

SPORTS

LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS NEWS

Saint Mary's Big Men Secure Shamrock Classic Championship

By Kevin D. Shallat



Senior Diamon Simpson shoots over San Jose defenders on the way to winning the first game of December's Shamrock Classic. (See related article) Simpson made Saint Mary's history in the January 2 game against CSU Bakersfield when he became the school's all-time leading rebounder with a defensive board at 7:21 following a missed 3-pointed by CSU Bakersfield's Bryan Emanuel. With that 917th rebound, Simpson surpassed Tom Meschery's school record 916 rebounds mark, which stood since the end of the 1960-61 season. Photo Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's men's basketball team locked up the Shamrock Classic basketball tournament by beating the San Jose State Spartans and Morgan State Bears in Saint Mary's annual tournament in Moraga.

The Gaels survived a slow start against San Jose State on Saturday, December 27, to put them in the championship game against Morgan State on Sunday. Saint Mary's beat the Spartans, 87-78. In Sunday's championship game the Gaels were able to get back to form from the opening tip-off, coasting to a 76-60 win over the Bears.

The story out of the Shamrock

Classic tournament this year is undoubtedly the Saint Mary's big men, most notably 6'7 forward, Diamon Simpson. The dominant senior has jumped out of the gates with authority this year.

With Simpson, it's not just about rebounds. He is averaging a double-double in his swan song season for the Gaels, as he continues to fill up the stat sheet. In Saturday's game Simpson finished with 20 points, 13 rebounds, five blocks, and four steals.

In Sunday's game he was three blocks shy of a triple-double. Simpson finished with 16 points, 10 rebounds, and seven blocks, while

gaming MVP honors for the tournament.

Former Cal coach and current coach of Morgan State, Todd Bozeman, stated after the game that Simpson has all the tools of a great player, and that if he developed a jump shot, he could play at the NBA level.

Thankfully for the Saint Mary's fans, the game against Morgan State never felt too close, despite a few lead changes in the first half. Ian O'Leary scored all seven of his points in the first half of the championship game to help the Gaels jump out to a 48-37 halftime lead.

Freshman Clint "Silky" Steindl continues to impress for the Gaels, as he routinely knocks down long range 3-pointers with ease. He is very active without the ball, and his quick feet are giving him the space he needs to knock down his

shot. Steindl hit both of his three-point attempts and finished with eight points in 17 minutes against Morgan State.

Omar Samhan and Simpson are passing the ball successfully down low to each other, which is opening up shots down low and out on the perimeter.

"He (Samhan) was smart enough today to see the weak side. His vision has gotten just ridiculous because he sees the floor now," said Simpson.

Samhan's 21 points was a team high against San Jose State, and his three assists and three blocks helped wrap up the 76-60 win over Morgan State to help retain the Shamrock Classic title.

Notable: The Golden State Warriors General Manager Chris Mullin attended both games of the tournament.



Patrick Mills goes for a lay-up, 2 of the 13 points he scored in the Gaels' final Shamrock Classic game, a 76-60 win over Morgan State that earned the Gaels the tournament title. Photo Tod Fierner

Patrick Mills (#13) Does it All



Photo Robin Schoettler Fox

College basketball star, Olympian, and... mopping instructor? During the San Jose State game on December 27, Patrick Mills takes a moment during a fourth-quarter time-out for one-on-one mopping instruction, teaching Saint Mary's ball boy Kyle Nichols, a Moraga 3rd grader, how to press down hard enough to get the job done

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-res-

ident 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.

Local Youth Play at SMC's McKeon Pavilion

By Robin Schoettler Fox



Photo Tod Fierner

Ryan Cardiff, a St. Perpetua (St. P's) 5th grade CYO basketball player, reaches around the St. Bede (Hayward) defenders John Mondina (#4) and Hunter Schied (#9) to pass the ball in a goodwill rematch of last year's Diocese of Oakland 4th grade championship game. The scrimmage, played in a packed McKeon Pavilion during SMC's first Shamrock Classic game (December 27), was one of several activities coordinated by Diamon Center Nights youth event organizer and St. Bede coach, Chris Major. The St. Bede players are wearing Major's Hayward Youth Academy jerseys. St. P's, coached by Robert McKendall, won the original championship game by a single shot. The scrimmage? That was just for fun.

Half-time youth team scrimmages are popular entertainment at McKeon Pavilion, but they're more often available during women's basketball games.

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