

Boys Varsity Squash Christens New Competition Courts with 5-4 Win Over Gilman School

Will Robinson, Dec 11 2011

This Friday, the boys' squash team christened the St. Andrew's Squash complex's newest competition courts with a 5-4 win over Gilman School of Baltimore. The win marked one of the most impressive victories in the history of St. Andrew's boys' squash.

Early on, anticipation was palpable as the Saints warmed up to energizing music and fans began to take their places on the tiered seating block between the quartet of new courts in the old gym. The 4:15 start time came and went with no sign of ebbing crowds, and, when Gilman finally arrived thirty minutes late (victims of gridlocked Beltway traffic), they found a nearly packed house, ready to break in the new facility with the spirit of St. Andrew's School.

The even numbers on the ladder played first, and the match roared off to a thrilling start. In an immediate reversal of last year's encounter, when the Saints didn't win a single game, this year they took advantage of Gilman's bus legs, taking three out of four first games in emphatic fashion. Gilman would not go away, however, and all four matches would prove enthralling seesaw battles that went the distance. At #2, after taking the first game, Pep Ruckpanich '13 went down two games to one and appeared to be struggling physically, as he did last year deep in matches, while Z Roach '13 at #4, in a mirror image of his first match last season against Blair, dropped games three and four after taking the first two handily, and seemed on the brink of a meltdown. Both players however showed concentration, emotional resilience, and a great set of lungs in gutting out exciting wins in their matches' final stanzas. At #6, Nick Desrosier '13 lost his first game before seizing the next two and appeared in control, only to let his opponent back in with a tame loss in the fourth. He gathered himself, however, and dominated the fifth, taking it 11-2. The only five game loss the Saints suffered belonged to Jack Marshall '13 at #8, who nevertheless showed great effort and heart in a thrilling back-and-forth battle. Down four match balls at 6-10 in the fifth, he fought his way back to 9-10, only to see a low cross-court from his opponent fall a fraction wide of his outstretched racquet. In spite of the loss, the Saints' 3-1 performance in five-game matches against Gilman demonstrates not only improved fitness but also extraordinary heart, determination, and a refusal to give up fighting.

The odd matches were less thrilling though no less critical to the team victory. In recent series history against Gilman, the Saints had gone up 4-0 on the even matches only to drop all five odds and succumb in a 5-4 loss. Not this time, however: the experience and class of seniors Will Maas at #9 and David Ashpole at #7 saw to that, clinching the team win with straight-game victories; the individual games were tight, but the St. Andrew's players controlled play and the outcomes were not in doubt. The rest of the matches were competitive but saw Gilman ascendant, as Rob Rasmussen '12 dropped three tight games at #5, and #3 Riley McDonough '13 and #1 Michael Ding '12 both lost in four against quality opponents. Freshman Peter Knutson however concluded proceedings on a high note, winning his exhibition match in four tight games.

All in all, Friday was a banner day for St. Andrew's Squash and an inspiring season opener, giving us good reason to hope that the Saints will continue to go from strength to strength with the benefit of their beautiful new facility, increased court time and resources, and the brilliant leadership of Captains Michael Ding '12 and Pep Ruckpanich '13, not to mention the world class coaching of Mark Allen. Go Saints!

- Chris Childers, Head Coach