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Diamon Simpson is Youth Role Model

By Robin Schoettler Fox



Participants in the 2nd Diamon Center Night, sitting in the choice court-level student section, wait for Saint Mary's to take the court against San Jose State.

Photo Robin Schoettler Fox

With Saint Mary's students on winter break, the court-level student section morphed into Diamon Center for the first night of the Gaels' Shamrock Tournament on December 27. It was jammed with Diamon Simpson fans, many from Simpson's hometown of Hayward who were at the Gaels' McKeon Pavilion for the first time, all participants in the second of three Diamon Center Nights scheduled this season. Each Diamon Center Night brings upwards of 300 Hayward youth and others to Moraga to see Simpson play, most having heard him speak at prior visits to their schools.

Conceived by former SMC baseball player Chris Major, Diamon Center Nights are co-sponsored by Saint Mary's College (SMC) and Hayward Youth Academy (HYA), a non-profit that offers youth programs, educational services and parenting support. Major is President and Chief Executive Officer of HYA.

Diamon Center Night is a chance, said Major, for the kids to see what Saint Mary's – the college, not just the McKeon Pavilion – is like, to consider it an option in their lives. The event includes a pre-game rally, the game, and a chance to meet Simpson post-game.

About seeking corporate and individual sponsors to cover ticket costs, Major said that Lafayette-resident Ben Mangels made the biggest impact by sponsoring all three Diamon Center Nights.

At Major's invitation, this 2nd Diamon Center Night had a Lamorinda slant – nearly 100 kids and parents from St. Perpetua in Lafayette participated, including Coach

Robert McKendall's 5th grade CYO team that scrimmaged with Major's St. Bede (Hayward) CYO team during half-time (see related photo story). The Lafayette attendees purchased tickets, but at discounted rates.

At the pre-game rally, Major summarized Simpson's story: Diamon wasn't a flashy player, didn't get much notoriety. He was middle-of-the-pack, but always a hard worker. And that had earned impressive college career stats:

"He's going to be number one in (SMC) history in rebounds, he'll be number one in jump shots, he'll be number two in fields, and he'll probably be number 3 or 4 in points scored. That's how great this young man is. But the most important thing about Diamon that I have really learned from him was that he's gotten better every single year that he endeavored to play the sport."

Then Major delivered the Diamon Center Night punch line: "For all you young people here, whether in sport, in the classroom, and in your work life, he sets a real model."

The third Diamon Center Night is Thursday, February 5.

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