

Rockets win versus CMU; Lose Senior Night game

The Rocket men's basketball team played their second-to-last game of the year at Savage Arena on Feb. 24. They took down Central Michigan 87-66 in a game UT controlled from the beginning.

Toledo was efficient on offensive shooting (55 percent) and recorded 23 assists to just 11 turnovers. They controlled the other end of the floor as well, holding CMU to 23 points under their season average and outrebounding them by fourteen.

Fourth-year guard Jordan Lauf led the rebounding effort, recording a career-high 14 rebounds to go with a career-best 16 points. Fellow fourth-year forward Steve Taylor Jr. filled the stat sheet with 15 points, 10 rebounds and seven assists.

It was a showcase of fourth-year Rockets as guard Jonathan Williams paced the offense, scoring a team-high 22 points.

"We played exceptionally well on both sides of the floor," said head coach Tod Kowalczyk. "Our defense was really good to start the game and got into them a little bit."

The nation's leading scorer Marcus Keene (29.8 ppg) scored a game-high 27 points for the Chippewas.

Toledo led the entire game, thanks in part to a 12-2 run to start the game that was capped off with a Williams layup.

Following a Chippewas basket, second-year guard Jaelen Sanford scored five in a row, including a block that led to a layup.

The Rockets lead never fell under double digits for the remainder of the game. About midway through the first half, Williams drove the lane for a layup that pushed the UT margin to 16.

"Just great team basketball; we moved the ball well," Lauf said.

The lead remained steady for UT. The Chippewas were held scoreless for the final three minutes of the first half as Lauf and Taylor Jr. combined for eight points in that span. UT

led 40-20 after one half of basketball.

"It was big for us to go into halftime like that," Lauf said, "but we knew they were going to come back strong in the second half."

CMU came out of the locker room looking to make a dent in the lead by getting to the free throw line and cutting the margin to 15. Sanford had another answer as he knocked down a triple to push the lead back up.

First-year forward Luke Knapke hit a three of his own with 17 minutes left to stretch the lead to 50-29.

"I think our bench is fine; they've been fine all year," Kowalczyk said.

But UT couldn't keep Keene quiet for long: He scored eight quick points. Second-year Nate Navigato helped to capitalize, as he knocked down a triple to put the lead at 16 points with about five minutes remaining.

CMU tried but had no response for the tough defense and precise offense of the Rockets, who spent the rest of the game at the free throw line.

"We need to keep doing what we're doing," Kowalczyk said. "Stay together and stay focused."

Toledo headed into their last home game of the regular season against Ball State University looking to send the seniors out of Savage Arena with a win but were unable to find it in their 82-74 loss to the Cardinals.

Taylor Jr. and Williams led the Rockets on Senior Night, racking up 23 and 17 points, respectively.

The start of the game was massive for second-year Ball State guard Tayler Persons, who racked up 20 points in the first eight minutes, shooting six of six from the three-point line.

Williams fired back hard after the first media timeout, nailing two three-point shots on back-to-back possessions and putting the Rockets back within three points with a little under a half to go in the first.

Ball State eventually pulled away with the first-half lead and headed into halftime leading the Rockets 41-36.

The Cardinals destroyed the Rockets from around the arch, with

Ball State hitting nine of their 18 three-point shots, while Toledo only made five of 14.

Down by five points, the Rockets knew they need to shut down the Cardinals' three-point shot if they wanted to send the seniors home with a win.

Ball State started off the second half strong, extending their five-point lead to a 12-point lead before the 15-minute mark.

UT began to regain their footing on offense and, after a monster dunk from second-year forward Taylor Adway, the crowd was on their feet and the momentum was back on the Rockets' side.

After a three-point play from Ball State, the Rockets were down by 12 with seven minutes left in the game and were looking for a huge comeback.

Three straight Rocket scores from Sanford, Lauf and Williams brought UT within six points of the lead and the crowd on their feet.

Despite the momentum, the Rockets were unable to knock down critical shots in the final minutes of the game, giving Ball State an easy path to victory.

The Rockets will head to Lansing to finish out their regular season against Eastern Michigan on March 3 at 7 p.m.