

Neal Powers Mountaineers Past Rams

Written by Ryan Bower

Tuesday, 31 December 2013 08:15

Mike Neal scored a game-high 23 points and Appalachian put together its best shooting night in more than three years in a 97-70 win over visiting Bluefield College on Monday at the Holmes Center.

The Mountaineers (4-8) shot a blistering 63.2 percent (36-of-57) from the floor and scored first-half points to cruise to an easy win over the Rams (6-2) for their second-straight victory.

Bluefield appeared as if it may hang around longer than anticipated as it held a one-point lead (9-8) three minutes, but Appalachian turned on the offense and grabbed its first double-digit lead (29-18) in a Chris Burgess layup with 9:22 remaining in the opening period.

The Apps saw their lead cut to six points on Nequan Melvin's dunk two minutes later, but pushed the lead to 11 points (36-25) when Rantavious Gilbert converted a layup with just under six minutes to go and never led by less than 10 points the rest of the way.

Neal, who scored 19 points in the first half, made 6-of-7 shots in the opening period of play

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including a 4-of-5 mark form beyond the arc as the Mountaineers connected on 64.5 percent (20-of-31) of their shots in the first half.

The Rams never threatened in the second half as App State pushed its lead to 20 points (73-53) when Tab Hamilton converted a pair of free throws with 10:43 on the clock and rolled to the victory to close out the calendar year.

Neal finished 8-of-9 from the floor as the game's leading scorer while Hamilton added 16 and Burgess scored 14 while dishing out four assists. Michael Obacha notched his second double-double of the season with 11 points and 12 rebounds.

Bluefield was led offensively by Melvin's 13 points off the bench while Devin Page (12) and Kearsten Marion (10) scored in double figures.

Appalachian help the Rams to just 40.0 percent (25-of-65) from the floor and finished with a 39-30 edge in rebounds while dishing out 17 assists.

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The Mountaineers open up the 2014 calendar year when they take on Duquesne at 7 p.m. on Thursday from the A.J. Palumbo center in Pittsburgh, Pa.

NOTES: The Mountaineers improved to 5-0 all-time against Bluefield College... Monday's game marked the return of Rams' head coach Richard Morgan to the High Country... Morgan was an Appalachian State assistant coach from 2006-09... Obacha pulled down double-digit rebounds for the sixth time this season... he has ripped down 76 boards in the past six games (12.7 rpg)... Appalachian's shooting percentage (63.2 percent) was its best shooting performance since connecting on 67.2 percent (39-of-58) from the floor in a 111-83 win over Georgia Southern on Feb. 13, 2010... the Mountaineers have scored 90-plus points in back-to-back games for the first time since the 2007-08 campaign... the Apps downed UNCG 91-68 on Jan. 12, 2008 and defeated Chattanooga 92-83 on Jan. 17, 2008... all 11 Mountaineers who played made at least one field goal.

APPALACHIAN STATE 97, BLUEFIELD COLLEGE 70

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Score by Periods 1st 2nd Total

Bluefield College 41 29 - 70

Appalachian State 53 44 - 97

BLUEFIELD: NESBIT 2 (6 REBOUNDS), LUBSEY 6, PAGE 12, GRISBY 8, MARION 10, WILSON 9, Stathopoulos 3, DUKES 7 (9 REBOUNDS), MELVIN 13. FG: 26-65, 3FG: 9-23, FT: 9-16. 30 REBOUNDS, 12 ASSISTS, 9 TURNOVERS.

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ASU: OBACHA 11 (12 REBOUNDS), GILBERT 8, HAMILTON 16, BURGESS 14 (4 ASSISTS), NEAL 23, KOBANI 8, CLARKE 2, SPAGNOLO 7 (7 REBOUNDS), EAVES 3, PURGASON 3, SCOTT 2. FG: 36-57, 3FG: 10-20, FT: 15-23. 39 REBOUNDS, 17 ASSISTS, 9 TURNOVERS.

Photo Courtesy: Mike Neal, ASU Athletics