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Saint Mary's Wins Two at Home Gaels Break Top 25

By Bryant West



Rob Jones (22) had 15 points and nine rebounds over Santa Clara.

Against the Waves two nights later, McConnell had 11 points and 15 assists and sophomore forward Mitchell Young had 16 and nine boards. The Waves played without the conference's leading scorer Keion Bell, who had been averaging 20.9 points before going down with an injured ankle.

The first home match of conference play - against San Francisco - was a lot tougher game than expected out of a team picked to finish sixth in the conference. The Gaels led by just six at the half, but a strong second half effort fueled by a 7-0 run to start the half shattered the Don's resistance.

McConnell finished with 19 points and four assists, while Jones added 11 points and 10 boards. Dellavedova added 13 points and four assists of his own.

Back to back threes from Dellavedova, capped off with a way-past-the-arc bomb with 7:10 left, propelled the Gaels to their first double digit lead of the night at 30-18.

San Francisco edged back at 33-29 with 2:25 to go in the half, but Saint Mary's staved off the Don attack for the rest of the half and led 35-29 at intermission.

The Gaels exploded out to start the second half on a 7-0 run that took the fire out of the Dons. Dellavedova found junior forward Clint Steindl who slammed home a vicious dunk with 18:48 to play that put Saint Mary's up 42-29. It never got closer than 10 after that.

"I was hoping he was going to the basket, I thought he was gonna settle for a three," Dellavedova chuckled afterwards.

The Broncos had been picked to finish fourth in the conference, but put up little challenge as the Gaels won 84-59.

Six Gaels scored in double figures, and McConnell led the way again, scoring 18 points and a game-high 13 assists. Jones added 15 and nine boards. Dellavedova had 10 points and six assists.

The two teams fought it out in the early minutes, but a three from McConnell with 16:20 left in the half gave the Gaels a 9-5 advantage. A minute later, McConnell fired another three - this one from about 28 feet - that gave

The Saint Mary's men's basketball team stormed into West Coast Conference play and broke into the Top 25. The Gaels played four regular season games the last two weeks and in those four games only trailed four times. The team was recognized for their excellent play and ranked #22 in the AP poll and #21 in ESPN/USA Today Coaches poll.

Saint Mary's expanded their win streak to ten games, the third longest winning streak in school history. The Gaels have opened 4-0 to improve to 16-2. The team returned home after two road games last week to take on USF and Santa Clara. The Gaels bested USF on Thursday in a hard-fought 71-57 victory, followed by an 84-59 smashing of Santa Clara on Saturday.

Even after Saturday's rout, head coach Randy Bennett maintained the team could play better. "We can, we can play better," he said. "We still have to get better defensively. We're getting there."

It wasn't all fun and games for Saint Mary's, with an injury scare at halftime during the Santa Clara game. Sophomore guard Matthew Dellavedova was injured late in the first half and needed help getting to the locker room but did return in the second half. Saint Mary's is already playing without sophomore guard Jordan Page, who is out the remainder of the season with a knee injury.

Senior guard Mickey McConnell has emerged as not only the team's leader but as a serious contender for WCC Player of the Year. He won back to back WCC Player of the Week awards, winning the January 3rd and January 10th awards and was named the National Player of the Week by TheHoopsReport.com for the week of January 3rd.

Saint Mary's started the conference schedule with easy road wins over Loyola Marymount and Pepperdine, winning 98-75 on January 6th against the Lions and posting an 85-60 victory over the Waves on January 8th. McConnell led Saint Mary's with 21 points and eight assists against the Lions, while junior forward Rob Jones had 20 and nine.

the Gaels a 14-5 lead with 15:25 to go.

With 50 seconds to go in the half, Dellavedova crumpled to the floor after colliding in the paint on defense. But he started the second half and finished the game wearing a knee brace.

"He's a really tough kid, so I was concerned," Bennett said afterwards. "I was surprised he came sprinting back out there to start the second half... It reminded me of Willis Reed," he said with a laugh.

The Broncos couldn't muster a comeback in the second half as the Gaels continued their offensive barrage.

Saint Mary's will play one more home game -a matchup with San Diego on Wednesday at 7:30 - before embarking on a three game road trip. The Gaels will travel to Vanderbilt next Saturday to take on the Commodores, before heading north for games against Gonzaga and Portland.



Matthew Dellavedova (4) drives to the hoop over USF's Marko Petrovic. Dellavedova had 13 points in the win. Photos
Tod Fierner



Mickey McConnell (32) had 19 points against USF Photo Tod Fierner

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