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Umeadi's free throw boosts Prairie Stars

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

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Chigozie Umeadi hit a game-winning free throw with 2.3 seconds remaining as the University of Illinois Springfield men's basketball team survived a second straight thriller to beat Northwood University 80-79 Saturday in the GLVC/GLIAC Challenge at The Recreation and Athletic Center.

On Friday, UIS' Brandon Farmer drained a game-winning shot with 4.3 seconds left in a season-opening 67-66 win over Lake Superior State.

"I told the guys after last night I enjoy winning and let's make it a little easier," UIS first-year coach Ben Wierzba said.

That didn't happen. The game featured 25 lead changes.

The Prairie Stars trailed Northwood 34-33 at halftime. Cameron Joyce's 3-pointer put the Timberwolves ahead 77-75 with 1:30 to go in the second half and the back-and-forth battle continued. A pair of free throws by Northwood forward Darvin Ham tied the contest at 79 with 10 seconds remaining.

Ham fouled Umeadi, setting up the game-winning foul shot. Umeadi made the first of two free throws. Northwood guard Joe Powers rebounded Umeadi's miss on the second shot, then called a timeout.

Umeadi stole the inbounds pass, keeping the Timberwolves (0-2) from getting off a last-second shot. He scored three of the Stars' final five points. The sophomore forward finished with a career-high 21 points and eight rebounds, both team highs.

"He played really well," Wierzba said. "He was so aggressive inside. We kept giving him the ball inside late in the game."

Four players finished in double figures for the Stars. Senior forward Ryan Thornton added 17 points, including four 3-pointers. Senior guard Steffen Spinks and junior guard Lester Hart had 11 points apiece.

"There was a play in the second half where we had thee guys at one time all diving for a loose ball," Wierzba said. "Our guys played hard. They stayed with it. These guys have played hard the last two nights."

Andrew VanDierenDonck led the Timberwolves (0-2) with 22 points, including four 3-pointers. Northwood was 12 of 25 from behind the 3-point line.

UIS was the only undefeated team in the challenge matching teams from the Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference and the Prairie Stars' Great Lakes Valley Conference. Lake Superior of the GLIAC edged University of Missouri-St. Louis 74-71 in the early game.

The Stars (2-0) host the Hillsdale (Mich.) College Chargers, another GLIAC member, in a non-conference game at 7:30 p.m. Monday.

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