

Gaels Suffer Setback Versus Kent State

By Kevin D. Shallat



Carlin Hughes (3), Patrick Mills (13)

Photo Tod Fierner

The Gaels were riding a high from both their success on the court, and from all of the national and international media coverage this season. That high would quickly fade, as Kent State came into town to play in the ESPN Bracket-buster game on Saturday, Feb. 23. The Golden Flashes flexed their muscles and powered their way to an impressive 65-57 win over Saint Mary's in a raucous McKeeon Pavilion.

Kent State held on to their first place standing in the Mid-American Conference, but needed the win against the Gaels to solidify their chances of making the NCAA tournament. With the win, the Golden Flashes were able to make it to the top 25, with the Gaels holding the 23rd spot in the ESPN/USA Today poll, and the 25th spot in the AP poll.

Kent State won their last five games before coming to Moraga, and they are just

one of five teams to win 20 games in each of the past 10 seasons. However, the Golden Flashes have a couple of bad losses this year as well. They lost to a Detroit Titans squad that is struggling, and also lost to Ohio, a team the Gaels beat in Hawaii.

Samhan and Ian O'Leary had the first few points of the game, as the Gaels tried to force the ball down low, due to a strong perimeter defense by Kent State. Diamon Simpson was a beast for Saint Mary's, as he and O'Leary single handedly kept the Gaels in the game. Simpson had a double-double in the first half alone, but the wheels appeared to come off for the Gaels after Samhan dislocated his shoulder with 6:16 to go in the first half. Despite Kent State's lockdown perimeter defense, Saint Mary's would hang on to a two-point lead at half, leading the Golden Flashes 28-26.

The Gaels led the Flashes in second

chance points in the first half, but Saint Mary's would run out of second chances in this contest, as injuries, turnovers, and poor free-throw shooting would eventually doom the Gaels. Lucas Walker came into the game to replace Samhan, but as luck would have it, Walker would also suffer a shoulder injury. Simpson recorded a monster game with 24 points, 15 rebounds, four assists, three steals, and three blocks, but was the only Gael to finish in double figures. O'Leary was the only other player to come close, as he finished with eight points and nine rebounds. Kent State was able to boast a nine point second half comeback, thanks to their defense, which gave up only five points to Patrick Mills on the night. Saint Mary's was able to cling to a one-point lead with four minutes to go, but Kent State's defense proved too much for the Gaels down the stretch, as the Golden Flashes secured an 8-point victory.

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Diamon Simpson

Photo Tod Fierner