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New Recruits, Senior to Lead Gaels Saint Mary's Men's Basketball Preview

Kevin D. Shallat



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Hunter, a shooting guard/small forward, should see significant playing time this year and is arguably the best defender on the team. As a defensive minded coach, Bennett will look for as much veteran leadership on defense as he can get in order to help lead some of the younger players.

Bennett continues to dominate the NCAA recruiting of Australians. Almost all of his recruits come from the Australian Institute of Sport, which is Australia's premiere sports training institute, headquartered in the capital of Canberra. The newest crop of Australian recruits is led by freshman shooting guard Mathew Dellavedova.

Dellavedova, or "Delly," as he is known, comes in as the most heralded prospect for the Gaels. Dellavedova is best known for his hard-nose style of play and relentless defense. He was a part of his country's national basketball team (The Boomers), which played in China among other places this summer. He will see plenty of minutes, playing at both the guard spots, and will be a major factor on this team.

Jorden Page is the other freshman Australian guard who will see action in a backup role. Page helped Queensland win the Under 20 National Championship, and was named the tournament's MVP after averaging 21 points a game. However, it is going to be exceptionally hard to find minutes for all of the guards this year, as this is a very guard-heavy team.

Mitchell Young, forward, rounds out the freshman Australian class for the Gaels. Young still needs to polish his offensive game, but for now Bennett will be asking him to concentrate on defense, rebounding, and passing. Bennett has yet to decide if he will start but Young has impressed enough in the pre-season to the extent that he should see significant playing time, regardless of his "starter" status.

Rounding out the freshman class are redshirt freshman guard, Trey Anderson, forward Beau Levesque, and combo guard, Tim Harris. Both Anderson and Harris are noted for their shooting abilities. Levesque is the one Lamorinda native on the team, hailing from Lafayette. Levesque played high school basketball at De La Salle High School in Concord.

Clint Steindl is the incumbent sophomore Australian small forward. Bennett said, "Steindl is not a finished product, but he has improved a lot as a player, and he is more confident."

Depending upon the source, the Gaels are picked to finish third or fourth in the WCC. After Gonzaga, most sources are picking Portland to finish second. Finally, some have Saint Mary's occupying the third spot, and some have Santa Clara at the third spot. Saint Mary's is young and inexperienced, but they have some hungry seniors, some potential unknown surprises, and a few foreign gems that may be flying under the radar.

The Gaels open up their season with an 8:30 p.m. home game against New Mexico State on November 13, 2009.

The Saint Mary's men's basketball team lost two dominant players from last year's team. Losing Patty Mills and Diamon Simpson will no doubt hurt, but in the words of senior center, Omar Samhan, the Gaels are "remodeling, not rebuilding." With a few redshirt freshmen and an influx of new Australian recruits, the Gaels look to be good, but how good has yet to be determined. In all, the Gaels lost four starters and seven players from last year's team that went 28-7. Head Coach Randy Bennett said of the 2009-2010 squad, "This group might be our most coachable team we've had."

The Gaels will be led by one big senior center in Omar Samhan, followed by a supporting cast of young players. The team and top scoring threat will be centered around Samhan. His newfound quickness and rumors of an outside shot may have WCC teams in a quandary as to how to guard him. Samhan averaged close to a double-double last year.

Samhan can expect the double team this season. This should open the door for either senior forward/center, Ben Allen, or redshirt sophomore power forward Tim Williams. Allen was able to put up big numbers in the team's overseas trip to Australia last summer. Junior Mickey McConnell will most likely be starting at the point guard spot this year, as he has played back-up to Mills the last two seasons. He is a solid ball handler who can create his own shot and knock down the three-pointer with ease. However, McConnell has been known to be a little too unselfish at times. Bennett is looking for McConnell to shoot a little more this year, in order to take some of the scoring pressure off Samhan and redshirt senior Wayne Hunter.



#50 Omar Samhan Photo Tod Fierner

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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