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## Saint Mary's exits Big Dance following 2nd-round loss to Arizona Wildcats

By Karl Buscheck



Jock Landale Photo Tod Fierner

Since the fall of 2013, the Saint Mary's Gaels have made a tradition of meeting the Arizona Wildcats for an annual preseason scrimmage.

The men's basketball program squared off with the Pac-12 kingpins for three falls in a row before a scheduling conflict forced the Cats to scratch this season's exhibition. Instead, the teams had to wait until the second round of the NCAA tournament, when Arizona topped Saint Mary's, 69-60, on March 18 at Vivint Smart Home Arena in Salt Lake City.

"These guys really knew how Saint Mary's was," Arizona head coach Sean Miller told The Associated Press. "In a small way, (the scrimmages) really helped us tonight."

The Saint Mary's loss, which pushed Arizona into the regional semifinals of the Big Dance, denied the Gaels their first trip to the Sweet 16 since 2010 when future NBA champ Matthew Dellavedova was just a freshman and still early on in the process of re-writing the school's record book.

Ending the year with 29-5 record (16-2 West Coast Conference play), the Gaels actually commanded a 30-29 lead at the break and clung to a two-point advantage - 46-44 - nine minutes into the second half.

"I look at this as one of the great wins we've had in the tournament because of the team that we beat," Miller said, per The AP.

Ultimately, Saint Mary's characteristically lights-out long-range shooting - the team had shot 40 percent from distance entering the contest - deserted the squad. While it was Arizona who was ice cold in the first half (1-for-7 on 3-pointers), Saint Mary's managed to hit just five of its 21 triples (24 percent) on the night.

6-foot-11 junior center Jock Landale produced his second double-double in as many tournament games, totaling 19 points and 11 rebounds. Junior forward Calvin Hermanson was second on the team with 14 points - even as he connected on just two of his nine shots from beyond the arc.

The Gaels advanced to their second-round meeting with their erstwhile scrimmage partner after dispatching the No. 10 seed Virginia Commonwealth, 85-77, on March 16 at Vivint Smart Home Arena.

In the opening-round win, Landale, who paced Saint Mary's in scoring and rebounds throughout the season, went for a team-high 18 points and 13 boards.

On a night when the Gaels shot 64 percent from the field in the opening half, including a 23-6 burst, Hermanson and senior guard Joe Rahon both chipped in 16 points.

After the frenetic start, VCU rallied late, cutting the deficit to six points, 83-77, with 31 seconds left on the clock before the Gaels secured the win.

"They're hard to put away," head coach Randy Bennett told The AP. "We're happy to get this one done."

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