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(Neb.)- CSC Men Will Battle For Playoff Berth Friday

By: Jeremy Anderson Posted at: 02/28/2019 08:15 AM

CHADRON, Neb. -- Both Chadron State College basketball teams will wrap up their regular season schedules Friday night when they visit Metro State-Denver. The Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference traveling partners opened their conference schedules in Chadron on December 1 and will close them on March 1.

Metro won the women's game three months ago 64-61 in overtime. The Eagles won the men's contest 76-67.

The CSC men led by just 35-33 at halftime, but were ahead by as much as 70-53 with four minutes remaining.

It was just the fourth time since 1996-97 when Metro State joined the RMAC that the Eagles defeated the Roadrunners.

Much of the difference came from three-point range. The Eagles were 11 of 24 from behind the arc and Metro was just two of 16.

The trip to Denver will have special meaning for the CSC men. A victory will put them in the RMAC Shootout for the first time since 2012. They are 12-15 overall and 10-11 in the conference.

The latter mark ties the Eagles with Adams State for the eighth and final slot in the playoffs, but CSC has the tiebreaker advantage because it caged the Grizzlies 93-86 on Jan. 4 in Chadron when point guard Colby Jackson and co-center Adoum Mbang each scored 20 points.

Adams State will play at Fort Lewis in Durango on Friday night. Should the Grizzlies win on the road, they would need a CSC loss, also on the road, to nab the playoff bid. If both teams lose, that opens the door for South Dakota School of Mines, also on the road at Black Hills State.

Metro State is 11-14 overall and 9-12 in the RMAC to share 10th and 11th in the loop standings with South Dakota Mines. The Hardrockers pulled off the conference's biggest upset last Saturday night, downing league leader Colorado Mines in Rapid City to snap the Orediggers' 22-game winning skein. Metro State is eliminated from postseason contention by virtue of tiebreakers.

Colorado Mines is now 20-1 in conference play and will host the No. 8 team after Friday night's regular-season finales are played.

Chadron State coach Houston Reed said he hopes his Eagles have that opportunity.

This year's Chadron State team is a cohesive one made up largely of veterans who have transferred to CSC the past two years. Reed said the team that shoots best Friday night will probably win.

The coach is hoping the Eagles will connect on far more of their three-pointers than they made last weekend while playing at CSU-Pueblo and New Mexico Highlands. They were just five of 26 from behind the arc in those games.

Metro State has won three of its last four games, blasting Black Hills State 72-51 and South Dakota Mines 80-60 at home two weeks ago and then splitting, just as the Eagles did, last weekend on the road.

The Roadrunners were pummeled 103-69 by New Mexico Highlands, then whipped CSU-Pueblo 76-62. The Eagles downed Pueblo 70-62 and lost at Highlands 97-91.

Metro's top scorer is Druce Asah, a 6-4 junior who is averaging 16 points. He leads the team in 3-pointers, hitting 77 of 190 for 40.5 percent. Garrett Carter, a 6-3 junior, and Kendall McIntosh, a 6-8 junior, are averaging 11.4 and 11.2 points, respectively. All three are Californians.

Chadron State may have the conference's most balanced scoring. Senior Diontae Champion leads with a 12.0-point average and juniors Michael Sparks and Colby Jackson are next at 11.4 and 10 points, respectively.

Seniors Jeremy Ruffin at 9.1 points, Adoum Mbang at 7.7 and Charles Gavin at 7.3 follow.

Ruffin and Champion pace the rebounders at 6.8 and 5.3 per game, in that order.

The Metro State women are 15-12 overall and 14-7 in the conference, good for third place in the standings and likely a home berth in the RMAC Shootout.

The Roadrunners have two probable all-star honorees.

Senior guard Jaelynn Smith is averaging 15.2 points, third highest in the RMAC, and leads the conference in free throw line visits. She is 122-151 at the charity stripe. She also is averaging 6.7 rebounds a game. Classmate Emily Hartegan is averaging 14.4 points and 8.2 rebounds.

Smith scored 24 points and Hartegan 19 in the overtime win in the Chadron.

Not to be overlooked is a third senior, Jonalyn Wittwer, who is averaging 9.6 points and has sunk 67 treys.

CSC's scoring leaders are sophomores Taryn Foxen at 11.2 points a game and Jessica Harvey at 10.9. Freshman Angelique Gall is third on the scoring list at 7.1 a game.

While the Eagles own nearly a two per-game rebounding edge over the foes, the team's top rebounders are averaging just 4.1. One of them is 5-4 freshman point guard Jori Peters. Juniors Jessica Lovitt and McKenna McClintic, both 5-10, are the others.