

# SPORTS LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS

## Saint Mary's in WCC Second Place

By Caitlin Graveson



Suzie Davis knocked down a career-high 17 points in the win over SCU. She added 14 points against USF. Photos Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's entered West Coast Conference play predicted to finish in second place behind Gonzaga and with three games left in the season, they are right on track to fulfill preseason expectations. Saint

Mary's is 16-10 overall and 8-3 in WCC play. Saint Mary's returned home after a tough road trip where they lost to Pepperdine, 48-69 on February 3. Pepperdine is currently in



Kate Gaze drives past USF defender. Gaze had 13 points in the win.)

third place. The Gaels bounced back to defeat Loyola Marymount, 58-51 on February 5. With the win the Gaels avenged their season-opening loss to the Lions.

The Gaels carried momentum into their home games last week against Bay Area rivals Santa Clara and the University of San Francisco.

Saint Mary's rallied from down 2-15 in the opening minutes and down 19-34 late in the first half to defeat the Broncos, 75-70. The Gaels fought back in the second, rallying behind redshirt junior guard Jasmine Smith who had 21 points in the second half. Senior guard Suzie Davis also stepped up for the Gaels, notching a career-high 17 points. Senior forward Louella Tomlinson had a double-double with 16 points and 15 rebounds.

Saint Mary's continued their winning ways, again fighting back from a first half deficit on Saturday, February 12, against USF. The Gaels found themselves down 30-33 heading into the locker room at half time. Again, Smith led the comeback, sparking a 15-6 run with a big three pointer with 12 minutes left to play. Davis notched 14 points and sophomore guard Kate Gaze had 13 points.

Tomlinson led all scorers in the win with her fifth consecutive double-double with 19 points and 16 rebounds. She also had six blocks and three assists. Tomlinson leads the NCAA in blocked shots

per game, averaging five per contest. She is tied for the NCAA career triple-doubles record with seven. She is also chasing the SMC all-time points record, she needs to average 13.5 points per game to tie the record.

Tomlinson said that while breaking records is ideal, she does not consciously worry or think about it, instead she focuses on playing well. "Obviously I want to be able to break school records and leave the school with a legacy, but I just want to play in games and its fun to play," Tomlinson said.

Saint Mary's will play first place Gonzaga on February 24. While a win would mean a lot mentally, head coach Paul Thomas said they are not looking at it as a "must win." "We don't need to beat them today or tomorrow. We need to focus on how well our shoot around goes and if we have a good prep day," Thomas said.

He is working on preparing his team for the end of the season grind and tournament play. "We just have to be better about inconsistency and the defending part of the game. We can't give open looks and we need to know how to lock down on defense," Thomas concluded.

The Gaels next match-up is against the University of San Diego on Saturday at 1:00 p.m. The teams' four seniors, Tomlinson, Davis, Courtney Dunn and Leanna Richey will be honored. It is also a Pink Zone game and the Gaels will be wearing their pink uniforms.

## Saint Mary's Overwhelms USF

### Gaels Win Four Games Heading into Final Weeks

By Bryant West



Kenton Walker II Photo Tod Fierner

The #23 Saint Mary's men's basketball team won four straight contests and are just a win in San Diego away from their first regular season conference title since 1997.

With a victory in San Diego tonight, Saint Mary's would guarantee at the very least a tie for the regular-season conference title. If the Gaels beat USD and then defeat either Gonzaga or Portland a week later – both home contests – they would stand alone atop the WCC before the conference championships in Las Vegas in early March.

The Gaels managed to fend off two less successful conference teams at home – getting a 79-71 win over Pepperdine on February 3rd and a 79-70 win over Loyola Marymount two days later. Saint Mary's then headed out for two road contests last week and bested Santa Clara 65-59 on Thursday and a notched a 86-68 demolition of the second seeded Dons on Saturday.

The Gaels' two home contests against Pepperdine and Loyola Marymount were closer than to be expected.

Senior guard Mickey McConnell scored 26 points and had eight assists in the 79-71 win over the Waves, while junior forward Rob Jones had 20 points, eight boards and two steals. The Waves, who sit at sixth in the conference, shot 55 percent for the game and held Saint Mary's to 46 percent, but had 21 turnovers to the Gaels 13. Guard Keion Bell had 24 points and kept the Waves in it, but to no avail.

The victory over Loyola Marymount two evenings later secured the Gaels 20th win on the season, as they survived another contest where they let their opponents outshoot them. The Lions shot 52 percent and the

Gaels 49 percent. Rebounding was the major difference as Saint Mary's grabbed 36 boards and the Lions gathered just 21. Sophomore guard Matthew Dellavedova had 23 points, while McConnell had 16 and 10 assists. Ashley Hamilton had 16 points for the Lions.

After scraping by their Southern rivals, the Gaels headed out to face off against their Bay Area rivals – the first of which came Thursday night. The Gaels survived a late rally to pull off a 65-59 win over Santa Clara. SMC made just one basket in the final 12:45 of the game but took advantage of the free throw line, making 20-of-24 attempts in the second half.

"You're not going to get many style-points games at this time of year," head coach Randy Bennett said. "Everybody knows everyone. ... I knew it was going to be that way, and our guys were able to get it done, so I was pleased with them."

McConnell again led the way with 25 points, while Jones had 10 points and 16 rebounds. Sophomore forward Mitchell Young had 10 points and seven boards. Broncos guard Kevin Foster had 25 for the Broncos. They held Saint Mary's to 37.5 percent shooting.

Saturday's match with the Dons, who sit second in the conference, didn't live up to the hype. While the Dons' fast paced offense worked well in the first half, and the Dons' tied it with a jumper at 36-36 with 19:17 to go in the second half – Saint Mary's took over from there, finishing out the game on a 50-32 run. Saint Mary's outshot the Dons 66.7 percent to 33.3 percent in the second half, and the Dons couldn't muster a comeback much to the disappointment of the sold-out crowd.

"To have a good offensive game against their team, which is good defensively, on their court was a big step for us," head coach Randy Bennett said after the win in San Francisco.

The Gaels play today, February 16, in San Diego for at least a share of the conference regular season title, but Saturday's game is equally important. Saint Mary's will face off at home against Utah State in the 2011 Sears Bracketbuster contest. The contest against the #21/#17 ranked Aggies could really help – or hurt – NCAA Tournament hopes come March.

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