

Osborne rescues No. 11 Mustangs

Written by Jim Ecker

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Dondre Osborne has a good chance to be named the Most Valuable Player in the Midwest Collegiate Conference this season, especially if Mount Mercy keeps winning games and claims the league title.

He did what MVPs are supposed to do Wednesday night.

Osborne hit four clutch free throws to force overtime and drilled a pair of 3-pointers to start the extra session as the 11th-ranked Mustangs escaped a major upset bid by Clarke, 101-94.

Mount Mercy (20-3, 7-0) has not lost a conference game this season and Clarke (6-17, 0-7) has not won a league contest, but the Mustangs were fortunate to pull this one out at the Hennessey Recreation Center.

"It wasn't our best game today, but we fought through it and picked it up at the end when it mattered most," said Osborne, who finished with 23 points.

Clarke took a 76-73 lead with 1:28 left in the second half with a pair of free throws, putting Mount Mercy's two-month winning streak in serious jeopardy.

Osborne hit two free throws to make it 76-75 with 1:18 left. Clarke made one foul shot for a 77-75 edge, then Osborne drove to the basket, got fouled and cashed two more free throws to

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knot the game at 77-77 with 16 seconds left.

Haris Takes missed an open 3-pointer at the buzzer that would have won the game for Clarke in regulation.

Osborne began overtime with a 3-pointer for an 80-77 lead. Tanner Havens countered with a triple for the Crusaders, but Osborne stuck another 3-pointer for an 83-80 lead.

This time the lead stood.

"He took over," said Gavin.

Ben Struss canned a 3-pointer for an 86-80 advantage, James Boonstoppel hit a pair of triples and Osborne helped salt it away with two free throws with 31.2 seconds left for a 98-92 margin.

Osborne, a 6-foot senior from Zion, Ill., leads the Mustangs in scoring, assists and steals and ranks near the top in rebounding. He's the top player on the top team in the conference, making him a legitimate candidate for the MVP award.



"He's got to be a viable candidate," said Gavin. "He's our MVP."

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Osborne has done this type of thing before. He helped rescue the Mustangs against Grand View in overtime this season and rose to the occasion again Saturday when Mount Mercy trimmed Ashford, 62-61.

"It's my senior year," he said. "I've been the leader for us all year. I just try to do whatever it takes for my team. Whatever that need me to do, if that's defense or offense. I try to be the leader out there for everybody."

The Mustangs won for the 13th straight time. They have not lost since November, going spotless in December and January, but Gavin was not happy with his club's performance Wednesday.

"The last couple of games we've done just enough to win ballgames," he said. "I hate to say it, but I hope it's not complacency setting in."

"We've got some things to adjust and we've got to get some guys playing harder, with more passion and urgency. That's the big thing."

"Just a lack of energy, to be honest with you," said Gavin. "Just a frustrating game to coach."

The Mustangs lost guard Da'Quan Moore to a season-ending knee injury last month, stripping the club of a valuable contributor at both ends of the season.

Kyle Lamaak scored 16 points for Mount Mercy. Ian Matos and Boonstoppel finished with 14 points apiece. Matos also had nine rebounds, seven assists, two blocks and two steals. Jake Misener had seven assists.

Kylar Hayes popped in five 3-pointers and scored 23 points for Clarke. The Crusaders have

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fought injuries this season, but are getting healthy and dangerous.

"They hit big shots, especially in the second half," said Gavin. "They didn't quit. They'll get a win here soon. They deserved that as much as we did."

CLARKE (94): Neis 2 11-12 15, Walker 8 1-2 17, Thompson 0 0-0 0, Winkler 4 0-0 9, Durr 0 2-2 2, Havens 3 0-0 9, Takes 6 1-1 17, Hayes 8 2-3 23, Francis 1 0-0 2. Totals 32 17-20 94.

MOUNT MERCY (101): Houston 3 2-3 8, Osborne 7 6-11 23, Matos 5 4-4 14, Boonstoppel 4 2-2 14, Johnson 2 2-2 7, Misener 2 0-0 5, Struss 2 3-6 9, Price-Majors 2 1-2 5, Lamaak 7 2-5 16. Totals: 34 22-35 101.

Halftime: Mount Mercy 40, Clarke 31. End of Regulation: Mount Mercy 77, Clarke 77. 3-point goals: Clarke 13 (Winkler, Havens 3, Takes 4, Hayes 5). Mount Mercy 11 (Osborne 3, Boonstoppel 4, Johnson, Misener, Struss 2).