

Ayers' Late Three Carries Bucknell Past Morehead State, 54-50

Bison Sweep TicketCity Legends Classic Lewisburg Subregional, Ayers Named MVP

[box score](#)

LEWISBURG, Pa. - Lewisburg Subregional Most Valuable Player Cameron Ayers hit the tiebreaking 3-pointer with 1:47 remaining, helping Bucknell rally from 10 points down in the second half and claim a 54-50 victory over Morehead State and a perfect 3-0 weekend at the TicketCity Legends Classic at Sojka Pavilion. Ayers scored 15 points and did not turn the ball over in 36 minutes against the Eagles' heavy fullcourt pressure, and Bryson Johnson hit six more 3-pointers and scored 20 points for the Bison, who have now won five straight games to improve to 5-2 on the season.

Like Bucknell, Morehead State (3-4) had also beaten Princeton and West Alabama earlier in the weekend, so Sunday's contest was for the "championship" of the Lewisburg Subregional of the TicketCity Legends Classic. The game had a bit of a playoff feel, as both teams dug in defensively, making any inside look at the basket a rarity.

On the other hand, both sides shot the ball well from 3-point range early on. Six of Morehead State's first seven field goals were 3-pointers, and Johnson, coming off a nine-trey game against West Alabama, hit four more in the first 10 minutes of the game.

Leading 24-20 in the final four minutes of the half, Morehead State opened up some breathing room with a Kahlil Owens layup and a Ty Proffitt 3-pointer. The Bison had made only one field goal in over eight minutes until Mike Muscala beat the halftime buzzer with a 3-pointer from the left wing, bringing Bucknell within 29-23 at the intermission.

In the first half, 12 of the 18 combined field goals were 3-pointers, and coming out of the locker room Proffitt canned his fourth trey of the night. After Muscala went 1-for-2 from the foul line, Drew Kelly scored in the lane to give the Eagles a 34-24 lead with 18:14 to play.

But Bucknell's defense was stout the rest of the way, allowing only six more field goals, two of which came in the closing seconds.

Johnson's 3-pointer off a Muscala kick-out ignited a 9-0 run that got the Bison back in the game. Not quite two minutes later, Ayers drained a 3-pointer from deep in the right corner, and two more Muscala free throws made it a 34-33 game with 15:15 to play.

Ayers hit another 3-pointer to tie the game at 38-all, but Bucknell had trouble getting the lead back. After the Ayers trey, the Bison got a defensive stop, but as Steven Kaspar sprinted out of traffic with the rebound he got tripped up from behind and lost control of the ball. That led to a 3-point play the other way by Kelly, and the Eagles had the lead right back at 41-38.

After Joe Willman and Milton Chavis traded baskets, Johnson ripped his sixth 3-pointer of the night to knot the game again at 43-43. Bucknell then had three straight possessions take its first lead since 5-3, but came away with three missed jumpers.

Owens' put-back gave the Eagles the lead back with 2:57 to play, but then coming back the other way Kaspar drew a hand-check foul as he dribbled across midcourt. Kaspar, who was just 1-for-7 from the free-throw line on the season, came out of a media timeout and coolly drained both ends of the 1-and-1 to make it 45-45 with 2:46 left.

Morehead State went inside to Kelly on its next possession, but his contested layup rimmed out and Ayers grabbed the rebound. After a timeout, Bucknell drained about 30 seconds off the shot clock, and then Kaspar reversed a pass around the Eagles' zone defense to Ayers on the left wing, and the sophomore stepped into the go-ahead 3-pointer.

The Bison followed with a terrific defensive possession, forcing Lamont Austin into a long 3-pointer late in the shot clock. Kaspar contested the shot, and Johnson came down with the long rebound with 1:02 remaining. Bucknell ran time off the clock before Ayers missed a jumper from the left corner, but Willman made a critical play to tip the offensive rebound out to Johnson at the top of the key.

Now Morehead State had to foul, and Johnson, Ayers and Muscala combined to go 6-for-6 from the foul line in the final 32 seconds. Muscala's free-throws with three seconds left made it a 54-47 game before Austin hit a last-ditch three at the buzzer to make the final 54-50.

After making a school-record 17 3-pointers a day earlier, Bucknell again shot well from distance but struggled in their normally solid mid-range game. The Bison made 10 of 22 (.455) 3-point attempts and 15 of 46 (.326) overall. They were also 14-for-18 (.778) from the foul line.

The Bison, who have now won 17 straight home games, recorded assists on 14 of their 15 field goals, led by five from Kaspar, and they turned the ball over only 10 times against Morehead State's pressure.

Muscala finished with 13 points, eight rebounds, three assists and three blocked shots. He was held to two field goals but went 8-for-10 from the foul line.

Bucknell again rebounded the ball very well, finishing with a 36-28 edge on the glass while holding the athletic Eagles to only four offensive rebounds and just two second-chance points. Morehead State had double-digit offensive rebounds in four of its six games coming in, with a high of 23. The Bison spread out its rebounding as well, with all seven of the players who saw significant minutes pulling in at least three boards.

Johnson finished 6-for-12 from 3-point range, making him 15-for-27 in the last two games. He now has 188 career treys, and on Sunday he moved past Hall-of-Famer Mike Joseph into fourth place on Bucknell's career list. After scoring 27 points against West Alabama on Saturday, he now has back-to-back 20-point games for the first time in his career.

Johnson and Ayers were both named to the All-Tournament Team, while Ayers was named MVP of the Lewisburg Subregional. Morehead State's Proffitt and Hill, and Princeton's Ian Hummer rounded out the unit.

After beating two reigning NCAA Tournament teams in Princeton and Morehead State (which upset Louisville to reach the Round of 32), the Bison will face another in George Mason on Wednesday at 7 p.m. in Fairfax, Va. That contest will be televised live on the Mid-Atlantic Sports Network (MASN).