

## Road victory over rival nets Tigers first road win since 2021

### Mike Guild wins first road game

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Wins haven't been easy to come by for the Mercer boys' basketball team. Last Tuesday, the Tigers battled adversity to help coach Mike Guild win his first road game at Mercer.

The Tigers beat Butternut 46-38 for their first win of the season. It was Mercer's first road win since Jan. 29, 2021 when they beat Solon Springs 53-50.

"It's very exciting. I actually dreamed of a road victory last year after we got our first home victory. That was my next bucket list item or next on my goal sheet for coaching. It feels even better going to Butternut, a school we're kind of rivals with and getting a win in their gym," Guild said. "Yes it feels excellent. It definitely gets the monkey off our back for road victories, I'll say that."

Laken Walker picked up where he left off against Ironwood, Mich. with two triples in the first half. He led the Tigers with six first half points. It was his second straight game with at least two 3-pointers.

"I think Laken, in my opinion, is on Cloud 9," Guild said. "We showed up to practice (and) Laken drained six-eight (3s) in a

row. I go, 'If you're open, pull the trigger please.' He's done it two straight games. The best part is he's only a sophomore. And he's short. I don't think people take him seriously when he's out there from 3. When he lets them fly, they're buckets. Proud of him for stepping up."

Kyler Breunig scored five points in the first half while Josh Klopatek had four. Conrad LaBarge had a basket.

The first half didn't go without drama. Breunig got ejected after a small scuffle with a Butternut player.

The Tigers had to re-group and play without one of their leaders on the floor.

"I had Dylan (Eith) on the bench. He was playing alright, and I pulled him aside. I said, 'I don't care about anything else... I need you to step up in this moment. I need guys who can make (shots) fall.' Dylan rose to the occasion," Guild said. "He really stepped up and took everything that we've done so far — all of his shots, good or bad — (and) put that out of his mind. Good to see a young guy... step up and make plays."

Butternut got eight first half points by Luke Murphy and five points each from Owen Dennis and Jayden Mojto. They helped Butternut to a 19-17 half-time lead.

The Tigers turned it on in the second half. Klopatek caught fire from the field with 15 second half points to lead all scorers with 19 points. Out of those 15 points, Klopatek sunk two 3-pointers and made 3/5 free throws.

"Josh was a leader all night, controlling the floor and calling the shots," Guild said. "Josh had a career-high 19."

LaBarge scored seven points in the second half for nine total. Dylan Eith chipped in a big seven points, including one triple, all in the second half.

"Everyone stepped up to play tonight. They all wanted this win as bad as I did, if not worse," Guild said.

Defensively, the Tigers limited Murphy to just two second half points. A defensive change suggested by Klopatek prevented Murphy from scoring big numbers.

"Originally we were in man defense, and I think I made an adjustment, and I swapped Conrad and Josh. We made that switch per Josh's request, listening to the captain, telling me what he wants," Guild said. "Can we switch up the defense. (I) want to guard somebody else so I can get steals.' That's pretty much what he did. That was really good to succeed on something that he saw and noticed,

and (we) made the change, and I said 'ok we're going with it.'"

Mojto scored seven second half points for 12 total, leading Butternut. Dennis totaled 11 points, the third Butternut player in double figures.

Late in the second half, the Tigers had to fight through more adversity. Klopatek fouled out of the game with three minutes left. If the Tigers wanted to win a game on the road, they would have to do it without their two seniors.

"It's good to see the depth of these guys stepping up especially with a big guy like Kyler dropping out of the game," Guild said. "It was really nice to see the depth come together, and they actually showed they have more depth than I thought."

Mercer rose to the occasion. Up by a couple of points, the Tigers ended up getting some big points from Eith that put the game away.

"We finished the game with our two seniors gone, and still were able to pull out the victory. That shows a lot of drive from these younger guys. Their captains, their seniors laid it out the whole night. They saw what they needed to do, and picked up what both those guys left off. It was a more exciting win for the fact that the guys

did it with help from the seniors, but they weren't there to end the game at the final buzzer," Guild said. "They finished it on their own. I think it showed a lot of positives in the bench guys, and builds a lot of confidence that they can do a lot and not have to rely so heavily on one guy or two guys. (It was) a full team win, not a one-man show."

Mercer outscored Butternut 29-19 in the second half to propel them to their first win.

"We definitely gained a little momentum going into break," Guild said. "Well deserved win tonight. I couldn't be more proud to coach these young men."

Up next, the Tigers (1-5, 1-4) return in 2023 looking to make it two in a row when they host conference foe Drummond Tuesday, Jan. 3 starting at 7 p.m.

"I feel as though beating a good rival like Butternut is going to amp them up even more, especially to get it right before break," Guild said. "The positives from the last couple games are going to carry over into practice and the first couple games in January. They were really excited after getting a win on the road. I think it'll just carry over."

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## New Year's resolutions to improve teams/players



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New Year's Day is approaching this weekend. Many people will have New Year's resolutions for 2023. I'll take a look at a few sports teams/players that need a new resolution.

The New York Jets should make it their goal to find a franchise quarterback. I don't think Zach Wilson is the answer after the last two games. They already struck out previously with Sam Darnold.

It's clear the Jets have talent. I like head coach Robert Saleh a lot, and

they've been in the play-off hunt all season. A good quarterback — via the draft or free agency — would change their fortunes for the better.

A New Year's resolution for New York Yankees' Aaron Judge is to bring a World Series back to the Bronx. I love Judge — he's my favorite baseball player. He signed a massive deal to come back to New York, being named Captain of the Yankees in the process.

Now that Judge is back, it's time for him to lead the Yankees to their first World Series title since 2009.

The Los Angeles Lakers should have a New Year's resolution to figure out what they're doing. Are they going all in with LeBron James and Anthony Davis, or will they sell at the trade deadline in February?

The Lakers need assets really badly. They don't have much draft capital in the next few years. I believe trading James and Davis would hit the complete re-set button, something they need. They haven't done much since winning the title in the Orlando Bubble back in 2020.

Maybe they try and trade future draft picks to get a Myles Turner and/or Buddy Hield, which I heard they were rumored to be shopping awhile back. Either way, time is running out for the Lakers to decide what direction they want their franchise to go.

The Ohio State Buckeyes' football program needs to get back to beating the Michigan Wolverines. That should be their New Year's resolution.

Sure the Buckeyes still ended up making

the College Football Playoff (CFP) this year, but the Wolverines have proven to be superior as of late. Michigan has won back-to-back Big Ten championships, and have made the CFP two straight years.

A New Year's resolution for Tampa Bay Buccaneers quarterback Tom Brady is to find a new team. I think his time with the Buccaneers will end after this season. Brady is consistent in saying that he wants to keep playing. I believe him, and I think it'll be for a different team.

We might see Brady being recruited again, much like he did in 2020. Could a New England Patriots reunion be in the works?

The Los Angeles Angels should make it their New Year's resolution to actually make the playoffs. Every year,

experts seem to have the Angels making the playoffs as a Wild Card team. With the expanded baseball playoffs, it's time they make the playoffs.

The Angels have wasted the career of Mike Trout. Now, they have Shohei Ohtani, one of the best two-way players in baseball history. There are no excuses. It's time for the Angels to finally make the playoffs.

For all the bottom dwellers of the NBA standings, their goal for this year should be to get the number one overall pick in the 2023 Draft. The jackpot could be French basketball star Victor Wembanyama whose potential is through the roof. He's been tabbed as one of the best basketball prospects ever.

The Louisville men's basketball program

should make it their New Year's resolution to get back to relevancy. They've been woeful this year, holding a record of 2-11 as of Dec. 23. A once proud basketball program needs to find a way to get back to the NCAA Tournament.

A New Year's resolution for the United States women's soccer team is to win the FIFA Women's World Cup for the third straight time. They've been the dominant team as of late, and no doubt want to continue their streak. Alex Morgan will look to win her third straight title.

2022 has been a fun and wild sports year. I can't wait to see what 2023 holds for everyone.

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