

## Saint Mary's Topples Fullerton: Back in National Rankings

By Kevin D. Shallat

After returning from their recent road trip to Honolulu, Hawaii, the Saint Mary's men's basketball team had just enough time to place their Outrigger Rainbow Classic championship trophy up on the shelf before three other teams came into town to play in the annual Shamrock Classic. The tournament took place on December 28 and 29, in Moraga. The Gaels went on to win their second tournament of the year, and were able to climb back into the national rankings after they cruised to a victory over Howard, 97-48, and edged out the Cal State Fullerton Titans, 69-59.

After beating Howard the night before by nearly fifty points, the Gaels struggled against Cal State Fullerton. Saint Mary's, arguably, had their worst first half of the season. The Gaels committed 10 turnovers, had eight personal fouls, and shot 3-13 from 3-point range. However, after trailing by two points at halftime, they found a way to win.

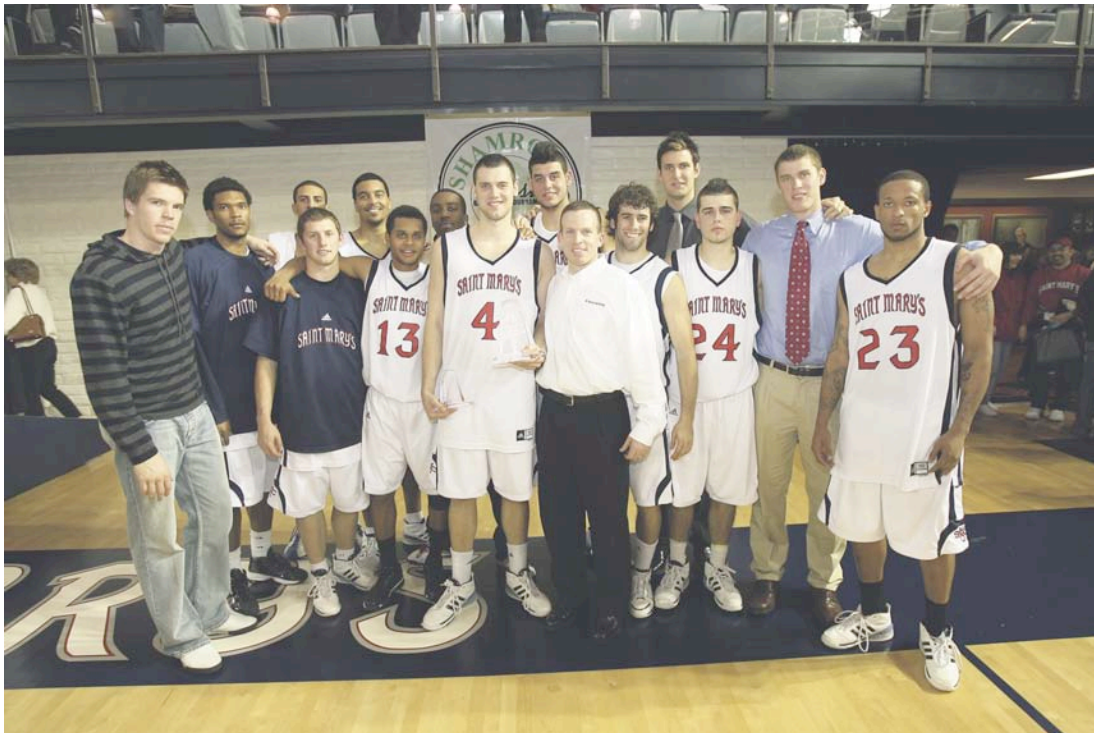
The Gaels went into halftime trailing 37-35, after a long 3-point shot by Fullerton's Josh Akognon. Saint Mary's had a hard time stopping Marcus Crenshaw and Akognon. The two players had 9 and 14 points respectively in the first half of play.

In the second half Saint Mary's cut down on their turnovers, and hustled for points. The Gaels realized that their jump shots were not falling, so they adjusted, and drove the ball to the basket. They finished the game with 29 points

in the paint, as opposed to only 16 for the Titans. The Gaels also had seven fast break points, and the Titans had none. Fullerton was not able to continue their hot shooting from 3-point range, as the Titans were 50 percent from long range in the first half. As Fullerton struggled to keep up with the Gaels in the second half, they began to throw up 3-point shots in desperation, and wound up shooting 9 percent from down town in the second half.

The usual stars for Saint Mary's were not on the top of their game, but that opened up opportunities for other players to step up. Yusef Smith was able to shoulder some of the load with his efficient play. Smith had 10 points and four rebounds in 13 minutes, as he was two for two from 3-point range. Smith has not only shot the ball well this year, but his above the rim style of play has Gael fans yearning for more of his high flying dunks.

Ian O'Leary continues to play with more confidence as the season plays on. He has been able to score points at crucial moments for the Gaels. O'Leary scored back to back double-doubles in this tournament, finishing with 14 points and ten rebounds in this game. Diamon Simpson quietly put up gaudy numbers in this game, finishing with 16 points, 15 rebounds, and four blocks. Simpson needs only one more block to give him the all-time record for blocks at Saint Mary's.



SMC Men's Basketball Team, Ian O' Leary (4) is holding the Trophy

Photo Tod Fierner

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Patrick Mills (13)

Photo Tod Fierner



Diamon Simpson (20)

Photo Tod Fierner