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UIS men's hoops team shines in GLVC debut

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The University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars men's basketball team, a newcomer to NCAA Division II and the Great Lakes Valley Conference, shined in its coming-out party Thursday in front of its home fans.

UIS senior guard Zach Lewis tipped in the game-winning basket at the buzzer for a thrilling 115-114 double-overtime victory over the Missouri S&T Miners in the UIS program's inaugural GLVC contest at The Recreation and Athletic Center.

"That's the effort we have to have to compete in the GLVC to win games," UIS coach Kevin Gamble. "We just kept fighting and we got lucky at the end with the tip-in with Zach. He's a guy that usually doesn't go to the offensive boards."

Lewis saved the day after the Miners' Bryce Foster drained a 3-pointer for a 114-113 S&T lead with 5.7 seconds left in the second overtime. UIS senior guard Richard Oruche then shot an air ball on a 3-point attempt with :03 left, but Lewis was there for the winning put-back.

"They always preach to us to crash the offensive glass," said Lewis, who finished with 18 points. "I knew with three seconds left when Rich put it up that it might be coming off. It just so happened to not hit anything and go right to me. It was a little bit of luck, but we'll take it.

"Coming into the game we didn't know what the difference between NAIA Division I and NCAA Division II was. I think we found that out tonight. We've got to bring it all 40 minutes or more than 40 minutes as you saw tonight."

The teams were separated by no more than seven points throughout the second half, and UIS (2-1 overall, 1-0 GLVC) had chances to win the game at the end of regulation and the first overtime.

Lewis stole the ball with :07.1 left in the second half. But the Stars didn't get a shot off and committed a turnover with :01.2 to go, leaving the score tied at 89. It was 97-all when UIS guard Brandon Farmer's 3-point attempt didn't fall at the end of the second overtime.

"We have lost three games like that already this season in the last seconds," Missouri S&T coach Jim Glash said. "Give credit to (UIS). They hit some huge shots. I love the way they go to the offensive board. That was one of our keys

to the game was not to let them get the offensive boards and on the last controversial play they got an offensive rebound.

"The crazy thing is if (Oruche's 3-point try) would have brushed the rim instead of being an air ball, the game's over. It would have went out of bounds. That's exactly the luck we've had so far."

With time running out in the second overtime, UIS appeared to have the game in the bag. Lewis converted two free throws for a 112-107 UIS lead with :22 to go.

The five-point edge quickly disappeared when the Miners' Byron Bundy made a layup with :15.7 remaining. Two seconds later, teammate A.J. Mandani stole the ball on the in-bounds play and tossed in a layup to pull the Miners within a point.

With :11.5 left, S&T's Hank Harris fouled UIS junior forward Justin Sims, who made 1 of 2 free throws for a 113-111 lead. That set the stage for Foster's go-head 3-pointer for S&T with :05.7 remaining.

"They didn't quit," Gamble said. "We came through in clutch situations. We made so many mistakes throughout the game that could have made it a lot easier for us. We put ourselves in situations that we shouldn't have been in, but you learn who you can play at certain times, who you can't and who's going to step up in certain situations."

Sloppy play plagued UIS late in the opening half and the Stars fell behind 46-37 at halftime. UIS had 13 turnovers in the first half and the Miners had eight steals.

"For the last 10 minutes of the first half we didn't compete," said Farmer, who had 26 points. "We were just out there. We had a lead and we were being

lazy. In the second half, we gave it our all and it ended the way it ended. In the second half, we learned how hard you have to play to win games.”

UIS got back in the contest with a 9-0 scoring run to open the second half, tying the score at 46.

“To begin the game we had opportunities,” Glash said. “We left eight points right at the rim to start the game. If we would have made those easy bunnies around the basket and would have made free throws, it would have never come down to a first overtime and second overtime.”

Mike Malat led S&T (2-4, 0-1) with 30 points.

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