

Mustangs climb to 4th place in Heart

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 03 January 2019 06:15 -



Aaron Jennings extended his palms and told his guys to slow it down midway through the second half Wednesday night, but the Mount Mercy coach was not abandoning his high-powered offense in favor of a methodical brand of basketball.

Mychael Brawner-Henley had just hit a 3-pointer for the Mustangs and was making just about everything he launched, so Jennings wanted to run a little offense and find another good shot for a hot shooter.

Sure enough, the Mustangs found Brawner-Henley in a good spot and he drilled another 3-pointer to justify his coach's approach.

The moment was a snap-shot in another highly entertaining victory for Mount Mercy, this time a 104-88 conquest of Missouri Valley in a Heart of America Conference game at the Hennessey Recreation Center.

The Mustangs led by 30 points, 104-74, with 3:41 remaining, so it hardly mattered that Missouri Valley scored the last 14 points of the ballgame in mop-up time.

The victory lifted Mount Mercy (9-5) into a four-tie for fourth place in the conference at 4-4.

The Mustangs tossed in 16 more 3-pointers, cementing their claim as the top 3-point shooting team in the NAIA, and they collected assists on 75 percent of their field goals with gorgeous passes and "we-first" basketball.

Six Mustangs scored in double figures as they spread the wealth, with 27 assists on 36 baskets.

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"That's just pretty basketball," said Jennings. "And it just makes me happy, because it's what we work on and it's how we want to play. It shows our unselfishness.

"That's what we do when we're good," he said. "And if we can keep on doing that, we'll come in confident every game. It's exciting. And it's fun to coach."

Mount Mercy poured in 63 points in the first half, but Missouri Valley pumped in 54 points of their own to stay in the ballgame with only a nine-point deficit.

The Mustangs owned a 10-point lead, 74-64, in the early stages of the second half when their firepower, extra passes and balanced scoring left Missouri Valley in the dust.

The Mustangs took off on a 30-10 surge that turned a fairly tight game into a 30-point blowout. Mohammed Albagami, a key player off the bench for Mount Mercy, ignited that surge.

"Mo came in and had six possessions that were just incredible," said Jennings.

Albagami tossed in a pair of 3-pointers and made two free throws for an 81-65 lead. He then made an extra pass and found Brawner-Henley for a 3-pointer to make it 85-67.

Mount Mercy point guard Antwain Strong took over with two free throws and pretty passes to Dennis McKinney and Emilio Villagrana for a 94-67 bulge with about nine minutes left.

McKinney led the Mustangs with 24 points and six rebounds. Strong collected 16 points, eight assists and seven rebounds. Bailey Basala scored 15 points. Brawner-Henley finished with 14 points and eight rebounds. Villagrana and Albagami finished with 11 points.

Larry Plummer scored 23 points for Missouri Valley (5-9, 3-5).

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Benedictine leads the Heart of America standings at 8-0, followed by William Penn (7-1) and Peru State (6-2). Mount Mercy, Central Methodist, Graceland and Clarke are tied for fourth place at 4-4.

William Penn is ranked No. 4 in the NAIA, Benedictine is 15th, Peru State 17th and Graceland 25th.

Mount Mercy hosts Peru State Saturday at 4 p.m.

MISSOURI VALLEY (88): Cody-Jackson 1 3-4 5, Mackenzie 6 0-0 14, Plummer 8 5-6 23, Schlotzhauer 3 2-2 9, Brazil 4 0-0 8, Cochran 4 3-5 14, Elbe 0 0-0 0, Collins 3 1-3 8, Williams 2 0-0 4, Mosby 1 1-2 3. Totals 31 15-22 88.

MOUNT MERCY (104): McKinney 8 4-6 24, Evans 2 0-0 4, Basala 5 3-3 15, Strong 5 6-6 16, Villagrana 4 0-0 11, Loggins 0 0-0 0, Doe 0 0-0 0, Brawner-Henley 5 1-1 14, Hehmann 0 0-0 0, Albagami 3 2-2 11, Reischauer 3 0-0 6, Johnson 1 0-0 3, Stoeffler 0 0-0 0, Kehinde 0 0-0 0. Totals 36 16-18 104.

Halftime - Mount Mercy 63, Missouri Valley 54. 3-point goals - Missouri Valley 9 (Cochran 3, Mackenzie 2, Plummer 2, Schlotzhauer 1, Collins 1), Mount Mercy 16 (McKinney 4, Villagrana 3, Brawner-Henley 3, Albagami 3, Basala 2, Johnson 1).