HPU women open season with big win

BY MICHAEL LINDSAY
ENTERPRISE SPORTS WRITER

HIGH POINT — High Point University women's basketball started its new era on a strong note.

The Panthers — with head coach Wyatt Foust in his first season and about half their roster being new — quickly led big and raced away to an 88-39 win over Lees-McRae in a nonconference matchup Monday evening in the Qubein Center.

"It's exciting," Foust said. "If you have 18 assists in a game, that tells you you're probably headed in the direction you want. We talk a lot about giving up the good for the great. That's a direct sign that your culture and the buy-in is where it needs to be.

"I feel like this group has worked so hard. And we've asked and demanded so much of them because they've got big goals. So for a night like tonight — for shots to fall, to get a lot of stops and it's fun and the energy is great. I felt like the team needed this. And to have a lot of good things happen, they deserve that."

Khloe Lemon, a graduate student who previously played at California Baptist, scored 16 points on 6-of-9 shooting — including 4 of 7 from 3-point range — to lead High Point, winner of the last three regular season and two tournament titles in the Big South Conference under Chelsea Banbury.



MICHAEL LINDSAY | HPE

The High Point University bench celebrates a basket during Monday's season-opener against Lees-McRae in the Qubein Center.

Peyton Gerdes, a senior forward who has been a key contributor during the Panthers' recent run, added 14 points and eight rebounds. Meredith Tippner added 13 points and seven rebounds, followed by Brecken Snotherly and Rylee Bess with 12 points each. Taylor Feldman had 10 points and five assists.

"I think we were definitely ready to play," Gerdes said. "The offseason's long, the preseason's long. I think we really bought into something really special. Tonight the 18 assists is amazing. That's fun basketball to be a part of. It's fun winning. It's fun playing basketball that way. And I'm really excited for this year."

High Point shot 47% from the field for the game — shooting better than 60% in the first and third quarters and staying above 50% into the fourth quarter when the final reserves entered the game. And it held the Bobcats — led by Braelyn Stillwell with 15 points — to 32% shooting.

The Panthers made 12 shots from 3-point range while limiting Lees-McRae, from the Division II Conference Carolinas, to just 2 of 16. High Point also made 14 of 16 free throws while holding the Bobcats — who feature former High Point Christian standout Nadiya Hairston — to just 3 of 4 from the foul line.

"That was really, really awesome," Foust said. "And then from a free-throw standpoint, they are really aggressive jumping. They do a great job getting in and getting shots

SEE **HPU/PAGE A10**

HPU

FROM **PAGE A6**

up on the rim. You have to be really disciplined not to foul. So to only attempt four free throws and only hit two 3s, I'm just excited to see that."

The Panthers used a 38-6 run over the first and second quarters to race ahead by 34 with 3 1/2 minutes left in the half. They carried a 50-19 advantage into halftime. High Point, going on a 16-point run in the third, pushed its lead to as large as 51 midway through the fourth.

The Panthers, forcing 28 turnovers, finished with notable advantages in points off turnovers at 33-11 and fastbreak points at 31-0. High Point — which awarded Foust the game ball following his first win — will host Wingate on Wednesday at noon in the Qubein Center.

"Since we got here in June, it's just sharing the basketball," Lemon said. "Basketball is a lot of fun when the ball is moving and swinging and everyone's getting involved. Just to see so many people in double figures tonight is our testimony to High Point basketball. This is our new brand and it will continue throughout this whole season."