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Gaels' Strong Mental Game Leads to WCC Championship

By Mikaela Cowles



Alex Poorta Photo Tod Fierner

Poorta quickly joined fellow teammates at the fence to cheer on No. 4 Soper and No. 5 freshman Alisa Spitzer. Losing the first set, Soper dug in, and battled for the next two sets, winning, 5-7, 6-4, 7-5.

Soper's win tied the game 3-3 and the crowd closed in around Spitzer and Cal Poly's Alexa Lee. Between taunts and cheers and hard hit balls, Lee tried everything she could think of to crawl back in the game. However, Spitzer prevailed, 7-5, 2-6, 7-6. Spitzer's third straight win gave the Gaels the 4-3 victory over the Mustangs.

Earlier in the season, the Gaels struggled in close matches, buckling under mental pressure. Head coach Lisa Alipaz said, "We've been focusing as a team on being in it until the end. We did a lot of focus drills, so that we could control our thoughts." With their mental game on lock-down, the Gaels peaked just in time for the West Coast Conference Championships.

On Sunday, April 25, the Gaels secured the school's first WCC Championship, beating No. 2 seed Pepperdine 4-1. They earned an automatic bid into the NCAA tournament. The games will begin at the University of Georgia in Athens on Thursday, May 20.

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The Saint Mary's women's tennis team continued its winning streak with a 4-3 victory over No. 58 Cal Poly on Friday, April 16. Returning home from five road wins, the Gaels increased their ranking to No. 39, their highest this season, and improved to a 14-6 record.

The match-ups were tough all day, as Saint Mary's slipped behind early in doubles play. Seniors Alita Fisher and Nienke Strijbis dropped their doubles match in two quick sets, but sophomore Anna Chikhikvishvili and freshman Catherine Isip tied things up for the Gaels. In a long battle, junior Clair Soper and senior Alex Poorta were unable to hold onto the final doubles match, and Cal Poly took the lead 1-0.

Things looked bleak for the Gaels as the Mustangs stormed ahead with two early victories in singles play. Dropping games on both court six and two, the tension at Korth Tennis Complex rose as Cal Poly extended its lead 3-0. Saint Mary's didn't lie down, and fought back with four straight wins.

At the No. 3 spot, Chikhikvishvili put the Gaels on the board with a 6-4, 3-6, 6-2, victory. Poorta followed her in the No. 1 position with a three-set victory, 5-7, 6-4, 6-3. Finishing her third straight win,