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## Amidst Pomp and Pageantry, Gaels Make a Run At Goliath

By Kevin D. Shallat



Cal dominating the line out Photo Robin Schoettler Fox

The fans of Saint Mary's and Cal were treated to something special in Moraga on Saturday, March 21, as the third ranked Gaels hosted the number one ranked Cal Bears rugby squad. Both teams came into this game undefeated, with the Bears boasting a 25-0 record, and the Gaels carrying a 17-0-1 record.

After not allowing one try to Cal in the first half, the Gaels eventually succumbed to the Bears' offensive strength and lost the match, 20-5. The win crowned Cal the top team in the Northern California Conference, giving the Bears the top seed from the Pacific Coast in the national playoffs.

Saturday's game in Moraga had a mystical and Gaelic feel to it, as the fans packed the sidelines beneath the mist surrounding the rolling East Bay hills. Saint Mary's took the field in fine fashion as a bagpiper led the Gaels out onto the field. Yet even the bagpiper was not to be outdone, as two Navy F-18 jet airplanes flew directly over Pat Vincent Field following the conclusion of the national anthem.

For the local rugby community, the SMC-Cal game was a homecoming of sorts. Both SMC and Cal recruit Lamorinda Rugby (Lamo) graduating players. The Gaels currently have five Lamo alumni on their roster, while Cal has ten. The 2009 Lamo team was on hand to watch their program's alumni battle at the elite collegiate level. One of those alumni included standout starter and SMC vice-captain Andrew Cook, a sophomore flanker for the Gaels. Local sports fans need only glance at the SMC or Cal roster to recognize graduates from each of the Lamorinda high schools, including Drew and Grant Hyjer (Miramonte), Mike Furlong (Acalanes), Connor Ring (Acalanes) and Nick Mascheroni (Campolindo).

The Gael defense was outstanding in the first period. They were able to keep the Bears out of the in-goal area for the entire first half, something only a few teams have done all season against Cal. However, the Bears still managed to get six points on two penalties to take a 6-0 lead at halftime.

The Gaels picked it up offensively in the second period, dominating the time of possession during the first part of the second half. Perhaps the most exciting play

of the day came when Tim Maupin intercepted a pass and quickly passed it off to Austen Mount, who then dished it off to Blake McGahan for the lone Saint Mary's try. The Gaels were able to cut the score to 5-6, but missed the conversion.

Perhaps no Gael was more dominant than Brendan O'Meara. The Saint Mary's center kept the Gaels in this match with a number of breakaway runs.

Unfortunately for the Gaels, they were unable to turn those runs into scores. The Bears scored their first try of the game with just under 18 minutes to play. Then, with 36 seconds left in regulation, the Bears added their final try of the game to seal a 20-5 victory over the Gaels.

"If we're lucky enough, we put in the work, we'll get to fight against them again in the final four at Stanford," said O'Meara.

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