

## Mustangs rally with 'D' and 19 3's

Written by Jim Ecker

Saturday, 26 January 2019 23:52 -

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The Pioneers from MidAmerica Nazarene put on a clinic during the first half at the Hennessey Recreation Center Saturday.

They hit just about every shot they took. If they missed, they usually grabbed the offensive rebound and scored again. The Mount Mercy defenders were typically a



step behind.

The Pioneers pounded Mount Mercy on the backboards in the first half, built a 16-point lead and appeared headed to an easy victory over the Mustangs.

Mount Mercy Coach Aaron Jennings was not happy.

"We talked at halftime about having some pride," he said. "You can't get pushed around in a basketball game."

The Mustangs listened and responded.

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Mount Mercy stiffened its defense, hit a string of clutch 3-pointers and rallied to defeat MidAmerica Nazarene, 89-82, in a Heart of America Conference game.

The Mustangs, who lead the nation in 3-point shooting, poured in 19 triples and made the Pioneers work a lot harder for their shots in the second half.

"It was just defense, man," said Dennis McKinney, who led the Mustangs with six 3-pointers and 24 points. "We dug deep. And it mattered."

Mount Mercy had lost five of its last six games, but Saturday's victory stemmed the tide and helped the Mustangs climb a notch in the conference standings at 11-10 overall and 6-9 in the league.

"This is huge," said Jennings, whose club is chasing a good seed for the league tournament. "This is huge for the program, this is huge for the season."

McKinney hit a 3-pointer to give Mount Mercy a 66-65 lead midway through the second half, giving the Mustangs their first advantage since early in the game, but MidAmerica Nazarene refused to fold and made it tough on the home team.

The Mustangs needed every 3-pointer they could muster coming down the stretch. Mohammed Albagami tied the game, 76-76, with a triple with 3:25 left. Bailey Basala gave the Mustangs a one-point edge at 79-78 with a 3-pointer with 2:44 remaining, then Albagami struck again with a 3-pointer to make it 82-80 with 2:10 left.

The Pioneers committed a turnover and McKinney delivered a 3-point dagger with 50 seconds remaining for an 85-80 advantage. The visitors hit two free throws to make it 85-82, but McKinney countered with two foul shots to make it 87-82 and Albagami hit two more free throws with 6.6 seconds left after the Pioneers missed a 3-pointer.

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"Shoot a lot of 3's and make a lot of 3's," said Jennings, whose club was 19 of 41 from distance. "And we were finally able to get a couple of stops in a row.

"In the first half, honestly, I felt like they were just playing with us. They just did their stuff, ran their stuff, got what they wanted and put the ball in the basket."

MidAmerica Nazarene shot 64.7 percent in the first half and scored 49 points, but shot only 37.0 percent in the second half and scored 33.

McKinney's 3-pointer with 50 seconds left gave the Mustangs a little room to breathe in a tough battle.

"Game after game after game, Dennis just steps up," said Jennings. "He's not afraid of the moment. He's never going to back down from anybody."

Bailey Basala popped in four 3-pointers and scored 17 points for Mount Mercy. Mike Evans did good work around the basket and hit 7 of 11 shots for 16 points. Albagami hit all four of his 3-pointers and added 15 points. Antwain Strong collected 11 assists and only one turnover.

"I thought Mike Evans was awesome with his energy," said Jennings.

Mount Mercy has a 5-2 record in conference home games this season, but the Mustangs are only 1-7 on the road in the Heart of America with nine games left (five home, four away).

"That has to turn around," said Jennings. "We have to be able to go on the road and win some games."

The Mustangs visit Graceland Wednesday, then will play five of their last eight games at home.

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Jonathan Green scored 21 points for MidAmerica Nazarene (10-10, 5-10).

**MIDAMERICA NAZARENE (82):** Green 8 4-5 21, Scroggins 2 0-2 4, Quinn 7 2-6 17, Chrisman 4 1-2 9, Turner 6 3-3 18, Brown 2 2-2 7, Anderson 3 0-0 6, Mahone 0 0-0 0. Totals 32 12-20 82.

**MOUNT MERCY (89):** McKinney 7 4-7 24, Evans 7 1-3 16, Basala 5 3-5 17, Strong 2 1-2 7, Villagrana 1 0-0 2, Albagami 4 3-4 15, Reischauer 2 0-0 5, Johnson 1 0-0 3. Totals 29 12-21 89.

Halftime - MidAmerica Nazarene 49, Mount Mercy 38. 3-point shots - MidAmerica Nazarene 6 (Turner 3, Green 1, Quinn 1, Brown 1), Mount Mercy 19 (McKinney 6, Basala 4, Albagami 4, Strong 2, Evans 1, Reischauer 1, Johnson 1).