

Aaron Jennings collected his first victory over Central Methodist Wednesday night during his five years as the men's basketball coach at Mount Mercy.

Dennis McKinney made sure it happened.

McKinney poured in a career-high 39 points as the Mustangs topped Central Methodist, 100-86, in a Heart of America Conference game at the Hennessey Recreation Center.

The breakthrough gave Mount Mercy an important victory over a perennial league power, although Central Methodist has a losing record this year.

"Been close a couple of times," said Jennings, recalling past games. "It feels good."

McKinney, a Cedar Rapids Jefferson grad, grabbed 11 rebounds for his first double-double of the season and popped in four 3-pointers while playing 36 minutes.

"He's a beast," said Jennings. "Tonight he had it going. It's special."

McKinney's 39 points were the most for the Mustangs since Matt Spreacker scored 41 against Grinnell in 2004. The school record is 45.

McKinney, an aspiring journalist, was asked to describe how No. 5 (that's him) played for Mount Mercy Wednesday night.

"He played good, man," he responded, smiling. "He played inside-out, like his coach always tells him to do."

In other words, McKinney did not simply settle for 3-pointers, even though he canned four of them. He worked effectively near the basket as well as on the perimeter.

Mount Mercy has struggled at times this season at 8-7 overall and 3-6 in the conference. McKinney was determined to help point the Mustangs in the right direction.

"I was looking at the standings," he said. "If we lost this one, we would drop as far as 11th.

"In my head, I was thinking our season was on the line. I'm glad we got this one. We can keep moving forward."

The victory did not come easily. The Mustangs enjoyed a 19-point lead early in the second half at 60-41 on a 3-pointer by McKinney, but Central Methodist pulled within six points at 81-75 with about seven minutes remaining.

McKinney made three free throws and Bailey Basala canned a 3-pointer to make it 87-75. DJ Johnson scored nine points for the Mustangs in the final 2:50 to help secure the victory.

"We needed that," Jennings said of Johnson's performance. "We were in a little funk and they were coming back."

Basala finished with 16 points. RoyShawn Webb contributed 15 points, nine rebounds and five assists while working a game-high 37 minutes.

"We've seen Roy have some good games, from start to finish," said Jennings. "This is the best

game I've seen him play.

"In terms of running the show, in terms of being a point guard, of being a leader out there. He was just awesome."

James Byrd II scorched the nets for eight 3-pointers and 35 points for Central Methodist (4-11, 3-6). Josh Robinson added 22 points.

CENTRAL METHODIST (86): Christian Soderholm 1-5 0-0 2, James Byrd II 12-21 3-4 35, Josh Robinson 7-14 6-6 22, Kyle McDermed 3-13 0-0 6, Rijnard Hartman 3-4 0-3 6, Isaiah Burton 3-7 1-2 7, Jake Branham 0-1 0-0 0, Trae Meny 1-3 0-0 3, Seth Stegeman 2-5 0-0 5, Jacob Moore 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 32-73 10-15 86.

MOUNT MERCY (100): Tyler Kelley 1-4 0-1 2, Dennis McKinney 14-24 7-11 39, Davion Watson 2-4 0-0 5, RoyShawn Webb 7-16 1-2 15, Streeter McIlravy 2-6 1-1 6, Julian Hehmann 0-0 0-0 0, Christian Reischauer 2-6 0-0 6, DJ Johnson 4-7 2-3 11, Bailey Basala 4-10 5-5 16. Totals 36-77 16-23 100.

Halftime - Mount Mercy 50, Central Methodist 34. 3-point goals - Central Methodist 12-39 (Byrd 8-15, Robinson 2-5, Meny 1-3, Stegeman 1-3, Branham 0-1, Soderholm 0-2, Burton 0-4, McDermed 0-6), Mount Mercy 12-30 (McKinney 4-10, Basala 3-7, Reischauer 2-4, Watson 1-2, Johnson 1-2, McIlravy 1-4, Kelley 0-1).