

Saint Mary's Rides Green Wave with Win at Rainbow Classic

By Kevin D. Shallat (reporting from Honolulu Hawaii)



Patrick Mills (13)

Photo Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's men's basketball bounced back from their first loss of the season, after the Southern Illinois Salukis spoiled the Gael's brief ride in the top 25. The Gaels traveled to Honolulu, Hawaii where they began a three-day tournament at the Outrigger Rainbow Classic, which started on Thursday, Dec. 20 for the Gaels. Saint Mary's survived a low scoring affair to beat the Tulane Green Wave by a score of 64-57.

Before the opening of the game, the starting five for both teams, along with the coaches, received leis in a nice pre-game introduction ceremony. A few of the Gaels threw the game-worn leis into the stands where some happy Saint Mary's fans were happy to catch them.

It didn't take Patrick Mills long to record the first two points of the game, as he flew down the lane for an easy layup. Mills didn't quite have his "A" game, but was still quicker to the basket than everybody else, and managed to finish with 23 points. Every time Tulane made a run, Mills would answer with a jumper or drive to the basket to keep the Green Wave

at bay. Mills was fortunate to have both his parents fly in from Australia to watch the games. "It was a special game," Mills said. "It's been a while now since I've seen them, and since they've seen me play. I've had to try my best to give them their money's worth."

Once again the Gaels received good contributions from their bench. Yusef Smith crashed the boards and came up with a couple of crowd-pleasing blocks. Smith finished with eight rebounds and two blocks in only 14 minutes of play.

Both Mills and Tron Smith did a good job of attacking the basket in the first half. They were both able to penetrate the Green Wave defense while protecting the ball on their way to the basket. This type of presence, and physical play helped the Gaels jump out to a 32-21 halftime lead.

In the second half the Gaels were never in jeopardy of losing the game, as they cruised the rest of the way. Omar Samhan had an efficient game, as his minutes were limited due to foul trouble. He would finish with 11 points and five rebounds in 24 minutes. Carlin Hughes gave the Gaels a spark off the bench, as he was a perfect 4-4 at the free-throw line. Hughes finished with nine points, two rebounds, two assists, and two steals in 22 minutes.

With all of the potential distractions that one might find while playing in Hawaii, the Gaels seem as focused as ever. "I love (Hawaii), it's everything people said it was going to be like, we're just having fun, but at the same time we have a job to do here," Mills said.

Highlights from Saint Mary's Friday night win over East Tennessee State at Rainbow Classic:

- Randy Bennett sets SMC wins record with 111 coaching victories.
- Yusef Smith matched his career-high with 11 points
- Simpson had his fourth double-double of the season and 11th of his career with 15 points and 12 rebounds
- Simpson's 12 rebounds marks the sixth double-digit rebound game of the season and 15th of his career.
- Lucas Walker had a career high with 12 points

- Patrick Mills had a career-high 8 assists
- Carlin Hughes tied his career-high with five made 3-pointers, going 5-of-9 from beyond the arc.
- With 11 made 3-pointers, Saint Mary's made 10 threes in a game for the fourth time this season.

The Gaels went on to play the championship game of the Rainbow Classic on Saturday, Dec. 22 against the winner of the Ohio/Louisiana-Lafayette game.