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Gonzaga handles Saint Mary's easily, 78-65

By Jon Kingdon



Cullen Neal

The 11th-ranked Saint Mary's basketball team seemed to have everything pointed in their favor Feb. 10 as they faced off against their biggest rival. They defeated Gonzaga on their home court earlier in the season, they had won 19 straight games, and they were playing Gonzaga in front of a sold-out, raucous home crowd and a national television audience.

Then the game began. Gonzaga hit their first three shots, all three pointers, and they jumped out to a 9-0 lead, Gonzaga never trailed and they posted a final score of 78-65 in a game that was not that close. Down 24-8 midway through the first half, Saint Mary's went on a 13-4 run to close the deficit to 7 with 5 minutes left in the first half, bringing the crowd back into the game. Gonzaga, which has now won 22 consecutive conference road games, maintained their composure every time Saint Mary's made a run, leading at the half 42-30. In the second half, Gonzaga maxed out their lead to 72-50, removing any doubt as to the final result. Utilizing a balanced attack, Gonzaga had four players scoring in double figures, led by Rui Hachimura with 21 points and Zach Norvell's 17 points.

In their first game at Gonzaga, 6-foot-11-inch Jock Landale led the Gaels to a 74-71 victory, scoring 26 points on 12 of 15 shooting. Gonzaga was not going to

allow that to happen again. Double-teaming Landale every time the ball was thrown into the pivot, the Bulldogs limited him to four shots, hitting two, and he finished with just four points, despite coming into the game averaging 22.7 points per game. Under these conditions, Landale was forced to constantly pass the ball out to his teammates. "As soon as it touched my hands, I had two guys on top of me," Landale said. "This team's not about me. I don't have to score every possession."

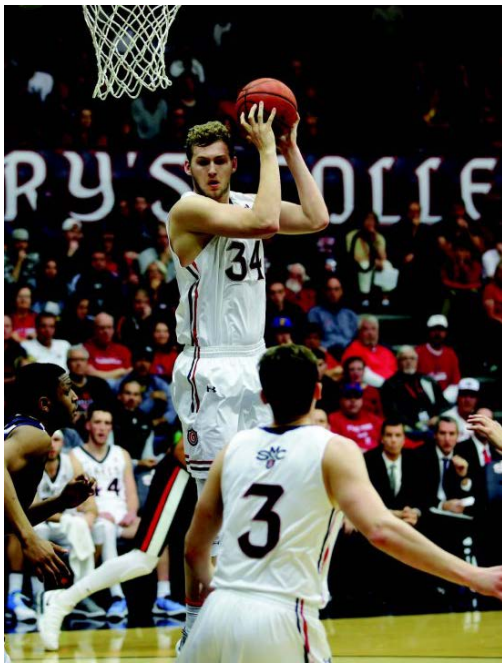
Gonzaga head coach Mark Few explained his strategy: "We wanted to give a different look with the double teams and where they were coming from. The doubles are actually the easy part of it. It's rotating out of it that's difficult, especially when they put four other guys on the floor who can shoot threes." Or not.

Saint Mary's head coach Randy Bennett did not put the blame on Landale. "I thought Jock competed. He did his job. With Jock double teamed, he had to pass the ball. He took what they gave him. We just did not hit our threes. Other guys have to make plays."

Or any other shots for that matter. Saint Mary's came into the game connecting on 52.8 percent of their field goals and 42.1 percent of their three pointers. Against Gonzaga, the Gaels connected on only 41 percent of their field goals, sinking only five of their 20 three point attempts. The starting team was a combined 1 for 12 from the three-point range. Coming off the bench, Cullen Neal did provide some offense, making three 3-pointers and scoring 16 points.

If there was a bright spot for the Gaels in addition to Neal, it was Jordan Ford who drove aggressively to the basket and scored 17 points, even though he missed all five of his 3-point attempts, shooting 5 for 15 overall. Ford did not soft-soap his comments: "They hit us in the mouth. We had a tough time handling the double team and they took us off our threes."

Bennett summed it up succinctly: "They played very well. We did not have our A-game. We did not have enough guys who played well."



Jock Landale (34) Photos Tod Fierner

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