

Saint Mary's Survives Against Team in Turmoil

By Kevin D. Shallat

Just three days before the Pepperdine Waves basketball team was scheduled to play the Gaels in Moraga, the head coach of Pepperdine, Vance Walberg, stepped down. Walberg resigned his position as the men's basketball coach for what was deemed as personal reasons. Despite the disarray of their program, this Pepperdine team came into town Saturday, Jan. 19, and put forth a spirited effort that gave the Gaels a scare of their own. The Waves were down by only four points with 15 seconds to play, before Saint Mary's put the game away and won by a score of 79-74.

Last week the Gaels played against their arch rival, Santa Clara, which is always counted on for being a tight game. Saint Mary's won that game by 31 points. This week they played a team in turmoil, and were 20 point favorites, but wound up winning by the skin of their teeth.

The score was tied seven times in the first half, and the lead changed three times as well. This was a clear indication that the team was not functioning at it's best. Head coach Randy Bennett turned to his bench early, and that decision paid off. The Gaels bench scored 29 points in 66 minutes of action. No bench player was more productive offensively than Tron Smith. Smith continues to take the ball hard and safely to the rim, which is something he says he has been working on.

"When I come in, I just want to create...I just have to step up as a senior leader, and take care of the ball, and do whatever I have to do to help us win," Smith said. Smith was 5-8 from the field, and scored 15 points in 26 minutes. Saint Mary's took a precarious 38-30 lead at halftime, as many of their shots in the first half rimmed out of the bucket.

The halftime didn't seem to change anything for Saint Mary's, as they picked up where they left off in the second half. The very first possession was a steal by Diamon Simpson, but he was unable to finish the fast break, and turned the ball over. This play typified the Gael's night. Still, Simpson finished with near triple-double figures. He recorded 17 points, 14 rebounds, and five steals, while hitting 7-8 free throw attempts.

Carlin Hughes was uncharacteristically 0-4 from 3-point range, but had astoundingly efficient numbers for the game. Hughes finished with eight points, three rebounds, three assists, and three steals in 23 minutes. Hughes also had the play of the year, which left the

crowd rocking. He dribbled down the floor on a fast break, and put the ball around his back and in for a Globetrotter-like layup. The Waves made things interesting, as they cut the lead to one with 14:54 remaining, but that would be as close as they got, as the Gaels were able to hang on and defeat the Waves 79-74.



Diamon Simpson (20)

Photo Tod Fierner