending NCAA Division II national champion. Missouri S&T took aim at the Norse's winning streak Thursday night and nearly pulled off the upset in The Bank of Kentucky Center.

Fortunately for NKU, Cassie Brannen was patrolling the lane in the final minute of the game. And the Norse escaped with a 67-61 win against the visiting Lady Miners to remain perfect (16-0) this season.

Brannen blocked a shot with 22 seconds left on the clock to prevent Missouri S&T from tying the game. NKU held a 63-61 lead, but Missouri S&T's Lauren Dubbert found an opening and drove into the lane for a shot.

Brannen blocked the shot, grabbed the rebound and drew a foul with 20 seconds remaining. She converted both free throws to give NKU a 65-61 advantage. Danyelle Echoles added two more free throws with nine seconds left to seal the win.

"Cassie made a big play when we needed it, and that's what you expect of a senior in a situation like that," NKU

Brandi Rayburn looks for an open teammate against Missouri S&T.

head coach Nancy Winstel said. "It was a hard-fought game, but I did not feel like we guarded like we need to. Missouri S&T has some very talented players and they made us pay. We could have lost this game, and good teams find a way to win."

Brandi Rayburn scored 17 points and grabbed 14 rebounds to leads NKU, which improved to 8-0 in the Great Lakes Valley Conference. Brannen added 13 points and three rejections for the Norse, who have won 22 consecutive games dating back to last season and are ranked No. 1 nationally in the NCAA Division II poll.

Jessie Slack scored 16 points for NKU, which defeated Missouri S&T (8-8 overall, 2-6 GLVC) for the third consecutive time.

"I thought Brandi played really well, but I feel like we didn't have a sense of urgency like we should have had," Slack said. "We need to have that killer instinct to go out and put people away as soon as we can."

NKU faces a showdown with GLVC West-leading Quincy at 1 p.m. Saturday in The Bank of Kentucky



Cassie Brannen (left) prepares to block Lauren Dubbert's shot attempt in the final minute of NKU's 67-61 win against Missouri S&T. Brannen grabbed the rebound after blocking the potential tying field goal and was fouled with 20 seconds left.

Center. Quincy overwhelmed Indianapolis by a 73-47 score on Thursday night.

"We are going to have to bring a much better game to the court Saturday against a very good Quincy team if we expect to be successful," Winstel said. "Some other people other than Cassie Brannen have to step up and defend the inside, because Quincy has a great deal of talent and they are playing very well."

Quincy defeated NKU last season, 83-66, at Quincy, Ill. The Lady Hawks enter Saturday with a 15-3 overall record and are 7-1 in the GLVC.