



Saint Mary's Tip-Off Classic: One Rout and One Barn Burner

By Kevin D. Shallat

The Saint Mary's Men's basketball season got underway this past weekend, as they hosted the Sonoma State Seawolves on Friday, Nov. 8, and the Drake University Bulldogs on Saturday, Nov. 9. The Gaels beat the Seawolves 82-57, and corralled the Bulldogs 72-66.

The fans got a good first look at Saint Mary's guard Patrick Mills from Australia, as he scored the first points of the season for the Gaels. He's been described as "lightening in a bottle" by fans. It's been five years since a freshman started his first game for the Gaels, and Mills did not disappoint, as he racked up 17 points, five assists, and four steals in his first contest.

Gaels forward Diamon Simpson had a typical game as he recorded a double-double with 18 points and 11 rebounds. Center Omar Samhan and guard Tron Smith also contributed for the Gaels.

The second game was a tightly contested game. St. Mary's is known for their frontcourt, but it was their backcourt that saved the day in this game. Drake has a talented but smaller squad than the Gaels, but they compensated for it by their athleticism and shooting ability. The Gaels got away from attacking the basket and kicking out to the perimeter in the second game, even though this style worked well for them in their game against Sonoma State. The Bulldogs were able to drive to the basket against the Gaels in the first half, but Saint Mary's did a good job of shutting down those lanes in the second half.

The Gaels addressed their shooting concerns from last year, having clearly improved in that category. Among those contributing to this improvement is guard Carlin Hughes, also from Australia. Hughes, a transfer from Montana State, was unstoppable Saturday night. In this game, Hughes looked to be the fastest player on the court. He was also deadly from the perimeter, hitting five of eight 3-pointers on the night. The performance by Hughes Saturday was reminiscent of former Gael guard David Sivulich's record game of eight 3-pointers set back in 1995.

The game would go back and forth, with each team taking relatively small leads that would not stick. At one point in the second half the Gaels would trail by eight points, but managed to shoot their way back. The game would get locked up at 61 a piece with two minutes remaining. Yusef Smith was able to get a nice put back and a foul with 1:52 left in the game that put the Gaels up 64-61. However, just when the Gaels looked to put the game away, the Bulldogs would crawl back and get within two points, bringing the score to 65-63. Shortly thereafter, Todd Golden would hit his fourth and final 3-pointer on the night, putting the Gaels up by five with 46 seconds to go, which in essence sealed the win.

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