

Runnin' Bulldogs Battle Past Western Carolina, 71-65, Saturday Afternoon

[box score](#)

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. – Playing its second game in less than 24 hours, Gardner-Webb put four players in double figures to battle past Western Carolina, 71-65, on the second day of the 2010 Legends Classic.

Gardner-Webb (4-3) got 12 points each from Laron Buggs and Jon Moore, and got 10 points from Mike Byron and Josh Henley to get the win – despite opening tip coming just 18 hours after a gut-wrenching, 56-55 loss to host William & Mary.

“These guys bought into the game plan and executed today,” said Gardner-Webb head coach Chris Holtmann, who improved to 2-0 this season against teams from North Carolina. “I couldn’t be prouder of this team and the way they bounced back with toughness after a close loss last night.”

The win saw the smaller Runnin’ Bulldogs exert toughness throughout, particularly after falling behind 25-8 against a stout press by the Catamounts (2-4).

Gardner-Webb regained its composure midway through the first half, getting an old-fashioned three-point play from Stefon Johnson to stem the WCU run with 10:01 to play before halftime. The Catamounts held a 34-21 lead with 4:51 left after a Brandon Boggs’ jumper, but Luke Davis sparked an 11-0 spurt by the Runnin’ Bulldogs that cut the lead to 34-32 on a Davis’ three-pointer at the 2:54 mark.

Western Carolina pushed the lead back to three points with less than a minute remaining in the half, but Davis found Santoine Butler with a nifty pass for a layup with 0.9 seconds left – and Butler made a free throw after the accompanying foul to tie the game, 37-37, going into the locker room.

“I was really pleased with the way we responded after falling behind early,” said Holtmann. “We had a number of different guys step up and get us a very big early season win. We were considerably better with handling pressure in the second half, and were tougher around the basket.”

The two teams traded small leads early in the opening moments of the second half but, after Gardner-Webb took a 44-41 lead on a Buggs’ three with 17:31 left, the Runnin’ Bulldogs would not fall behind again. WCU tied the game once more, 54-54, with 7:55 left, but reserve David Brown sank his second three-pointer of the half with just 25 seconds later to give GWU the lead for good.

A layup and free throw by Henley would expand the lead to eight points, 62-54, with 4:28 left and Western Carolina would not get the ball back with a one-possession deficit the rest of the half – getting as close as three points only once down the stretch.

Gardner-Webb was able to keep its lead at the free throw stripe, making an effective 24-of-31 free throws – including 7-of-8 by more in the final 34 seconds. GWU also coughed up just five turnovers after halftime, limiting Western Carolina to just three points off of turnovers in the final 20 minutes.

GWU held a 40-29 edge on the glass, turning 17 offensive rebounds into 14 second-chance points. Byron, a 6-foot-10, 230-pound freshman from San Antonio, Texas, helped the ‘Dogs to a 26-12 edge in the paint – with his 10 points a new career high. He added seven rebounds and a block in just 22 minutes of action.

Henley’s 10 points included a solid 4-of-5 effort at the free throw line. All told, the Gardner-Webb frontcourt quartet of Byron, Henley, Johnson and Butler combined to make 10-of-12 free throws. The ‘Dogs shot 41.2 percent from the floor in the game (21-of-51).

Western Carolina got a game-high 24 points from guard Mike Williams on 8-of-17 shooting, and made nine three-pointers as a team to stay within striking distance in the second half. Trey Sumler came off the bench for 12 points, Keaton Cole added eight and Preston Ross scored five. WCU shot 39.2 percent for the game.

Gardner-Webb will play its final game of the 2010 Legends Classic on Sunday, doing battle with Mercer at 2:00 pm. The game will air live on WGWF-FM (88.3) and on the station’s website (wgwg.org).

