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The Western Michigan men's basketball team

WMU MEN'S BASKETBALL

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The Western Michigan men's basketball team passed its first real test of the season Wednesday.

The Broncos went on the road to play their first Division I opponent and beat a feisty Oakland team, 82-71, in Rochester.

What was billed to be an offensive game between two teams who like to get up and down the floor turned out to be a gritty game that came down to execution.

"We kind of grinded it out," WMU coach Steve Hawkins said. "The game didn't materialize like I thought it might. Oakland does a good job of getting up and down the floor."
"The first half was really slow, but it was a pace that we kind of liked. Neither team could hit a lot of shots. In the second half we started getting up and down. I thought our veterans looked like veterans in the last six minutes of the ball game."

Western Michigan executed three offensive sets in a row that translated to an 8-0 run to put the Broncos ahead for good.

Connar Tava made a move inside to draw a foul and made both free throws to put the Broncos ahead 67-65. WMU got a 3-pointer from two possessions later to go ahead 70-65 and then Tava drew defenders down low again and found Tucker Haymond for a wide open 3-pointer in the counter to give WMU a 73-65 lead with 3:40 remaining in the game.

Hawkins said playing inside out and setting good screens in that stretch made the difference.

"We took the ball to Connar almost exclusively and played through his hands," Hawkins said. "He can be a point forward. He can be a good passer if he doesn’t try to get too cute with the ball. We did execute well and we were able to get the ball inside."

Tava finished with 21 points and 10 rebounds. He had six and eight respectively in the first half.

WMU held Oakland (0-3) standout center Corey Petros to five points and seven rebounds. Petros did not score in the second half.

The first half was a game of runs as the Broncos turned a 14-14 tie with 10:40 remaining in the first half into a 21-14 advantage just over a minute later. Oakland then countered with a 7-0 run to tie the score at 21-apiece with 7:37 to go in the first half.

WMU’s Tucker Haymond led all scorers with 12 points in the first half. Haymond finished with 19 in the game.

The Broncos host Drake at 1 p.m. Saturday at University Arena.

**HIGHLIGHTS**

- WMU freshman Thomas Wilder had eight points in 14 minutes in the first half and scored in the paint late in the shot clock several times. He was on the court with Austin Richie and David Brown for the last six minutes of the first half. That trio gives WMU a different look as it frees Richie up from handling the ball all the time and allows him to move without the ball and look for his shot. Richie finished with 10 points.

- WMU’s bench out-scored Oakland’s reserves 24-17 in the game. Along with Wilder, the Broncos’ bench was led by redshirt sophomore forward/center Kellen McCormick, who scored 14 points. Oakland made a point to shut down Richie and David Brown.

Those two players finished a combined 4-for-16 shooting in the game. McCormick gave the Broncos a spark and proved to be an X-factor in the game. He was 4-for-5 from 3-point range in the game, including 3-for-4 in the second half.

**LOWLIGHTS**

- Oakland showed its might on the offensive glass as the Golden Grizzlies collected 12 offensive rebounds in the game. Hawkins said he thought the lengthy Grizzlies lineup might have the advantage on the glass, but he also pointed to WMU’s 56.9 percent shooting percentage in the game, including 50 percent from behind the arc, as a reason why WMU only collected six offensive boards. Both teams finished with 29 rebounds.

- The Broncos had 15 turnovers Wednesday. They had 16 mishaps in the season opener against Aquinas. It’s not a huge problem for the Broncos, but it is something to work on cleaning up as the season progresses.
- Wednesday's game is the final contest in a four-year contract with Oakland. However, WMU coach Steve Hawkins said the two will start a new four-year series next season. The matchup has proven to be a quality in-state test for both squads.

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