

Mount Mercy rallies to win NAIA opener in OT

Written by Metro Sports Report

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The Mount Mercy men's basketball team lived dangerously at the NAIA Division II national tournament Wednesday morning but survived to play another day.

The 14th-ranked Mustangs rallied from a 15-point deficit and trimmed No. 17 Southern Oregon, 98-97, in the opening round at Keeter Gymnasium in Point Lookout, Mo.

Alex Houston scored on a tip-in with nine seconds left in overtime to give Mount Mercy the go-ahead points. Ben DeSaulnier missed a contested 3-pointer at the buzzer that would have won the game for Southern Oregon.

Mount Mercy (26-7) will face top-ranked Saint Francis (Ind.), which moved to 30-4 with a 96-81 win Wednesday over Dakota State, in the Sweet 16 Friday at 10:15 a.m.

The Mustangs fell behind by 15 points in the first half and trailed 58-47 at intermission against the Raiders, who reached the Elite 8 of the NAIA tournament last March.

"They are just really good," said Mount Mercy Coach Aaron Jennings. "They came out hot. They were hitting tough shots, they were hitting open shots. They kind of had us on our heels. We just couldn't quite keep up.

"But we kept scoring," he added. "So even though we gave up 58 in the first half, we had 47. So we scored enough. We were down, but we stayed in it."

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Derik Gogg and Antwain Strong gave the Mustangs a big lift off the bench in the first half. Gogg, a Linn-Mar grad, scored 12 points in the first and Strong had nine points to keep the Mustangs alive.

Chris Ford gave Mount Mercy a 75-73 lead with a basket with 7:17 left in the second half. Southern Oregon tied the game, 75-75, but the Mustangs spurted to a pair of seven-point leads at 82-75 and 84-77.

Southern Oregon stormed back and took an 89-88 lead with 63 seconds left in regulation. Tre Wagner gave Mount Mercy a 90-89 edge with 20 seconds left, but Southern Oregon had a chance to win the game with two seconds left when Jordan West went to the foul line for two shots with two seconds remaining.

West missed his first free throw, then made the second for a 90-90 tie.

Things got wild in the five-minute overtime as the lead changed hands seven times. West gave the Raiders a 97-96 lead with 44 seconds remaining, but Houston got his big tip-in for the winner.

"We just kept attacking and attacking and attacking," said Jennings. "That's the way we need to play. That's the way we're good. And we pulled it out at the end.

"It was two great teams battling it out. It was just one incredible ballgame."

Houston topped Mount Mercy with 18 points. Sheawn Bedford scored 15 points. Gogg finished with 14 points and nine rebounds. Tre Wagner and CJ Parker had 11 points apiece. Strong contributed nine points and seven rebounds.

Gogg, a tall lefty, poured in 10 points during a four-minute flurry in the first half when the Mustangs needed a boost.

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"He was incredible. His energy," said Jennings of the former Linn-Mar prep. "We needed that.

"He's so crafty, so smooth around the basket. And he had some huge, tough finishes. He gave life to us. Those buckets were just huge to keep us in the game."

Mount Mercy clobbered Southern Oregon in bench points, 37-12.

"Our depth was huge," said Jennings. "It was a team win."

DeSaulnier scored 26 points for Southern Oregon (24-9). West finished with 23.

SOUTHERN OREGON (97): Meyer 3 2-2 10, Spear 4 6-7 14, DeSaulnier 9 4-7 26, West 10 1-2 23, Sierra 5 2-2 12, Holmes 0 0-0 0, Martin 2 0-0 6, Rakoz 0 0-0 0, Melvin 3 0-0 6. Totals 36 15-20 97.

MOUNT MERCY (98): Houston 9 0-1 18, Wagner 0-0 11, Ford 3 0-0 6, Parker 4 0-0 11, Bedford 4 3-4 15, Strong 3 2-2 9, Murdock 0 0-0 0, Brawner-Henley 2 0-0 6, Lamaak 3 0-0 6, Struss 1 0-0 2, Gogg 5 4-5 14. Totals 39 9-12 98.

Halftime - Southern Oregon 58, Mount Mercy 47. 3-point goals - Southern Oregon 10 (DeSaulnier 4, Meyer 2, West 2, Martin 2), Mount Mercy 11 (Bedford 4, Parker 3, Brawner-Henley 2, Wagner 1, Strong 1).