

Valpo Earns Road Victory in Legends Classic Over Georgia Southern

[box score](#)

STATESBORO, Ga. – Brandon Wood (Kokomo, Ind./Kokomo [Highland C.C./Southern Illinois]) scored 39 points on Friday evening as the Crusaders used an 18-3 run in the early stages of the second half to extend their halftime advantage en route to a 97-89 victory at Georgia Southern in Legends Classic action.

Wood connected on 13 of his 18 field goal attempts on Friday, including three trifectas, in the 39-point effort. The sophomore also stepped up at the free throw line, hitting 10-of-12 attempts from the charity stripe in the winning effort. In addition, he pulled down a game-high nine rebounds and added three assists and three steals.

Three other Crusaders also reached double figures in the scoring column. Cory Johnson (Duluth, Minn./Duluth East [Iowa State]) scored 14 points in just 16 minutes of action, while freshman Ryan Broekhoff (Frankston, Victoria, Australia/Australian Institute of Sport) hit three 3-pointers in a 5-of-7 effort from the field for 14 points of his own. Fifth-year senior Brandon McPherson (Indianapolis, Ind./Lawrence North) added ten points and a game-high six assists from his point guard position.

“I was really pleased with our game tonight,” said Crusader head coach Homer Drew. “We got 11 guys on the floor, ten of which played double-figure minutes, and had good balance with four players finishing in double figures. I was also happy with the fact we got 23 assists tonight as well. The way we shared the ball was crucial to our key run in the second half.”

Valpo’s key run commenced after Georgia Southern connected on a basket on its first second-half possession to cut the Crusader advantage to 47-41. Broekhoff answered with a 3-pointer on Valpo’s next trip to extend the lead to nine. Two possessions later, Broekhoff hit Wood with a deep pass over the top of the GSU press to make it 52-41.

A bucket of the Eagles was again responded to immediately, as Broekhoff connected on yet another triple. The Crusaders then stepped up the defensive intensity with a steal and fast-break layup from Wood, who came up with a triple after a McPherson steal on GSU’s next possession. McPherson converted a layup on Valpo’s next trip, followed by a steal and assist on the fast break from Howard Little (Chicago, Ill./Stoneridge [Calif.] School) to Wood. Little added a free throw to cap the 18-3 spurt over a span of 6:30, extending Valpo’s lead to 65-44 with 13:06 to play.

Georgia Southern would not go away without a fight, however, rallying to cut the Crusader advantage to 84-78 with under two minutes to play. Johnson came up with a big three-point play on a dunk with 1:28 remaining to extend the lead back out to nine points, and then the Crusaders stepped up from the free throw line down the stretch, hitting 11 of 13 attempts in the final 90 seconds of the game to hold off GSU.

Valpo took the lead for good during a 13-4 spurt midway through the first half, starting with the Eagles holding a 25-20 lead with 8:53 remaining in the opening stanza. Michael Rogers (Kingston, Jamaica/Redemption [N.Y.] Christian) hit two free throws and then knocked down a triple off a pass from McPherson to tie things up at 25. Cameron Witt (Launceston, Tasmania, Australia/Launceston) then connected on a shot to put Valpo ahead for good. McPherson and Wood connected on triples as well to close out the run as the Crusaders extended the advantage to 33-29 with 5:13 to go in the half, a lead which became 47-39 at the break thanks to 21 first-half points from Wood.

The Crusaders had a tremendous night across the board on the offensive end, connecting on 56.4% (31-of-55) of their field goal attempts and 52.9% (9-of-17) of their 3-point tries. Valpo tallied assists on 23 of its makes from the floor and added 81.3% accuracy (26-of-32) from the foul line. Defensively, the Crusaders came up with 12 steals as they forced 20 turnovers, led by four thefts from Little.

Georgia Southern (1-4) was led by 27 points from Willie Powers to go along with six rebounds and six assists, while Antonio Hanson scored 20 points. Rory Spencer chipped in 14 points as well.

“The key at the end was keeping our poise as Georgia Southern was making its run,” said Drew. “Brandon [Wood] and Howard both came up with some big rebounds, while we also had a number of guys step up and make free throws at the end, which was really instrumental. Now we have a tough Troy team tomorrow; they went to the CBI last year and return four starters and get a transfer from Alabama, so it will be a good challenge for us.”

Valparaiso (2-3) plays its second of three games in Statesboro on Saturday afternoon as the Crusaders face off against Troy, which also won its Friday contest. Tip-off is set for 2 p.m. CST, and as always, all the action can be heard live on the Valpo Sports Radio Network (WAKE, 1500 AM, Valparaiso; WEFM, 95.9 FM, Michigan City) and online at www.valpoathletics.com, which will also have a link for live stats.

