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Gaels Fall to New Mexico State in NCAA Tourney

By Mikaela Cowles

The Saint Mary's Women's volleyball team lost in the first round of the NCAA Division I conference tournament to New Mexico State. In a four set match the Gaels won the first 25-22, but gave up the last three, 16-25, 21-25 and 15-25.

Megan York earned the first point of the match for either team with a kill, but New Mexico responded, to tie the set. Though the Gaels took a three-point lead, they allowed the Aggies back in the game with several unforced errors. As New Mexico tied the score and then gained the advantage the two teams battled back and forth for the lead. The set continued and Saint Mary's gained confidence, forcing 10 New Mexico errors. The Gaels finished the first set with three blocks and 13 digs to the Aggies' zero blocks and 11 digs.

The second set was a brand new look at both teams as the Aggies came out strong and gained the early lead, 8-3. New Mexico began hitting their zones, targeting 8 with great accuracy, completing 14 kills in 26 swings with only one error. The Aggies' high hitting percentage combined with multiple unforced errors by the Gaels let the set end quickly.

New Mexico's senior middle hitter Amber Simpson later said, "The other team let up during the third game and we really took advantage of it."

The proof? The Aggies opened the third set with an 8-1 lead. York ended New Mexico's run with a kill. The Gaels fought back in the third going on a 9-4 run, but lost their momentum at the end as New Mexico tied the score and went on a 6-2 run to win the set.

The Gaels opened the fourth set 8-7, a lead they never saw again. New Mexico took the fourth set easily.

Saint Mary's finished the season 20-8.

Head coach Rob Browning said: "We are disappointed, of course. We always expect to win. Our girls played hard, but they are a young team. They might not always do everything right in terms of execution but our girls always play hard every night."

Saint Mary's graduates five seniors. They will return nine players, however, not the least of which are star outside hitter Megan York and libero Alita Fisher.

The Gaels are disappointed with the NCAA tournament results, but they show the makings of a great and experienced team for next year.

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