

IWU falls to Knights, who win sixth straight Crossroads League title

By Sean Douglas

Without a doubt, No. 16 Indiana Wesleyan has proven to be one of the most athletic teams in the entire Crossroads League. Their blazing quickness and agility on the perimeter and reliable shooting from all over the floor play a major role in their success, while their defensive acumen is equally as impressive.

However, No. 4 Marian possesses just a bit more, and that proved to be the difference in the Wildcats 72-54 loss at Luckey Arena on Wednesday evening.

While the Knights have a plethora of scoring options like Macy Willoughby and Imani Guy at their disposal, what sets Marian apart is their defensive prowess. Not many teams are able to effectively guard IWU’s speed on all levels, but the Knights did just that, disallowing the Wildcats to find any sort of offensive rhythm.

“They can just cover space,” IWU Head Coach Ethan Whaley said. “When you feel like you’re open, you’re not, because you’ve got a ridiculous wingspan closing out to you. Then, you try to drive by, and then they’ve got more length coming to block the shot. They are very good. They do a nice job of running you off the line and making you go to your second and third option in your offense. Over 40 minutes, that’s tough to go against. They executed their gameplan extremely well, and they kicked our butts.

“Over 40 minutes, 94 feet, both ends of the floor, they are coming at you and they are attacking. That’s why they’ve won so many league championships in a row.”

The Knights pressured the Wildcats throughout the contest, forcing 18 turnovers and holding IWU to just 18-of-47 shooting from the field (38.3 per-



Dayton Groninger drives to the hoop in IWU's contest against No. 4 Marian on Wednesday.

Photo by Sean Douglas

cent). Additionally, after making 17 triples in their win over Grace, the Wildcats made just three-of-15 (20 percent) from the perimeter against the Knights.

“It was just so choppy,” Whaley said. “We never really had sustained two, three, four possessions in a row where we got in a rhythm. Any good offense,

if you are going to be good, you have to have those types of stretches. I do think we had spurts, possessions here and there where we developed a rhythm and got the shots we wanted, just too little, too late.”

The Knights came out firing in the first quarter, knocking down three triples in the first 4:31 of game action to take an 11-2 lead.

The Wildcats pushed back in the final two minutes of the frame, as Baylie VanD-kyle scored on back-to-back possessions as part of a 6-2 IWU spurt to trim the Knights lead to just five. However, a basket in the paint by Kinnidy Garrard, followed by a steal and score by Marian point guard Abby Downard, gave the Knights a 17-8 lead at the first quarter break, and the Wildcats were unable to recover.

Garrard scored the first points of the second quarter, putting the Knights up by 11, and Marian held that double-digit advantage the rest of the way.

“If you boil this down, they just wanted this game more than we did in all facets,” Whaley said. “It showed itself in who took more charges, who got on more loose balls, and who got their hands on more deflections. Credit them, they were well-coached [and] we were out-toughed and out-

played tonight.” Only two Wildcats finished in double figures, with Dayton Groninger leading the way with 12 points to go along with six rebounds, while Maddie Lawrence scored 10 points in 19 minutes off the bench. Jordan Reid scored nine, while VanDyke, Maddie Davis, Anne Secrest, and Gabby Suarez each added five.

For Marian, Willoughby scored 16 points, while Guy scored 14, 12 of which came in the fourth quarter.

While Whaley was disappointed with the final result, he and the team know that this contest will prepare them for the Crossroads League Tournament, and beyond. Now, the goal is to finish the season strong.

“It was one game. It was a clunker of a game, but it was one game, and we have three more to go,” Whaley said. “That’s where our minds are at. Let’s move on, watch the film and learn from it.”

Grant County sports round up

February 9-15
Boy’s Basketball
Tuesday, Feb. 9

Behind a strong performance from Tai McClung, the Mississinewa Indians broke their two-game losing streak on Tuesday evening, defeating the Manchester Squires 64-59. McClung put together one of his best performances of the season, scoring 25 points, while Landen Swanner added 13 in the victory.

Playing Noblesville for the first time since 1957, Marion came away with their fifth straight victory, defeating the Millers at the buzzer, 69-68. Jalen Blackmon scored 38 points in the win, including the game-winning layup as time expired. Jermaine Woods scored 14, while Rodney Gipson added eight. Friday, Feb. 12

Eastbrook’s losing streak reached seven games on Friday evening, as a tough first quarter proved to be the difference in an 80-68 loss. The Panthers fell behind 30-11 after the first quarter of play, and despite another hard-fought effort, they were unable to get any closer than 10 points the rest of the way. Braxton Bowser put together another solid performance, scoring 19 points to go along with eight rebounds.

Marion saw their five-game win streak come to an end at McCutcheon, falling to the Mavericks by a score of 88-73. Jalen Blackmon scored 26 points, surpassing the 2,000 point threshold in his career, while freshman Taden Metzger scored 17 points. Coming off their strong

win over Manchester earlier in the week, the Mississinewa Indians suffered a heartbreaking, last-second loss to conference foe Frankton, falling to the Eagles 53-52. Tai McClung became the 10th Indian in program history to reach the 1,000 plateau for his career and the second this season, joining fellow senior Landen Swanner.

Oak Hill also suffered a last-second defeat on Friday evening, falling to the Blackford Bruins 52-50. The Golden Eagles took a 50-48

lead with 25.4 seconds to play, but the Bruins scored the final four points, including a layup at the buzzer. Despite the loss, Oak Hill played tremendous defense, holding Blackford to 24 points under their average. Landon Biegel finished with 26 points for the Golden Eagles, while Caleb Kroll scored 10.

Saturday, Feb. 13
Behind a strong, complete game effort, Eastbrook snapped their seven-game losing streak on Saturday evening, defeating the

Daleville Broncos 59-56. The Panthers led from the onset, and Jaxson Van-Belkum hit two crucial free throws in the waning moments to seal the deal.

Brody Brodkorb and Jett Engle each finished with 13 points, while Braxton Bowser scored 10 and Van-Belkum added eight.

Coming off clinching their first outright CIC championship in school history, the Madison-Grant Argylls recorded their 16th win of the season on Saturday, defeating the Southwood

Knights 72-64. Grant Brown scored 23 points, Justin Moore finished with 16, and Kaden Howell added 15 in the win.

Men’s Baseball
Friday, Feb. 12
Playing against No. 6 Faulkner University down in Alabama, the Wildcats dropped a pair of contests on Friday afternoon, falling to the Eagles 5-4 in game one and 7-1 in the second contest.

In the opener, Jon Young pitched 6.1 innings, giving up just four hits while strik-

ing out seven batters. The Wildcats took a 4-0 lead after five innings, but Faulkner scored three runs in the eighth and two runs in the bottom of the ninth to secure the win. Tye Thixton finished with a pair of hits, while Denver Blinn, Colby Jenkins, Chris Lopez, and MJ Stavola each collected one.

In game two, Thixton drove in the Wildcats’ lone run in the seventh inning, but five runs for Faulkner in the seventh and eighth frames al-

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