

**MEN'S GAME 8**  
**March 8, 2018**



**EASTERN MICHIGAN - 67**  
**AKRON - 58**

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**KEN MATHER:** Like to welcome our Eastern Michigan Eagles to the press conference room. We'll go ahead and let the Head Coach Rob Murphy open with an opening statement.

**COACH MURPHY:** I thought this was a really good win for us. We got off to a slow start. We knew Akron would be an extremely tough out here in Cleveland. Knew they would have confidence coming in. They had been playing well, and they shoot the ball exceptionally well. We got off to a bad start offensively and put them in transition early, something we don't usually do, and they were able to score and build the lead. Our guys continued to fight throughout the first half.

I thought James Thompson getting a couple fouls early hurt us by him being on the bench, rebounding lacked, our defensive interior lacked, but we went into half time and made some adjustment offensively but Akron continued to come out and play well at the beginning of the second half, and I thought what changed the game right around that 12-minute mark when we decided to press. Ideally just want to go speed them up to see if they'll make a few mistakes, which they did, which we were able to get some quick buckets in transition that we hadn't got all game. Then once we made a run and cut it to single digits, we seen them begin to think a little bit, be a little bit indecisive, and from the six-minute mark on we made really great offensive plays, we played great defense, we were able to rebound the ball and close out the game.

So a lot of credit to our guys for being down 19, continuing to believe what we preach and teach every day defensively and offensively for executing.

I thought Elijah Minnie did an unbelievable job in the second half. He finished with 21-14 and three huge blocks. I thought Tim Bond all game continued to help initiate our offense. He made key steals and key plays when needed and we were able to close out the game.

So give Akron a lot of credit, they gave us all we could handle. Our guys could have kind of melted, could have veered left and threw the towel in, but in each and every timeout we just worked on cutting the lead, cutting the lead in increments, taking one play at a time. And to a man, everybody believed and just continued to stick with what we were going to do. And Tim Bond being a senior, obviously we didn't want to go out in his career in MAC play with a quarterfinal loss. So we dug in and I give our guys a lot of credit. Very thankful to advance.

**Q. Tim became the single-season all-time steal leader tonight. Tim, there were several in this game, I think three of them. How much of your anticipation defensively and knowing that you had to get points in transition against Akron, who was pesky all**

**night, just the mindset of scoring in transition and points off turnovers?**

**TIM BOND:** The defensive mindset is always at the top of my head. Coach Murphy is always telling me try to get this steal, that steal. He preaches defense all day and night so that's what I try to bring my game off the most, just try to feed off defense and get everybody going.

**Q. Elijah, those key 3s late in the second half there, just talk about the confidence shooting those in that situation.**

**ELIJAH MINNIE:** Most of my confidence comes from myself and Coach Murph. I can remember like it was yesterday, we were sitting at Kent, I think I was like 0-4 and I sat on the bench and he told me to keep shooting. He told me if J.J. Redick is 0-4, he's going to keep shooting. Since that day that's the confidence I had in myself, just keep shooting, but making the shots. Not just shoot them to shoot them, but know I'm going to make them.

**Q. Elijah, you were made Third Team All-MAC by being the highest scorer in the conference, and top 3 in steals, blocks, fifth in free throw percentage in the league, and not on the All-Defensive team. How much of that did you think about and drive you in this game and through this tournament?**

**ELIJAH MINNIE:** It's on my mind a lot. I feel embarrassed that conference even picked me at third team, I thought I was at least second team, maybe first team but at least second team. I think I was second in blocks, like fourth or third in steals, I didn't make All-Defensive team, I didn't get any recognition in that either. So I feel really disrespected and embarrassed by the MAC for getting Third Team, and that's in the back of my head and it's going to cost a lot of coaches.

**Q. You guys are down by 19 points with 12 and a half minutes left and James Thompson in foul trouble. What did it take for your team to exactly come back in this game?**

**COACH MURPHY:** Well, it's no exact science and obviously that's not the situation we want to be in, but continued belief was the message, continuing to believe in what we needed to do and making sure we took one step at a time. We weren't going to get it all back with one shot or one defensive play, but we just needed to be consistent in what we were doing. More importantly, these guys continuing to believe that it can happen and everyone, as I mentioned earlier to a man in every timeout continued to motivate each other and tell them a lot of time, don't look at the score, don't look at the clock, but there's a lot of time left for us to make a run. I thought when we drew up our diamond press to speed them up, we got a few steals. Then we continued to stay in our red press, which sped them up. Anytime you in a situation where one team is scoring and then you start to think, which our zone makes you do, you know, you tend to get in trouble and that's what happened to Akron tonight.

**Q. Coach Murphy, at 3:15 Eastern tied it 57-57. Right at that moment, what were you**

thinking?

**COACH MURPHY:** Well, I knew we had the momentum. Even when we were down 7, we had the momentum. We thought and felt we were in great shape. Jordan Nobles hit a big 3 in the corner, and then Elijah came back and hit a 3, and we knew once we cut it to single digits and continued to amp up our defense, we would stifle them and that's what we did. They started to think, they started to second guess themselves. They turned down a couple open shots and tried to penetrate.

I gave James Thompson a lot of credit. He didn't score a lot, but in the last six minutes his presence was great. He came up with a huge block, a huge deflection, which led to a steal, which led to an early transition bucket.

Collectively, our team defensively, we were great the last six minutes. So I give those guys a lot of credit for believing and buying into what we were teaching and preaching every timeout.