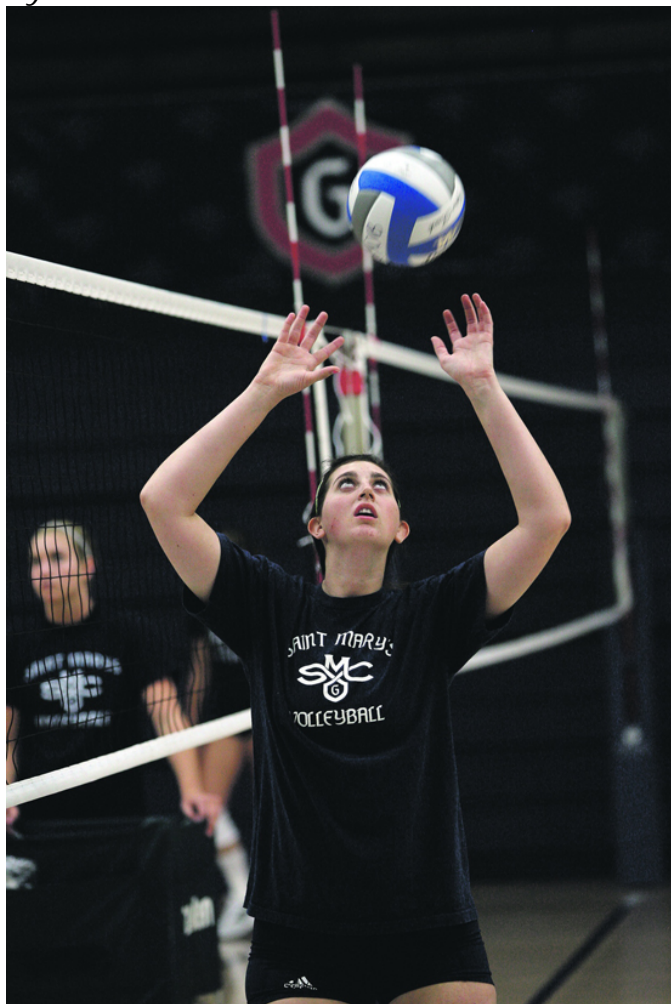


Published September 1st, 2010

## Saint Mary's Volleyball Goes 2-1 on Opening Weekend

By Caitlin Graveson



Reserve sophomore setter Missy White recorded 21 assists in the win over Sacred Heart. Photos Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's women's volleyball had a record-breaking season last year and the team looks to repeat their success. Last year, the Gaels won the West Coast Conference title for the first time in program history and boasted a 23-5 record, which ties for the school's second best all-time record. The Gaels are off to a great start as they have already received national attention at the beginning of the 2010-2011 campaign. They were ranked #25 in the nation in the American Volleyball Coaches Association (AVCA) pre-season poll.

Although Saint Mary's is expected to do well, they have a long road ahead of them. In pre-season play the Gaels will host #4 Stanford and #11 University of California at McKeon Pavilion on September 17-18. This will be the first time the Gaels have ever gained home court advantage over these Pac-10 rivals. The Gaels also face UCLA and #5 Hawaii.

Conference play will also be challenging. The University of San Diego took #22 in the AVCA pre-season poll and is also favored to win the WCC. Pepperdine and Santa Clara also received votes in the AVCA pre-season poll, although neither broke the top 25.

The Gaels graduated three starters and another key player transferred, however, the team brought in four freshman players who have high potential to make an immediate impact. Head coach Rob Browning was pleased with their play this past weekend, "The two freshmen in particular, Sarah Reams and Natalie Loos, improved significantly from the first match to the third match." Returning players include senior outside hitter Megan York, senior middle blocker Shannon Lowell and senior setter Kapua Kamana'o. Lowell made First-Team All-WCC, and York and Kamana'o each received an Honorable Mention.

The Gaels opened their season on the road at the Long Beach State Baden Classic this past weekend. Saint Mary's dominated the opening rounds against Sacred Heart and University of Nevada Las Vegas, winning in four sets against Sacred Heart and sweeping UNLV. Megan York and sophomore outside hitter Lauren Corp each notched consecutive double-doubles in the matches.

The third match against the host, Long Beach State, proved to be too much for the Gaels. Long Beach State was ranked #26 in the AVCA's pre-season poll and in the match against Saint Mary's they proved just how good they are. The Gaels committed 35 errors in the five-set match.

Browning is not dismayed by the loss. "This weekend's tournament was a good way to start the season. We needed those first two matches to work with a new line-up. By the time we played Long Beach the girls were much more comfortable with what they were doing out there. Long Beach is good and we needed that challenge to see where we stand. We are better for having played a very good team the first weekend."

The Gaels return to action on Wednesday, September 1 against San Jose State. They return home on Saturday, September 4 to take on UC Riverside at 7:00 p.m.



Senior middle blocker Shannon Lowell notched 16 kills and nine blocks in the loss to Long Beach State.



Sophomore outside hitter Lauren Corp had 15 kills and nine digs in the loss to Long Beach State.

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