



## No. 1 NKU gives Mercyhurst lots of Slack, 78-38



Jessie Slack (21) goes over Mercyhurst defender Jackie Artise for a basket during the second half of NKU's 78-38 victory Monday night in The Bank of Kentucky Center. Slack finished with 26 points to lead the Norse. On the right, NKU's Cassie Brannen attempts a shot in the first half.

## NKU senior guard nets 26 points on 12-for-17 shooting from field

HIGHLAND HEIGHTS, Ky. – On a night in which she shredded Mercyhurst (Pa.) for a career-high 26 points, Northern Kentucky University's Jessie Slack wanted to talk defense after her team's 78-38 win over the visiting Lakers.

"Our defense is really, really good. We stepped it up a lot," Slack said after going 12-for-17 from the field and dishing out four assists. "We knew our defense wasn't as good as it should be last game (against Wayne State). I thought defensively we played really well when we had seven fouls the entire game.

"The officials let us play which is nice, and we're a very physical team. I think it was definitely a step up and showed defensively how good we really can be."

As a result, NKU (2-0) held Mercyhurst (1-1) to 36.8 percent shooting from the field. The Norse also forced 24 turnovers and shot a blistering 60 percent from the field.

Slack, a senior guard from Mt.

Perry, Ohio, scored 14 points in the first half as NKU built a 38-18 lead at the break. She was 6-for-7 from the field at

halftime.

"If there's a better guard in Division II I'd like to meet her because I think Jessie Slack is awfully good," NKU head coach Nancy Winstel said of her senior star. "She is a special talent, and I can't imagine anyone who is off to a better start this season than Jessie Slack."

In her first two games this season, Slack has averaged 22.5 points and shot 5-for-7 from 3-point range.

A year ago, Slack averaged 13.3 points and made a



Jessie Slack



Karen Brackman shoots a jumper in the first half against Mercyhurst.

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team-leading 68 shots from 3-point range. The East Carolina transfer also dished out 92 assists last season as NKU captured the NCAA Division II national championship.



Whitney Levering scores a basket against Mercyhurst on Monday.

Cassie Brannen added 15 points for NKU, which is ranked No. 1 nationally in the NCAA Division II poll. Brannen, a senior post player and Mount Notre Dame High School graduate, now has 984 career points and is looking to become the 25th member of NKU's 1,000-point club.

"I thought Cassie looked really good, and she is getting back to where she was last year," Slack said. "She missed some time with the

injuries, but Cassie is a great player and she is going to score if we get her the ball."

Slack and Brannen combined for NKU's first 19 points of the game as the Norse built a 19-10 lead. A Brandi Rayburn basket made it 21-10, and NKU led by double digits the remainder of the evening.

A total of 10 NKU players dented the scoring column. Rayburn scored seven points for the Norse, while Karen Brackman, Danyelle Echoles and Kendra Caldwell each scored six points. Caldwell also grabbed five rebounds, and Echoles dished out five assists.

Freshman Whitney Levering scored two baskets in the second half in her regular-season Norse debut. Sophomore Diondra Holliday also played for the first time this season after recovering from an injury. Freshman Sadie Bowling added three assists and two steals for the Norse.



NKU's Brandi Rayburn (30) attempts to block Mara Dreiser's jumper.

"I thought our freshmen picked up where our upperclassmen left off," Winstel said. "That was nice to see because when we made substitutions tonight, there really wasn't a drop off. I thought it was really good team effort.

"I was much happier with our

overall team defense tonight than I was in the Wayne State game. I just really felt that from start to finish our team did a pretty good job defensively."

Amy Achesinski led Mercyhurst with 15 points. No other Laker reached double figures.

NKU now leads the all-time series with Mercyhurst, 3-0. A year ago, NKU posted an 83-67 victory against the Lakers at Erie, Pa.

NKU will play at Indianapolis on Dec. 4 to open Great Lakes Valley Conference play. The Norse then play at Southern Illinois at Edwardsville on Dec. 6



Mercyhurst's Jackie Artise (25) runs into NKU defenders Rachel Lantry (5), Karen Brackman and Cassie Brannen (31). The Norse defense held the Lakers to 36.8 percent from the field.



NKU's Sadie Bowling records one of her two steals in the second half against Mercyhurst. The Norse forced 24 Laker turnovers en route to a 78-38 win in The Bank of Kentucky Center.