

Published December 16th, 2015

Saint Mary's, Cal Rekindle Decades-Old Rivalry in Thrilling Fashion

By Dean Boerner



Joe Rahon's (25) 16 points led all scorers Saturday Photo Tod Fierner

"We changed a couple things offensively," Bennett said. "We definitely got better shots in the second half."

By the eight-minute mark in the second half, the Gaels had outscored the Golden Bears 24-9, taking a 50-46 lead, quieting those in the Haas Pavilion crowd not wearing red.

Neither team could separate in the game's final minutes. A Calvin Hermanson 3-pointer gave Saint Mary's a 55-52 lead, which was promptly countervailed by a timely 3-point jumper by Jabari Bird with 3:30 left on the clock.

The last bucket for Saint Mary's came on a layup from Joe Rahon with 1:47 to play, putting Saint Mary's up 59-58. While the Gaels had several opportunities to bolster their lead thanks to the offensive rebounding of Pineau, a block by Cal forward Ivan Rabb secured possession for the Golden Bears and allowed Cal head coach Cuonzo Martin to draw a play up for Bird in a timeout.

With less than 20 seconds left, Cal down 59-58, Bird nailed his third 3-pointer of the afternoon, giving the Golden Bears a lead they wouldn't relinquish. Saint Mary's had a chance to extend the game into overtime, but a missed free throw by game-high scorer Rahon sealed the Gaels' fate.

"It was the first real close game we've played as a group this year," said Rahon. "We made a lot of mistakes down the stretch."

Both players and coaches alike expressed satisfaction at the thought of making Bay Area contests like this one more commonplace. The game was no doubt a reminder for Bay Area basketball fans of what they've been missing

"This is what should be going on," said Bennett after the game. "It would be good to get some rivalries going in the Bay Area." Earlier this season, Bennett's squad had an impressive 78-61 victory against Stanford in front of a packed house at McKeon Pavilion.

Cuonzo Martin showered praise on the oft-overlooked Saint Mary's program. "This is probably the best team we've played on both ends of the floor," declared Martin. "They play hard. They play together. Great game for the Bay Area."

The Saint Mary's men's team isn't the only one embroiling itself in more Bay Area competition.

The women's team upset No. 18 Cal on path to a Cal Tournament championship earlier this month. With Cal up one and only seconds left, Saint Mary's freshman Sydney Raggio hit a clutch jumper to give Saint Mary's a dramatic road victory.

The theatrics of Saturday afternoon's matchup is another episode in what might be a revived sense of competition in Bay Area college basketball. "You can see the fan support (Saint Mary's) had tonight and both teams really had a bunch of fans rooting for them," said Rabb, a Cal freshman. "We gave them a thriller."

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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