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Penguins battle Vikings on ESPNU

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Coming off a less-than-stellar two-game stint in Wisconsin, the Youngstown State University men's basketball team has to regain their groove as they entertain the Cleveland State University Vikings in a nationally televised game Friday on ESPNU.

YSU students are excited that YSU will be on showcase to a national audience Friday night.

“I think it’s a good thing. It will be a memorable and exciting experience for the team,” said junior Julianne Popovec. “Relatives from out of town can watch the game if they can’t make it to Youngstown.”

The Penguins are in a state of inconsistency as they have lost three straight games after winning four of their previous six games. When they play the Vikings, the Penguins will be at the start of an eight-game, four-day home stand.

If the Penguins want to win against the Vikings, they are going to have to start making shots. In the two games in Wisconsin against the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, the Penguins shot below 34 percent from the field in each contest. In the Penguins’ 78-61 loss against Green Bay, the Penguins allowed them to shoot a sizzling 51 percent from the field.

Even with four straight home games, the Penguins are only 3-5 at Beeghly Center. They want to give the country a good show and give the hometown fans their money’s worth.

Head coach Jerry Slocum has only good things to say about the opposing team.

“Cedric Jackson and J’Nathan Bullock are among the top players in the league,” he said. “They are a team that has struggled in conference play and I’m sure that they are going to come in really desperate ... we know we will get their best shot,” Slocum said.

Cleveland State boasts a record of 13-7 overall and a solid .500 mark of 4-4 in the Horizon League. The Vikings are only 1-3 in the Horizon League on the road, so perhaps the Penguins can capitalize on the Vikings’ poor conference road record.

The Vikings ride into Youngstown with a two-game losing streak after losing to UW-Milwaukee and UW-Green Bay. Before their recent two-game skid, the Vikings enjoyed a stretch of three straight wins over Horizon League opponents University of Detroit-Mercy, Loyola University and University of Illinois-Chicago.

For YSU to be successful on the big stage, the Penguins’ shooters have to start knocking down jumpers. The Penguins average three more points per game than the Vikings but allow their opponents to score three more points per game. The Penguins need to play better defense if they want to win this game and for the rest of the season.

The Penguins have to contain J’Nathan Bullock in order to have a chance in the game. Bullock bullies opponents to the tune of 15.8 points per game and chips in 6.7 rebounds for spare change. Bullock rains in field goals made at a respectable 38 percent, so he is a deep threat the Penguins need to pay attention to.

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