

Basala stars as Mustangs top Graceland

Written by Jim Ecker

Thursday, 06 February 2020 05:54 -



Time and opportunity are slipping away for the Mount Mercy Mustangs as they chase a spot in the Heart of America Conference playoffs, but they won't go down without a fight.

They showed it Wednesday night.

Mount Mercy collected a crucial victory over Graceland, 93-84, in a conference game at the Hennessey Recreation Center to keep their hopes alive.

Bailey Basala led the way with five 3-pointers and 26 points as all five starters scored in double figures. Davion Watson netted 18 points, Dennis McKinney 15, RoyShawn Webb 14 and Streeter McIlravy 13.

Graceland walloped Mount Mercy in their first meeting, 107-77, in late November, but the Mustangs had the right answer this time.

The Mustangs, once 4-10 in the Heart of America Conference standings, raised their record to 7-10 with their third straight victory while averaging 99.3 points per game.

Only eight teams will make the conference playoffs in the 13-team league. The Mustangs sit in ninth place, two games behind Missouri Valley and Baker in the loss column with seven games remaining.

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"We've got to keep winning," said Mount Mercy Coach Aaron Jennings. "We've put ourselves in a hole. We're in this hole and we have to keep putting scoops in. And every win is a scoop."

Basala knows the clock is ticking, but he's not sure how many victories it will take to make the playoffs.

"I'm not going to lie to you. I haven't even looked that far ahead yet," he remarked. "All I know is we've got to win a lot of games and not lose many."

Mount Mercy was clinging to a 74-73 lead with about seven minutes remaining when they finally gave themselves a little breathing room with a 9-0 run.

McKinney began the spurt with a driving layup, then Basala got fouled on a 3-point shot and made all three free throws for a 79-73 advantage. Basala followed with two more foul shots and Tyler Kelley finished the 9-0 spurt with two free throws to make it a 10-point game at 83-73 with 4:55 left.

Kelley gave the Mustangs a 12-point cushion at 86-74 with a 3-pointer from the corner with 3:43 remaining. Graceland pulled within six points at 90-84 in the final minute, but Webb hit a free throw and McKinney canned a pair to finish the scoring.

"We're playing the right way," said Jennings, happy his team turned the tables on Graceland after the 30-point loss to the Yellowjackets in their first meeting. "When we're putting the ball in the basket and we're sharing the basketball, we're tough. This was another move in the right direction.

"We're doing things together," he said. "We keep talking about playing together, doing things for each other. And when we do, it shows."

Virgil Walker Jr. scored 23 points for Graceland (8-16, 5-13).

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GRACELAND (84): Amanze Njoku-Ibe 4-8 0-0 8, Virgil Walker Jr. 10-12 2-2 23, Trey Newsham 5-11 0-0 13, Nick Coleman 6-14 5-7 19, Doc Self 5-11 0-0 12, Jordan Oliver 1-4 3-4 5, Joshua Gonzalez 0-2 0-0 0, Dhimani Hernandez 1-3 1-2 4, Mekhi Rodgers 0-1 0-0 0. Totals 32-66 11-15 84.

MOUNT MERCY (93): Dennis McKinney 6-15 2-2 15, Davion Watson 7-14 1-5 18, Bailey Basala 7-17 7-7 26, RoyShawn Webb 5-11 4-8 14, Streeter McIlravy 3-8 4-4 13, Tyler Kelley 2-5 2-3 7, Keishum Thomas 0-1 0-0 0, Julian Hehmann 0-0 0-0 0, Christian Reischauer 0-0 0-0 0. Totals 30-71 20-29 93.

Halftime - Mount Mercy 44, Graceland 41. 3-point goals - Graceland 9-25 (Walker Jr. 1-2, Newsham 3-6, Coleman 2-6, Self 2-6, Oliver 0-1, Gonzalez 0-1, Hernandez 1-2, Rodgers 0-1), Mount Mercy 13-36 (McKinney 1-7, Watson 3-6, Basala 5-12, McIlravy 3-7, Kelley 1-3, Thomas 0-1).