

Mount Mercy women drubbed by Clarke

Written by Jim Ecker

Friday, 26 February 2016 20:21 - Last Updated Saturday, 27 February 2016 00:36



The Mount Mercy women's basketball team played its first game ever in downtown Cedar Rapids on Friday, but it quickly turned into the Nightmare on 1st Avenue for the Mustangs.

Mount Mercy played miserably in the first half and lost to Clarke University, 78-58, in the opening round of the All Tournament at the U.S. Cellular Center.

The Mustangs defeated Clarke twice during the regular season, both times by double digits, but they fell behind by 34 points in the second half and needed a late flurry just to make the score a little more respectable.

Mount Mercy trailed 39-15 at halftime and never recovered.

Mount Mercy coach Bob Kintzel did not need a score sheet to recite his team's atrocious statistics from the first half. They were emblazoned on his brain in scarlet letters.

"We were 4 for 24, 0 for 11 (on 3-pointers) and 46 percent from the free throw line," he recited from memory. "One assist, 18 turnovers. That's not going to win you many games."

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"It's tough to beat a team a third time, but they looked like they were a little bit hungrier than we were, a little more aggressive attacking us. We were on our heels at the beginning."

Clarke (18-11) will face No. 1 seed College of the Ozarks (26-3) in the semifinals at 2 p.m. Saturday. Haskell (21-6) will play Indiana Northwest (22-8) in the other semifinal at noon.

Mount Mercy finished its season with a 16-14 record.

The Mustangs trailed 53-19 in the third quarter. They were losing 68-39 in the fourth quarter when they suddenly got hot and hit four 3-pointers in just a few minutes during a 14-0 spurt and pulled within 68-53, but that's as close as they got as Clarke pulled away again.

Mount Mercy got off to a slow start with a string of missed shots and turnovers, and once things went bad they went really bad.

"I think it's a mental state," Kintzel said. "When we started sliding, we got out of everything we run. We kind of hit panic mode. We didn't play smart basketball at that point."

Mount Mercy junior Abby Herb, an All-American last season, missed a wide-open layup and shot an air-ball on an open 3-pointer during the struggles. She finished with a team-high 13 points, but was 3 for 9 from the field.

Makenzie Zeitler, who finished her career with more than 1,000 rebounds, grabbed 16 more boards for the Mustangs.

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Mount Mercy shot 31.4 percent overall for the game, 21.7 percent on 3-pointers and committed 26 turnovers.

Kea Whittington led Clarke with 18 points. Kelsey Ernst had 16 points and 10 rebounds. Breland Prochaska added 14 points.

CLARKE (78): Whittington 4 8-10 18, Prochaska 3 8-9 14, Hoppman 2 2-4 6, Kleppin 3 3-5 9, Ernst 7 2-2 16, Ricker 0 0-0 0, Ramirez 0 0-0 0, Werner 1 0-0 2, Petkoff 0 0-0 0, Adams 2 0-0 5, Penney 3 2-3 8, De Craene 0 0-0 0, Engstrom 0 0-0 0. Totals 25 25-33 78.

MOUNT MERCY (58): Herb 3 7-9 13, Weiland 0 6-8 6, Zeitler 2 3-3 7, Thompson 0 0-0 0, Dolan 3 2-4 9, Goodman 1 0-0 2, Blowers 3 0-0 9, Sexton 0 1-2 1, Valdez 0 0-0 0, Keating 0 0-0 0, Harmon 0 0-0 0, Lampe 2 2-4 7, Lehman 2 0-1 4. Totals 16 21-31 58.

Halftime - Clarke 39, Mount Mercy 15. 3-point goals- Clarke 3 (Whittington 2, Adames 1), Mount Mercy 5 (Blowers 3, Dolan 1, Lampe 1).