

No. 17 St. Joseph's beats No. 10 Gonzaga in Marquee MSG Match-Up

All-America Nelson scores 20 as Hawk Hill takes over the Garden

[box score](#)

NEW YORK (AP) -- Jameer Nelson lived up to the billing.

Jameer Nelson handled all the hype with 20 points for Saint Joseph's.

The second-leading vote-getter on the AP's preseason All-America team had 20 points, eight rebounds, 10 assists and a ton of oohs and aahs in leading No. 17 Saint Joseph's to a 73-66 victory over No. 10 Gonzaga in the Coaches vs. Cancer Classic on Friday night.

The senior guard struggled with his shot in the first half but more than made up for it in the second, seeming to come up with every big play the Hawks needed in the teams' season opener.

"People roll their eyes when I self-promote our kids, but he's the best in America because he leads and he believes the reason you play basketball is to make your team win," Saint Joseph's coach Phil Martelli said.

Nelson's best sequence came when he drew a charge at midcourt, then took the inbounds pass and made a drive through traffic that left the crowd of 10,328 at Madison Square Garden standing and cheering.

"It was great, probably the best game of this season so far," Nelson said, adding comedian to his other talents.

More than 4,000 Saint Joseph's fans bought tickets and they turned the building in New York into Philadelphia's Hawk Hill for a night. The university with the enrollment of 3,800 was the big school for the night.

"That shows the passion our people have for Saint Joe's," Martelli said. "You have to realize there were more people here tonight than will be at any home game we'll have this year."

The Saint Joseph's Fieldhouse has a capacity of 3,200.

"There was nobody left in Chester tonight," Nelson said, referring to his hometown.

This was the third straight year these schools met. Although this one wasn't as close as the last two that were decided by a total of four points with the Saint Joseph's win going overtime, it did get nervous for the Hawks.

They went five minutes without scoring and the Bulldogs closed an 11-point deficit to 66-61. But Pat Carroll banked in a 3-pointer from just in front of the Saint Joseph's bench with 3:02 to play

and the outcome was never really in doubt.

"I called `Bank,'" Martelli said. "Shoot it enough and you're going to get lucky."

Delonte West added 16 points for the Hawks, while Carroll and Tyrone Barley each had 12.

Cory Violette had 13 points and 15 rebounds for Gonzaga. Senior guard Blake Stepp, the West Coast Conference player of the year last season, struggled through a 2-for-12 shooting night and had eight points.

"We didn't knock down as many shots as we would have liked to but we had a lack of production and mobility to bring the ball into the post," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said.

Nelson finished 6-for-20 from the field but that didn't bother the fans who chanted "You can't guard him" at any of the Gonzaga defenders that had the assignment.

"There aren't many guards in the country who drive left and throw it all the way back out to the right corner and find a shooter," Few said of Nelson, who finished second to Connecticut's Emeka Okafor in the preseason balloting. "That's why he's so special and he's a handful. I don't think there's anyone in the country that can handle him one-on-one."

Gonzaga outrebounded the Hawks 47-32, but Saint Joseph's doubled the Bulldogs' output from 3-point range with 12.

"We have had three great games with them and after each one we look each other in the eye and say `Well done,'" Martelli said. "The game has had a rough six months but games like these show college basketball is on the way back."