

Bears Top Western Carolina in Legends Classic Opener, 71-66

[box score](#)

WILLIAMSBURG, Va. – Mercer University snapped its three-game losing streak in a big way with a 71-66 win over Western Carolina University in the opening game of the 2010 Legends Classic. The win improves the Bears to 2-3 overall, while the Catamounts fall to 2-3.

Mercer led at halftime of a game for the first time in five games this season, holding a 29-28 advantage over the Catamounts at the intermission. WCU's largest lead of the opening half was six points and the Bears held a three point cushion. There were four ties and seven lead changes in the opening 20 minutes.

Mercer extended its advantage to six points midway through the second half, but WCU would not fold and came back to catch the Bears at 50-50 on a tip-in by Richie Gordon (10 points). But MU would not be overtaken and a three-pointer by Mark Hall (10 points) gave the Bears a 53-50 lead it would never relinquish.

Western Carolina came back at the Bears several times down the stretch, only to be rebuffed. Down by two, 55-53, with 3:47 left Mark Hall missed a three pointer. However, freshman Paul Larsen was relentless on the loose ball, tapping it out to Brian Mills who controlled the rebound and put it back in to make it 57-53.

The Catamounts cut the Bears padding to a single point - 59-58 - with 2:57 left to play, thanks to a trey by Mike Williams (16 points). But Jeff Smith tallied back-to-back layups on Mercer's next to possessions, the second of which was also followed by a free throw to complete a three-point play and extend the MU lead to four, 64-60.

Freshman point guard Langston Hall had ice in his veins as he made four of his six free throws in the game down the stretch and with the outcome on the line. Hall also had three assists and three steals, as well as a huge block of a three-point attempt by the Catamounts in the waning seconds and the Bears clinging to the lead.

Mills, a senior forward, led Mercer with a game-high 21 points, as well as grabbing 11 rebounds. Mills made good on 9-of-16 from the field before fouling out with two minutes left to play. It was Mills' first double-double of the season and the second of his career in the Orange and Black.

Smith added 18 points on a six-for-11 night shooting. Smith had a game-leading four assists, as well as two steals.

Larsen had a game-leading 12 rebounds.

Mercer, which entered the game as the Atlantic Sun Conference's top free throw shooting team (73 percent), struggled a bit from the charity stripe by hitting just 22-of-34 (65 percent). However, the Bears bounced back from its worst shooting night from the field at Florida State last Tuesday (25 percent) by canning 46 percent (23-of-50) against the Catamounts.

The Bears will play the second of their three games of the Legends tournament on Saturday at 6 p.m. versus host William and Mary. The event concludes on Sunday afternoon.

All Mercer men's basketball games can be heard live on the sister FM stations of Peach 96.5 & 102.5 (WPCH and WZCH), which will serve as the flagship stations for all broadcasts this season. Behind the microphone once again this season will be Rick Cameron, "Voice of the Bears", in his fifth year calling the play-by-play for Mercer basketball.

