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Saint Mary's Falls Short Against Gonzaga

By Mikaela Cowles



Diamon Simpson takes it up, up, up... and in, at the Gonzaga game Photo Doug Kohen

The Saint Mary's men's basketball team lost a heart breaker on Thursday, February 13, at home to the No. 19 ranked Gonzaga, 72-70. The 3,500 capacity crowd of McKeon Pavilion was energized adding to the difficult venue of what Gonzaga's head coach Mark Few calls, "a little cracker box gym."

With 14 lead changes, 11 ties and 38 fouls, the game came down to the final seconds as Carlin Hughes scored 8 points to bring the Gaels within one, 71-70. Despite suffering a highly controversial call of Delay of Game by the refs, Saint Mary's head coach Randy Bennett didn't look for any excuses as they suffered their first home loss of the season.

"We had our chances," said Bennett. "Until we can look at ourselves and say we can take care of the ball, that's what's going to happen."

With the recent loss of leader Patrick Mills due to injury, the Gaels have seen lineup changes in the last four of their games. Facing the Bulldogs, Bennett looked to gain a defensive advantage with three new faces in the starting five. Mickey McConnell, Wayne Hunter and Lucas Walker combined with seasoned starters Diamon Simpson and Omar Samhan to create a fast paced, highly physical game.

Steven Gray opened the scoring for Gonzaga, hitting a three pointer within the first minute of the game. Saint Mary's Wayne Hunter countered the Bulldogs attack with a three of his own and continued the game shooting 4-7 from behind the arc. Hunter, known as one of the best defensive players in the WCC, showed how formidable he is. 13 minutes into the first half he stopped the Bulldogs guard Jeremy Pargo in a one on one fast break. Hunter finished the game with 18 points.

Leading scorers Samhan and Simpson were met with strong resistance in the post during the first half, as the Bulldogs forced both players to shoot off the block and off balance. Saint Mary's stayed in the game by shooting an impressive 6-10 from three-point range, sending the Gaels and the Bulldogs to locker at halftime, tied 36-36.

Four minutes into the second half, Simpson broke the 1,000 rebound mark, making the 15th player to accomplish this in the WCC history. Simpson finished the game with 12 points and 15 rebounds.

Down to the wire Gonzaga showed their poise, fouling Wayne Hunter with 8 seconds left at half court, which due to Gonzaga's low foul count forced Saint Mary's to take the ball out of bounds at half court and Hunter to turn the ball over on his inbounds pass. As the Gaels fouled to stop the clock, Pargo hit his first of a one and one, making the score 72-70 for the Bulldog win.

The Gaels postseason dreams look rocky as they search late in the year for a new presence at point guard. Bennett said when they find that, "I think we'll start being a pretty good team again."



Extreme Red Zone Photo Doug Kohen

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