

No. 21 Mustangs top Saint Ambrose

Written by Jim Ecker

Wednesday, 03 February 2016 22:01 - Last Updated Wednesday, 03 February 2016 22:25



The Mount Mercy men's basketball team took a step in the right direction Wednesday night.

Alex Houston muscled in 22 points and grabbed eight rebounds as the 21st-ranked Mustangs defeated Saint Ambrose, 84-73, in an NAIA game at the Hennessey Recreation Center.

Mount Mercy got burned for 99 points in a 99-92 loss to Waldorf in its previous game last Thursday and Coach Aaron Jennings put a heavy emphasis on the defensive end of the floor in the practices since then.

"The whole practice," Houston reported about the club's renewed emphasis on trying to stop people from scoring. "Defense is going to win the game.

"Communication is key," he said. "Communication will eliminate a lot of things, with switches and stuff. Communication is our main focus right now on defense."

Mount Mercy (19-6) has won 9 of its last 10 games, but Jennings wants to make sure the Mustangs are proficient at both ends of the floor heading into the postseason tournament later this month.

Jennings said the Mustangs made some progress against Saint Ambrose (7-16), but need to keep working hard to improve.

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"We are very dangerous offensively and we can come at you a lot of different ways," he said. "I think we have five guys averaging in double figures and more that can get it. But we need to have guys that want to step up and take defense personally."

Jennings liked the way his club responded in practice after surrendering 99 points to Waldorf, including 65 in the first half.

"The next practice was intense," he said. "As a coaching staff, we got on guys.

"It was feisty. They want to win, which is a good thing, and they want to play together."

Houston, a 6-foot-5 senior from Chicago, did most of his damage around the basket against Saint Ambrose. He made 7 of 12 shots from the field and was 8 for 9 at the foul line.

"We're still a work in progress," said Houston. "We want to hold teams under 80. If you can hold teams under 80 in college basketball, you have a chance to win a game."

Mount Mercy built a 13-point lead at 75-62, but the Bees pulled within six points at 78-72 on a 3-pointer with 2 1/2 minutes remaining. Chris Ford hit a strong driving layup to make it 80-72 and CJ Parker gave the Mustangs an 82-73 margin with two free throws with 46 seconds left.

Tre Wagner scored 14 points for Mount Mercy. Parker, Sheawn Bedford, Mychael Brawner-Henley and Kyle Lamaak all had nine points for the Mustangs. Parker grabbed eight rebounds.

Mount Mercy has four games left in the regular season before hosting the All conference tournament Feb. 26-28 at the U.S. Cellular Center. The top three teams from the AAI tournament will advance to the NAIA Division II national tournament.

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The Mustangs reached the second round of the national tournament last year and covet another trip.

"I feel this team is just as talented as the one last year, if not better," said Houston. "We just have to stick together."

Jacoby Posley led Saint Ambrose with 14 points.

SAINT AMBROSE (73): Hetherton 3 2-2 10, Butler 2 2-2 7, Johnson 2 1-2 5, Posley 4 3-5 14, Buls 1 0-0 2, Hernandez 0 0-0 0, Kohnle 1 0-0 2, Ainsworth 2 1-2 5, Wagner 1 2-2 4, Dust 4 3-3 13, Knoll 5 0-1 10, McEachern 0 0-0 0. Totals 25 14-19 73.

MOUNT MERCY (84): Strong 0 0-0 0, Houston 7 8-9 22, Wagner 3 8-9 14, Ford 2 2-4 6, Parker 2 4-6 9, Murdock 1 0-0 3, Julien 0 0-0 0, Brawner-Henley 3 1-2 9, Bedford 3 2-4 9, Lamaak 4 1-3 9, Gogg 1 1-1 3. Totals 26 27-38 84.

Halftime: Mount Mercy 41, Saint Ambrose 38. 3-point goals: Saint Ambrose 9 (Hetherton 2, Butler 1, Posley 3, Kohnle 1, Dust 2), Mount Mercy 5 (Parker 1, Murdock 1, Brawner-Henley 2, Bedford 1).