

## Gaels Win Big Against the Portland Pilots

By Kevin D. Shallat

The game against the University of Portland could not have come soon enough for the Saint Mary's men's basketball team Saturday, Feb. 2. After losing their game against the University of San Diego on the same day the national rankings came out, the team was ranked 21st in the ESPN/USA Today poll, and 20th in the AP poll. The Gaels took out their frustrations on the Pilots and won in a calm, cool, and collected manner Saturday night, downing Portland, 86-49.

Saint Mary's was able to avoid the dreaded trap game, as Randy Bennett and the Gaels made sure there was no let-down against a rebuilding Portland team. Despite the 37-point win, the game did not turn into a sloppy blowout. The Gaels looked determined to finish strong in this game, as they prepare for the biggest game of the year Monday night, in a nationally televised game against Gonzaga.

"I really believe it's important to finish games well, play well, it affects how you play the next game," said Bennett. "That's why I kept bringing guys back in... I wanted to make sure our guys finished on a positive when they played."

The game was not much of a contest from the opening tip-off. Saint Mary's jumped out to an early 12-3 lead and never looked back. Portland could not generate much offense, as they shot a dismal 29 percent in the first half. Ian O'Leary had the hot hand early, and scored the first five points of the game for the Gaels. O'Leary finished with a season high 20 points in 23 minutes, and was perfect from the field in the second half.

Portland guard Taishi Ito was quick with the ball, but only one player was able to knock down a shot for him, and finished with only one assist on the night. The Pilots were dominated by Saint Mary's in the paint, and were outscored by the Gaels 17-0 in second chance points.

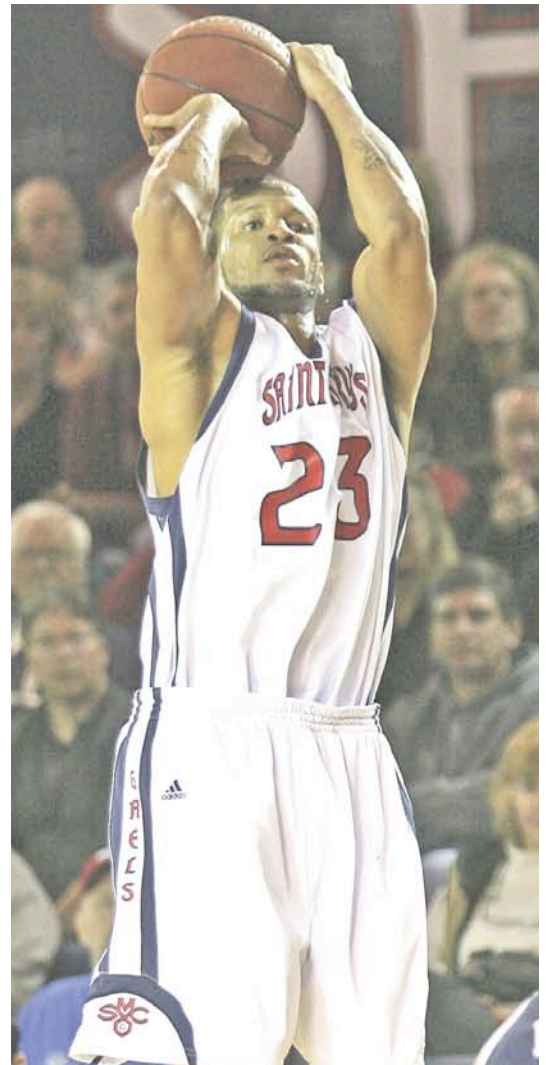
There was one bright spot for Portland Saturday night. Redshirt sophomore Nik Raivio, brother of former Gonzaga star Derek Raivio, scored 18 points for the Pilots.

Patrick Mills gave the fans a scare in the second half when Portland's big man fell on him. Mills left the game, only to return later in the second half. Mills played only 26 minutes in this game, as Bennett presumably wanted to keep his star point guard healthy and rested for the Gonzaga game.

Diamon Simpson had a stellar game for the Gaels, as he connected on six of nine field goals, and finished with 13 points and 15 rebounds. Omar Samhan was one rebound away from a double-double. He finished the game with 18 points and nine rebounds in 23 minutes. Reserve Tron Smith rebounded from a poor shooting performance in San Diego to finish with 10 points, and Carlin Hughes came off the bench and recorded a season high eight assists in 18 minutes.



Ian O'Leary (4)



Tron Smith (23)

Photo Tod Fierner