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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 garnering 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
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