



UT Martin holds off UNC Asheville

Skyhawks tied school record for wins in a season

MARTIN, Tenn. – The University of Tennessee at Martin men’s basketball team never trailed in a convincing 89-75 home victory over UNC Asheville in the first round of the 2017 CollegeInsider.com Postseason Tournament.

With the win, the Skyhawks tied the program’s single-season record for victories (22) and won its fifth postseason game in the past three years. UT Martin will travel to Campbell for a second-round CIT matchup on Monday, March 20.

The Skyhawks (22-12) led by as many as 21 points in the first half over UNC Asheville, who were co-champions of the Big South Conference and entered the CIT with the best RPI (73) in the 26-team field. The Bulldogs got within one point with five minutes to go before UT Martin closed out the win.

Jacolby Mobley supplied a game-high 29 points and equaled a career-best with six rebounds while logging all 40 minutes to lead four double-digit scorers for UT Martin. Fatodd Lewis tallied 16 points and a career-high four steals off the bench while Matthew Butler (15 points, career-high eight assists) and Malik London (11 points, three blocks) also contributed offensively for the Skyhawks, who shot 59.1 percent (13-of-22) from three-point range to push their home winning streak to eight games.

UNC Asheville (23-10) was led by Ahmad Thomas’ 22 points and 11 rebounds. Kevin Vannatta chipped in 18 points while Alec Wnuk tossed in 14 points for the Bulldogs.

“We got a little winded there when they made that run but we just tightened up on the defensive end and did what we needed to do to get the win,” Skyhawk head coach Anthony Stewart said. “This team has a lot of character and they believe in each other. It doesn’t matter who’s out on the court, who’s playing or who’s not playing. They believe in each other and they know that we believe in them. When you believe in each other, anything can happen.”

UT Martin set the tone early, scoring the first seven points of the contest. A Kahari Beaufort three-pointer at the 16:35 mark padded the Skyhawk lead out to eight points at 14-6.

UNC Asheville tied the score at 20-all with 13:27 to go in the first half but UT Martin responded with a 15-2 run, as Mobley scored the first 10 points of the run before Lewis poured in the final five.

Three-pointers down the stretch by Jalen Jackson, Butler and Mobley resulted in a 21-point Skyhawk lead before UT Martin settled for a 48-29 halftime advantage.

Mobley accrued 19 points in the first half for the Skyhawks, who connected on 66.7 percent (18-for-27) of their field goal attempts in the opening 20 minutes. Vannatta's 10 points paced a UNC Asheville squad that committed nine turnovers in the first half.

The Bulldogs scored seven of the first nine points of the second half but an old-fashioned three-point play by Mobley with 15:32 remaining kept UT Martin's lead at 17 points. UNC Asheville pulled within single-digits (58-50) with 11 minutes to go and eventually trimmed the Skyhawk advantage to 63-62 with 6:46 left to play.

Lewis immediately responded with an old-fashioned three-point play but a Bulldog trey with 5:13 left on the clock kept UNC Asheville within striking distance at 68-67.

Mobley answered with a big three-pointer on UT Martin's next trip down the floor to ignite a 12-2 run that essentially iced the victory. Two Jackson free throws with 2:10 left gave the Skyhawks an 80-69 lead and the Bulldogs would not get any closer than nine points the rest of the way.

As mentioned earlier, UT Martin is set to travel to Buies Creek, NC for a second round showdown against Campbell, who also competes in the Big South Conference. Tipoff time from the Pope Center is set for 6 p.m. CST.