Forget that Miami shot 22 more free-throws than Kent State in its 86-80 overtime win over Kent State at Millett Hall in Oxford. Forget all about the RedHawks shooting a paltry 40 percent from the floor, including just four-of-16 from 3-point range. Don't worry about Miami falling behind by 13 points midway through the second half, turning the ball over 12 times and playing with all the intensity of a wet shoe, despite the wild home crowd, early in the game.

Throw all that out the window.

What matters is that the RedHawks, who lost starters Antonio Ballard and Quinten Rollins to season-ending injury earlier this season, have battled, fought and scraped their way to the top of the MAC East standings.

Ballard went down with a left wrist injury on Jan. 27 during Miami's 68-58 road victory over Central Michigan. At that point the RedHawks were 9-11 overall, 4-2 in Mid-American Conference play. Since that fateful day Miami has won four of five conference games and now, at 9-3 in the league, sit a half-game in front of 17-8, 8-3 Kent.

Though the Golden Flashes shot just 13 free throws to Miami's 35, Kent coach Geno Ford stopped short of blaming the officiating.

"It's tough. All five starters had at least four fouls, and we couldn't play as much trapping defense as we usually do," Ford said. "They made enough big plays down the stretch that they deserved to win. It was a battle of two evenly matched teams, but Williams and Windbush each hit clutch shots when they needed them."

Kent had no answer for Windbush or power forward Julian Mavunga all night. Winbush finished with 26 points and 12 rebounds while Mavunga, playing the most inspired basketball of his career since Ballard was lost, added 17 points and 17 rebounds. All told Miami out-rebounded Kent 48-35.

Kent connected on 10 3-pointers to Miami's five.

"They were hitting 3-pointer after 3-pointer," Winbush said. "If we weren't hitting our free throws, they would have kept chipping away. I guess little things count."

Kent raced out to a 33-26 lead at halftime, but Miami caught them late in the game and then out-scored Kent 20-14 in the overtime session. Even though the RedHawks fell behind by 13 in both halves, Windbush knew his team was not going to be denied…expecially after falling to Kent, 78-57, two weeks ago.

"We played a poor first half, but we stuck with it," he said. "We came in with a chip on our shoulders because we got embarrassed up there."

Kent must now travel to Philadelphia to face host Drexel in a nationally televised ESPN BracketBusters game Friday, Feb. 18 at 9 p.m. (on ESPN U). Miami will play James Madison Saturday, Feb. 19 at noon in another BracketBuster contest, this one televised on ESPN3.com.