

## Simpson's double-double leads Saint Mary's past San Diego State

Article from: [Oakland Tribune](#) Article date: [December 13, 2008](#) Author: [Justin Lafferty](#)

ANAHEIM -- With less than two minutes left on Saturday, the Saint Mary's College men's basketball team knew who needed to take the shot.

The Gaels' opponent, San Diego State, shared the same knowledge.

Dodging a constant double-team, sophomore guard Patrick Mills stepped in front of the 3-point arc that had given him fits all day and nailed a shot to give the Gaels the game's final lead.

After Mills' basket put his team up by one, Saint Mary's was able to hold on for a 67-64 win in the 15th annual John R. Wooden Classic at the Honda Center.

"He's so confident and relaxed out there," sophomore guard Mickey McConnell said of Mills. "He's good when he gets the ball in his hands. He lives for games like this where he can come out, play well and play against a great team."

Mills finished with 15 points but was 1-for-8 from the perimeter. Senior forward Diamon Simpson led the Gaels on both sides of the ball, with 20 points and 15 rebounds.

"Our guys have been in a lot of big games and close games," said coach Randy Bennett, whose Saint Mary's team is now on a four-game win streak. "I wasn't worried. We have a number of guys that can hit a big shot."

The Gaels (7-1) built on that one-point lead with baskets from Simpson and junior center Omar Samhan, but the team knew that the game was far from over.

With 11 seconds left, Aztec forward Tim Shelton made a layup to cut the lead to three. Samhan fouled Shelton, who missed the free throw, starting a frenzy under the hoop. The basketball looked more like a lotto ball, bouncing off players' hands as they fought for control. Numerous SDSU put-back attempts missed, giving Saint Mary's the victory as the buzzer rang.

"They were really talented on the inside, real aggressive and real strong," Simpson said.

The game saw 16 lead changes, many of which came in the game's final minutes. But in the first half, it looked like a calm, collected Gael team would walk away with a win.

After the first few minutes were close, Saint Mary's went on a 14-2 run late in the first half for a 34-22 lead, the Gaels' largest of the day. The Aztecs (7-3) managed a bit of a comeback, going into halftime with a four-point deficit.

The Gaels, who just finished finals week, enjoyed the win after an eight-day absence from game action.

"In a game like this, I think that was real important, that week we had off," junior guard Wayne Hunter said. "We were able to work hard and then take a couple days off and rest for a bit."

The game was reminiscent of last year's Wooden Classic matchup, when Saint Mary's scraped out a 69-64 victory over SDSU.

"Coming down here is a great event for our guys," Bennett said. "We're thankful for the chance to do that. The game was exactly what we thought it would (be) -- a tough game. This is one of the two best teams we've played thus far."