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## SMC Women Fall in WCC Tournament but Qualify for NIT

By Caitlin Graveson



Jasmine Smith (32) hit a lay-up late in the game to bring the Gaels within two points 58-56. The Waves held on to win 62-56. Photo Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's women's basketball finished the regular season 12-2, the second best record in the West Coast Conference (WCC) and the school's best record since 1989-1990. Their record secured them a number two seed and a two-round bye in the WCC tournament. New changes to the National Invitation Tournament qualification requirements also guarantees Saint Mary's post season play if they do not qualify for the NCAA tournament.

The Gaels traveled to Las Vegas on Sunday, March 6th for the WCC tournament where they faced #3 Pepperdine University. Just two weeks prior to the playoff match-up, Saint Mary's defeated the Waves 52-38 in Malibu. Unfortunately, Lady Luck was on Pepperdine's side in Sin City and the Gael's fell 62-56.

"Last year we planned to not be in this position again. We played hard...but it wasn't good enough and unfortunately, we can't take that back for the older girls," said junior forward Louella Tomlinson, who recorded a double-double for the Gaels with 18 points and 14 rebounds. Tomlinson, the WCC Defensive Player of the Year, also notched six blocks.

The Gaels came out strong against the Waves in the first half, building a 26-18 lead with five minutes to go in the half. Pepperdine increased their defensive pressure, forcing 11 turnovers from the Gaels in the final 11:30 to play. With 1:25 to go in the half the Waves tied it at 26 all, and it remained so heading into the locker room.

To open the second half Saint Mary's reclaimed a nine point lead. However, the Waves again upped the defensive pressure and incited a run which gave them the lead. With about a minute to play, redshirt sophomore Jasmine Smith hit a lay-up to cut the lead to two, 58-56. The Gaels were forced into the fouling game and could not overcome the deficit.



Louella Tomlinson (2) notched a double-double in the loss. Photo Tod Fierner

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