

ULM Comes Back from 20-Point Second-Half Deficit to Beat Mercer, 71-69

box score

MACON, Ga. – Trailing 48-28 in the second half, the ULM men's basketball program slowly chipped away at the deficit and came back in the final minute to defeat Mercer, 71-69 on Monday in the College Basketball Invitational (CBI) quarterfinals at Hawkins Arena.

Senior Tylor Ongwae, an All-Conference First-Team selection, led the charge as he matched his career-high with 27 points. He scored ULM's (23-12) last three field goals, including a game-tying three-pointer and a go-ahead lay-up on the fast-break.

Junior Majok Deng recorded a double-double with 14 points and 14 rebounds and also rejected three blocks in the contest. Sophomore Nick Coppola poured in 11 points with four assists in 40 minutes, and junior Jamaal Samuel grabbed a career-high 10 rebounds. Junior Mack Foster aided the attack with nine points off the bench.

Ike Nwamu led Mercer (19-16) with 20 points including five three-pointers. Jestin Lewis pitched in with 12 points while Jibri Bryan had 10.

The Warhawks saw the Bears shoot 53.8 percent from the field in the first half, but limited them to just an 18.8 mark in the second half.

Nwamu started the game hot and scored 11 points to give the Bears an early 14-4 lead. ULM trailed 17-9 when it used a 7-0 run capped by a three-pointer by Coppola to cut the deficit to 17-16 and force a Mercer timeout at the 9:22 mark.

The Bears answered with a 10-0 run to grab a 27-16 advantage with 6:43 remaining. They extended their lead to 42-27 at the intermission after hitting seven three-pointers in the half.

Mercer pushed its lead up to 48-28 with 18:06 left in the second half. ULM came back with an 8-0 run after three-point plays by Roberson and Ongwae to cut the deficit to 48-36 with 15:57 left.

Still down 54-39, Ongwae scored five straight points and Foster threw down an alley-oop dunk to make it a 54-46 game at the 12:29 mark. A three-pointer by Ongwae further chopped the deficit down to 61-56 with 8:12 left.

Still down 67-62 at the 3:13 mark, Ongwae converted a lay-up, hit a three-pointer and scored in transition to give ULM a 69-67 edge with 49 seconds left. The Warhawks extended their lead to 71-67 after free throws from Coppola and Deng with 26 seconds remaining.

Mercer's Phillip Leonard got a bucket to go and got fouled with 10 seconds left to make it 71-69. After a missed free throw, the Bears grabbed the offensive rebound and kicked it out, but Nwamu's potential go-ahead three-pointer was off the mark in the final seconds and Deng secured the rebound.

The Warhawks return home for "Whiteout Wednesday" when they host the CBI Semifinals against Vermont at 7:00 p.m. at Fant-Ewing Coliseum. It will be ULM's 17th home game of the season, the most in school history.