UNH Men’s Basketball: Wildcats Season Update

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Durham N.H.- When you throw a brand new coaching staff and five new players onto a Division I basketball team it is bound to be an uphill battle. The University of New Hampshire (UNH) Wildcats (12-8, 4-3) are currently facing that exact challenge.

Since their conference schedule began, the Wildcats have mounted three thrilling comebacks to keep fans on the edge of their seats (11-point deficit at Maine, seven-point deficit at UMBC, and 12 points vs. Binghamton).

Scrapping for these wins can never be easy but it helps when a team consists of players like junior guard Ahmad Robinson and senior forward Clarence Daniels. Daniels (20.8 ppg) averages the most points in the America East conference and the 16th most points in the nation while Robinson (16.5 ppg) averages the sixth most in the America East conference.

Now what makes matters harder to stay out of these situations of having to pull off a comeback is when your 6’10” center suffers a season-ending injury before the team’s first back in November. Sophomore forward Ridvan Tutic tore his ACL in a practice, leading to graduate student Jaxson Baker to take his role.

While the challenge is present for the 6’8” forward from Arizona, Baker has shown copious amounts of grit averaging the third most points (10.4) and second most rebounds (6.4) on the team. While having to be that “big body” down low, he also has recorded the second most three-pointers on the team (35).

Those three players played a major role last Thursday (Jan. 25), when they mounted a 12-point comeback vs. Binghamton University (9-1B5). Baker tallied 11 points while having to match up against a 6’10” Tariq Balogun. Robinson recorded his third 20+ point game of the season with 22. Two of those 22 points took place on a high-flying game-tying layup to send the game to overtime.

But Daniels was the icing on the cake that not only sparked the comeback late in the second half, but with 32 points he was virtually unstoppable. This was his third 30+ point game and his eighth double-double of the season.

Following their thrilling comeback against the Bearcats, UNH was tasked with a quick turnaround to host a frisky UAlbany (11-10, 3-3) team two days later. The Great Danes who currently sit one game behind the Wildcats came into Lundholm Gymnasium and got the job done. Sebastian Thomas who sits one slot behind Daniels in the America East points per game standings (18.9 ppg) helped the Great Danes to their seven-point victory with a 25-point, seven assists, six steal game.

That loss dropped the ‘Cats record to 4-3 with a difficult four-game stretch upcoming. Their trek begins this Saturday when they take a highly anticipated trip down to the Tsongas Center to compete against UMass Lowell (14-5, 5-1) for the second time this season.
Since last season the two teams have played one another four times. Three of those four games ended with the Riverhawks in the victory column. The most notable of the four was the 2023 America East Semi-Finals where UMass Lowell beat the Wildcats 75-64.

On January 6th, 2024, UNH hosted the UMass for their first conference game of the season. The Wildcats stuck with the Riverhawks in the first half as they were only down 31-30 at halftime. But as the second half got underway the ‘Cats began to find themselves in a hole that they could not dig themselves out of.

Being down as much as 11 points, the Wildcats could not claw themselves back as the talented Lowell roster was too much to handle. The final score from Durham on the sixth was 82-75.

Max Brooks (12.2), Ayinde Hikim (15.5), Cam Morris III (11.5), Quinton Mincey (11.2), and Braden O’Connor (10.3) all average over ten points per game to contribute to the team being the second highest scoring offense in the America East (78.0 ppg).

UNH will head down to UMass Lowell for a 5:00 p.m. tip-off this Saturday, February, 3rd. The game can be watched on ESPN+ or listened to on WUNH 91.3 f.m.

Following the conclusion of Saturday’s game, the Wildcats will be tested three more times as they will first travel to Bryant (13-8, 5-1) who beat UNH 89-74 earlier this season. Then two days later the ‘Cats will host Maine (10-11, 2-4) who they had to scrap back from an 11-point deficit in the second half to win in early January. The following Thursday, the gauntlet ends with an away matchup against a Vermont (16-5, 6-0) team that hasn’t lost an America East matchup since January 11th of 2023.

Only four teams are able to secure home-court advantage in the America East playoffs and the Wildcats sit in the fourth slot right now. With a number of teams on their tail, every game from here on out is more crucial.