

Gardner-Webb Strong in 69-55 Win over Alabama A&M in Season Opener

[box score](#)

LEXINGTON, Ky. – Junior point guard Aaron Linn poured in 24 points in his Gardner-Webb debut Tuesday, leading the Runnin' Bulldogs to a convincing 69-55 win over Alabama A-M in Rupp Arena.

Gardner-Webb (1-0) will face the winner of No. 20 Kentucky and Central Arkansas on Wednesday night at 9 pm ET in the championship round of the 2K Sports College Hoops Classic Lexington regional. The game will be televised live nationally on ESPNU.

"This was a good win for us, and a good performance for a first game," said GWU head coach Rick Scruggs. "The effort was definitely there. Our kids played very hard, and we were very pleased with the way they came out and got going."

Linn, a third-team junior college All-America selection last season at Johnson County (Kan.) CC, scored 18 of his points in the first half on 6-of-7 shooting – as Gardner-Webb opened up a tight game with a late 7-0 run to lead 34-23 at intermission.

The Runnin' Bulldogs used hard-nosed effort on both ends to pull away in the second half. Despite shooting just 28.1 percent in the final 20 minutes, Gardner-Webb saw its lead widen – due mainly to smothering perimeter defense and relentless attacks on the offensive glass.

Alabama A-M (0-1), picked to finish fourth in the SWAC this season, trimmed Gardner-Webb's lead to just seven points early in the second half, but the Bulldogs' sophomore center – 6-foot-8 Auryn MacMillan – swung momentum back to GWU's side with a thunderous three-point play, dunking on the nation's leading shot blocker from a year ago – A-M's 6-foot-11 Mickell Gladness – and drawing a foul.

The two teams traded baskets over the next few minutes, but Linn came up with a baseline jumper to put GWU up 46-36 at the 12:56 mark – and drained a long three-pointer for a 49-36 lead just 34 seconds later.

Gardner-Webb extended that lead to 15 points and, with 6:16 left, took a 63-43 lead when Grayson Flittner capped a personal 7-0 run with a step-back three in front of the Bulldog bench. The lead would remain in the 20-point range until the game's final minute, when Alabama A-M knocked in a pair of late buckets for the final margin.

In addition to Linn's big debut, which also included three rebounds, three steals and three assists, Gardner-Webb got 10 points each from MacMillan (4-of-7 shooting) and freshman standout Nate Blank. MacMillan added eight rebounds (four offensive and blocked a shot in 24 minutes).

Sanders overcame a rough shooting night (3-of-18) to finish with nine points, 14 rebounds and three steals.

GWU shot just 35.6 percent from the floor on Tuesday (21-of-59), but clamped down on Alabama A-M on the other end – limiting the Huntsville, Ala., program to just 17-of-49 shooting and outrebounding the other Bulldogs by a 42-35 margin.

Gardner-Webb also forced 27 turnovers and pilfered 12 steals – which helped produce 10 fast-break points for the 'Dogs.

Evan Hilton led Alabama A-M with nine points, while Gladness contributed eight points, 10 rebounds and seven blocks (four fouls).

The win was Gardner-Webb's first in a season opener since the 2004-2005 campaign.

