

Australian gives Mustangs a triple threat

Written by Jim Ecker

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James Boonstoppel tried a variety of sports when he was a kid in Australia until he found the one he truly loved.

"I played Australian football, soccer, tennis and cricket. And I tried boxing," he said Saturday. "And when I was 12 I seriously made a commitment to the game of basketball."

The Mount Mercy Mustangs are glad he did.

Boonstoppel scored 12 points and grabbed a career-best eight rebounds Saturday as the 16th-ranked Mustangs clipped AIB, 84-71, in a Midwest Collegiate Conference game at the Hennessey Recreation Center.

The Mustangs (17-3, 5-0) have not lost since November and are riding a 10-game winning streak. Boonstoppel, a 25-year-old marksman from Australia, has been a key ingredient in his first and only year with the club.

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He hit eight straight 3-pointers in a victory over St. Ambrose Wednesday night and is averaging 12.2 points off the bench on a balanced club. He's a 6-foot-2 guard with flaming red hair and an assassin's touch from behind the 3-point arc.

He was 8-for-8 against St. Ambrose before he finally missed with 10 minutes left in the game. "I was feeling it and my teammates were getting me the ball. I had the easy job, just knocking the shots down," he said.

Boonstoppel was nearly 9-for-9 that night.

"I thought it was down," he said of the one that got away. "I was due to miss one. I thought it was good. I watched it on tape. I kind of faded away. I just missed it."

Josh Keister holds the Mount Mercy record with ten 3-pointers in a game in 1994. The excitement rose at Hennessey Wednesday as Boonstoppel made shot after shot.

"My teammates told me to keep shooting it, because they wanted me to go for the record," he said. "I didn't know what the record was and I didn't want to take away from the team, whether I got the record or not."

Boonstoppel played at a prep school in North Carolina when he arrived in the U.S. and planned to attend Oral Roberts University, but the NCAA stripped him of a year of eligibility for having played for an amateur team in Australia.

Instead of enrolling at Oral Roberts, he played at Frank Phillips Junior College in Texas for two years and returned home to Australia for about 18 months after that. That's when Mount Mercy and Coach Paul Gavin entered the picture.

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Gavin, who is also Mount Mercy's golf coach, was recruiting golfers in Texas when he was told about this red-headed shooter from Australia who could really play the game. Gavin was intrigued and offered Boonstoppel a spot on the team, even though he'd never seen him play in person.

Gavin did not have a lot of scholarship money to offer, but was willing to take a chance based on what he'd seen on tape. "I said it has to be a leap of faith on both our ends," Gavin remarked Saturday, "and obviously it's turned out pretty good."

Boonstoppel just wanted a chance to play college ball. "I wanted to finish my career in a winning program, whether I played (a lot) or not," he said.

Boonstoppel has not started a game all season, but he's averaging 18.7 minutes and probably will get increased court time with his continued good work and the recent misfortune for Mount Mercy guard Da'Quan Moore, who suffered a knee injury against St. Ambrose Wednesday and is likely done for the season.

Boonstoppel still speaks with a thick Australian accent, but it's not like it was when he first arrived in this country.

"I used a lot of slang words," he said, smiling. "A lot of people didn't understand when I spoke. I had to slow down and jump back a little bit, just to make sure they can understand me when I speak."

Boonstoppel speaks the international language of basketball, however, and has meshed nicely with his new teammates.

He'd like to play pro basketball after he finishes at Mount Mercy this spring, either in Europe or South America. "If I can get a good degree out of this and play pro ball, I'll be extremely happy," he said.

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Dondre Osborne and Kyle Lamaak paced Mount Mercy with 16 points apiece Saturday. Ian Matos scored 15 points and grabbed 12 rebounds. Osborne collected six rebounds, six assists and four steals.

Boonstoppel cooled off from 3-point range Saturday and finished 3-of-9 from behind the arc.

Keanu Glover scored 21 points for AIB (14-6, 4-2).

AIB (71): Brawner 4 0-0 8, Deemer 3 1-1 7, Glover 9 0-4 21, Brown 1 0-0 2, Eley 5 2-2 13, Ford 2 1-2 6, Riley 0 0-0 0, Farmer 0 0-0 0, Babalola 3 3-8 10, Smith 0 0-0 0, Cameron 1 2-2 4. Totals 28 9-19 71.

MOUNT MERCY (84): Houston 2 2-2 6, Matos 4 7-11 15, Struss 2 3-6 9, Osborne 4 7-8 16, Misener 3 0-0 7, Boonstoppel 3 3-4 12, Murdock 0 0-0 0, Johnson 1 1-2 3, Lamaak 7 2-6 16.

Halftime - Mount Mercy 43, AIB 37. 3-point goals - AIB 6 (Glover 3, Eley 1, Ford 1, Babalola 1), Mount Mercy 7 (Boonstoppel 3, Struss 2, Osborne 1, Misener 1).