

SMC Women's Water Polo Hosts Local Tournament

By Jennifer Wake



The Gaels women's water polo team poses by the Saint Mary's pool

Photo Jennifer Wake

Just two games into the women's water polo season that began Feb. 13, the Saint Mary's women's water polo team will host its first local Collegiate Water Polo tournament this weekend, Feb. 23-24, at the Campolindo Soda Aquatic Center.

The Gaels will face teams from Chico State, UC Davis ("A" and "B" teams), and UC Berkeley at the CWPA Sierra Pacific Division Qualifying Tournament #1.

"The tournament at Campo is important because it

will make people aware that Saint Mary's water polo is a force to be reckoned with," said club president Alyssa Schroeder.

Since the pool at Saint Mary's has limitations, many of the team's games are played out of the area. "We play most of our games away, and we're excited to have a fan base and an opportunity to host a tournament and get our name out there," said Gracie Bone, the club's vice president.

"We have one of the best goalies in the country in Malia

Chung," Head Coach Stephen Imperiale-Hagerman said. "Blair Smith and Rene Fleming anchor our defense at the 2m position. Gracie Bone, Amanda Bjerke, and Alyssa Schroeder will all play major roles on offense."

Leading freshmen include Clair Pelpel and Barbara Perking – two of the fastest players in the Sierra Pacific Division, said Imperiale-Hagerman. "It will take some time to get used to the college game, but they have the speed and determination necessary to

make an immediate impact."

Gracie Bone agrees that one of the team's assets is its speed. "Our biggest strength is that we are really fast," said Bone, who has been on the team for the past three years. "We are able to move really quickly and our team is really eager to play."

Last year, the Gaels finished fifth in their division. It was the first year competing in the Collegiate Water Polo Association.

"Since then, we have added several key players and have only improved," Imperiale-Hagerman said. "The greatest strength is the team's cohesion. They enjoy each other's company in and out of the pool, and newer players are not afraid to make mistakes, but rather learn through doing."

"Stephen has helped our team care more about the game and about each other," Schroeder said. "Our biggest strength is the number of players, the experience level of the team, and our level of friendship."

"We've gotten more girls and won more games," Bone said. "It's so much fun to see so many girls in the pool. Stephen was such a blessing. It's been great to have someone so knowledgeable to coach us. We have a great coach."