



If you've ever heard the cliché, "That's why they play the games", it could be used to describe Saturday's slate of MAC basketball games. It looks to be a day for the favorites to sweep the board with little trouble. With six games on tap and no marquee matchups on the schedule, it could take an upset or two to turn it into an exciting day of basketball.

There weren't any upsets during the week either, as Akron and Ohio were both victorious over lesser competition, Western Michigan, Toledo, and Eastern Michigan defended home court, and Bowling Green took advantage of yet another poor offensive performance from Northern Illinois to grab their first road win. In Tuesday's standalone MAC contest, the Zips avoided a letdown at home by taking charge in the second half to down the Central Michigan Chippewas 68-56. Ohio held Ball State to just 14 points in the first half, using a 20-point halftime cushion to coast to a 27-point rout of the Cardinals. Western Michigan got a stiff test from Kent State, but scored 50 points in the second half to erase a six-point halftime deficit in an 82-76 win. Toledo got a buzzer-beater three-pointer from Nathan Boothe to squeak past Miami of Ohio 65-64. Eastern Michigan clamped down in the second half, holding Buffalo to just 13 points, in a 65-46 victory. Bowling Green held Northern Illinois to 27.5 percent shooting and just 15 first half points in a 57-41 road win.

The focus shifts to Saturday, when all 12 MAC teams take the court. In what could be the top game of the day, the Bowling Green Falcons will look to make it two straight road wins with a trip to Athens to battle the Ohio Bobcats. If history is any indication, it will be hard for the Falcons to go into the Convocation Center and come out with a win. The home team has won nine of the last 10 matchups between these two schools.

The reason this game could be much closer than people think is that it could become a defensive struggle. The Bobcats are allowing just 57.8 points at home this season, while the Falcons have held opponents to 59.6 points per game in their last five. The Falcons and

Bobcats combined to allow just 83 points in their last game as Bowling Green beat Northern Illinois and Ohio beat Ball State.

The conference's top team, the Akron Zips, will take their show on the road to Oxford for a matinee with the Miami of Ohio Redhawks. The Zips are just 4-3 on the road this season and will take the nation's longest winning streak, 14 games, to a place where they have had some success. The Zips have won three of the last four meetings in Millett Hall over the Redhawks.

Akron has a four-game winning streak in this series, winning by an average of 11 points per contest. The Zips are riding high, while the Redhawks are flying low, losers of five of their last six and coming off a heartbreaking last-second loss to Toledo on Wednesday night. Akron is shooting 48.4 percent over their last five, while Miami's defense is allowing opponents to shoot over 50 percent over that span.

The top team in the MAC West Division, the Western Michigan Broncos, will put their seven-game win streak on the line in Muncie against the Ball State Cardinals. The Broncos have taken charge in the division and have gotten on track offensively, scoring 70 or more points in six of their last seven. The Cardinals haven't done much of anything right of late, losing by nearly 12 points per game in their last seven losses.

The highlight matchup in this game will feature the conference's two best rebounders. Shayne Whittington, who had 21 points and 12 rebounds in Western Michigan's win over Kent State, will go head to head with Majok Majok, the 13th-best rebounder in the country with 10.3 boards per game. That matchup alone should be worth the price of admission at Worthen Arena.

This game can be seen live on SportsTime Ohio at 6 p.m.

The Toledo Rockets will attempt to carry over the momentum from their thrilling last-second win over Miami of Ohio with a nighttime tip against the Eastern Michigan Eagles, who are still looking for that elusive road win. The Rockets snapped a six-game losing streak against the Eagles with last March's 76-51 win and they'll try to make it two in a row over EMU for the first time since 2008-2009. After getting dominated by Akron on January 23, the Rockets have won four straight.

Eastern Michigan plays a lot of low scoring games with a pesky defensive team and a terrible offense. Part of the reason the Eagles are 0-9 on the road is that they are scoring just 52 points per game. There's cause for optimism on Saturday, though, as the Eagles have held their last five opponents to 21.6 percent from three-point range.

Kent State will try to fix their fortunes and get back in the win column against Central Michigan. The Golden Flashes have lost five out of their last six and are at risk of falling to the .500 mark for the first time since they were 5-5 on December 9. Like their counterparts to the East, the Chips have struggled on the road, winning just once in eight tries. To make matters worse, the Chippewas have lost 10 straight against Kent State.

The Flashes are just trying to get to the MAC tournament and take their chances in the single elimination format. With high expectations for this season, or at least hopes of contending with Ohio and Akron, the Flashes are just 12-11 overall and 3-6 in the conference. A game against CMU should go in the win column, but Kent State cannot take anybody for granted right now.

Northern Illinois will have the longest road trip on Saturday, heading up to Alumni Arena on the University of Buffalo campus to take on the Bulls. At this point, it's impossible to predict what Huskies team will show up. After beating Kent State and playing right with Toledo, the Huskies mustered just 41 points against Bowling Green on Wednesday. Buffalo also struggled on the offensive end, scoring just 46 points at Eastern Michigan. Might want to hide the women and children or at least shield their eyes when this game is on.