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By Andrew Cato, ShowMe Times Sports Editor

The Bearcats opened the regular season at home on Friday night against the Sikeston Bulldogs. Sikeston, fresh off a 30-0 season and Class 4 State Title last year, utilized great outside shooting to knock off the Bearcats with a 68-35 final.

“When [Sikeston] shoots it like they did tonight, there’s nothing we can do and nothing most people can do to stay in the game,” head coach Rob Nichols said after the game. “I thought Vashawn Ruffin shot the ball amazingly. A couple of them hit a few deep shots in transition - you’ve gotta tip your hat to them, it shows the work they put in shooting the basketball.”

Ruffin led the Bulldogs with 20 points, including two deep threes in the second quarter. Kilron Coleman and Terry Jameson each chipped in 13 points toward the Bulldog win.

“They’re a very good team, and I don’t see a whole lot of weaknesses,” Nichols said of Sikeston. “From what I’ve head and talked to other people, they think they’re a few steps ahead of where they were last year at this time. They shoot the ball well.”

The Bulldogs jumped out to a quick lead early in the first quarter, aided by two threes from Jameson and one from Caleb McGee. Sikeston’s defense was aggressive throughout the entire game, and their full-court press proved difficult to break at times for the ‘Cats.

Tyler Miller hit a three as time expired to cut the Bulldog lead to 15-7 at the end of the first quarter.

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J.T. Jones downed a three to open the second quarter for Sikeston, but Brad Potts knocked in a jumper to answer. Miller hit a three at the 5:45 mark to cut Sikeston's lead to 10. Miller and Jake Lee were both aggressive on the boards late in the first half, but the Bulldogs still held a 41-20 lead going into halftime.

Lee hit a bucket to open the third quarter, but Sikeston then went on a 10-0 run, aided by great play from Markeith Fratcher off the bench. D.J. Dowdy knocked in a layup to end the run at the 3:45 mark, but the Bulldogs still held a commanding 58-27 lead after three quarters of play.

The Bearcat defense played much better in the fourth quarter, holding Sikeston to only 10 points. Potts, Miller, and Lee scored the Bearcats' eight points in the fourth, but Sikeston still claimed the 68-35 victory.

Despite the lopsided score, Nichols agains felt that his team played well throughout the game.

"I thought the kids executed what we wanted to do early in the game, but fatigue gets to you. We're not real deep compared to them," he said. "The kids start seeing your down by seven or eight points, they think 'we gotta score' and you can't do that against them. Any time it gets uptempo, it's bad for us and great for them."

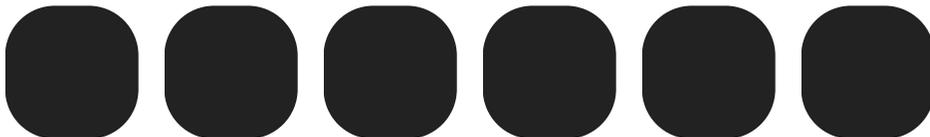
"I feel like we competed tonight; I don't think we laid down and let them whip us," Nichols continued. "If we can stay positive, two games against Sikeston and one against Charleston, that will make the kids better. If they can be positive and not so much see 0-2 and see what's down the road, if they can play these teams they can play with anyone in the area."

The Bearcats will be back in action on Monday night, when they face Sikeston again in the opening round of the SEMO Tournament.

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