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Lady Gaels Take Second in Thanksgiving Tournament

By Kevin D. Shallat





Gaels' Louella Tomlinson fights to put up a shot through a Hoosier swarm Photo Sheryl Cardiff

Nobody can accuse the Saint Mary's Women's basketball team of scheduling weak opponents. So far the lady Gaels have played Old Dominion, Texas, Nevada, and the University of Indiana. During the Thanksgiving holiday break Saint Mary's hosted the Concord Hilton Thanksgiving Classic in Moraga.

The Gaels won their opening game against La Salle 61-55 on a strong performance from their center, Louella Tomlinson.

On Saturday, November 29, the Gaels played the University of Indiana Hoosiers for the Classic championship. Saint Mary's was competitive for much of the first half, but the Gaels found themselves down by 15 points at halftime. They were able to trim the lead to 13 in the second half, but they were unable to come back. Despite another strong effort from Louella Tomlinson, Saint Mary's eventually fell to the Hoosiers, 80-63.

The Hoosiers gave the Gaels every opportunity to take the lead early in this game, as Indiana's play was sloppy at the onset. Indiana shot just 39 percent in the first half, connecting on only one three-pointer in eight attempts. The Gaels weren't able to take advantage offensively, shooting just 27 percent in the first half. It didn't help that the Gaels were without their all-time leading 3-point scorer, Jontelle Smith, who remained sidelined with a knee injury.

The Hoosiers won 18 games in the Big Ten last year. Part of the reason for their current success can be attributed to their forward, Amber Jackson. The senior from Yokosuka, Japan, was able to dominate the Gaels in the paint, as she scored 15 of her 25 points in the first half.

The Gaels usually look to run on their opponents, but it was Indiana who controlled the pace of this game. The Hoosiers were able to score on a number of fast break opportunities.

Saint Mary's forward Maija Lahde led the Gaels in the first half. She managed six rebounds and two assists in the period.

The score got away from the Gaels in the second half, but there were plenty of bright spots for Saint Mary's as well. Freshman guard Katie Batlin showed flashes of the ball handling that made her such a valuable recruit coming out of Miramonte High.

"She is a joy to coach," said Head Coach Paul Thomas. "I couldn't be prouder to coach someone like Katie."

Sophomore guard Erika Ruiz made the most of her 18 minutes on the court. Ruiz went 3-4 from the field and finished with 10 points. Freshman Ashlee Smith played like a veteran, as she finished up with nine rebounds and seven points in 12 minutes. Tomlinson continues to put up impressive numbers. She was able to record 12 rebounds, 11 points, and 8 blocks, on her way in garnering all tournament honors. She was just two blocks shy of recording a triple double.

The Gaels look to build upon their runner-up finish at the Thanksgiving Classic, as they continue to play top-notch teams in preparation for league play.

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