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Tough Competition Ahead

Alex Kozela



Goalkeeper Kate Brenot blocks shot attempt Photo
Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's women's soccer team is off to a flying start in what promises to be a challenging but hopeful campaign.

The Gaels have begun the young season breaking even with a record of 1-1-1, tying 1-1 on the road against New Mexico on Friday, August 19 and winning their home opener a week later over George Washington, 3-0. The Gaels fell to Texas Tech on Sunday, August 28, 2-0.

New Mexico, the defending Mountain West Conference winner, is just the first of many strong opponents on the docket for Saint Mary's this season, which includes top teams such as #13 UC Irvine.

It won't get any easier in WCC play, with Portland, Santa Clara, and San Diego nationally ranked at #4, #16, and #25 respectively. Pepperdine and Loyola Marymount also have received votes and could enter the Top 25 this season.

"We try to make things as complicated as possible here at Saint Mary's," said head coach Kai Edwards, who hopes the difficult schedule will help the team improve upon last year's overall record of 8-7-4 (2-4-1 in West Coast Conference).

Sophomore midfielder Jordan Marada, who earned an All-WCC selection last year for her efforts as the Gaels' leading scorer with 19 points and seven goals, believes they are prepared for those tough games because of the team's work ethic in practice.

"Training how we're going to play helps when we travel and play against harder teams," said Marada. "We battled with [New Mexico] with the 1-1 tie and I think we prepared our bodies well and practiced hard enough to stay with them at their level. It starts with team building off the field and on the field we connected."

With the young team the Gaels have - 24 of the 29 players are freshmen and sophomores - connecting on the field will be key to victory, and Edwards doesn't foresee the team having trouble in doing so.

"Everyone contributes," said Edwards. "The good thing about this group is they don't know any better but to work hard and find ways to win. Everyone has a role and everyone for the most part plays that role, whether it's ten minutes off the bench, if it's 90, if it's passing and trapping, or if it's beating players. I think they've done a very good job of understanding their roles."

Much of the Gaels' success this season will depend on the play of sophomore keeper Kate Brenot, who came up big against George Washington with four saves, preserving a shutout.

"[Brenot] is tactically probably the smartest player on our team," said Edwards. "She manages her game really well; she keeps us in games and doesn't give up bad goals."

The team's nucleus, however, is the midfield, which features Marada at the playmaker position with two midfielders, a rotation of junior Daelyn Paul, sophomore Emma Kroloff, and freshmen Vicki Shimkus and Brooke Herrick, on either side.

"Our goal is to play through all five of them," Edwards said. "[Marada] usually plays at the highest point, but the work that Daelyn, Emma, Vicki, and Brooke do free her up to do what she does, which is be special in front of net."

Check out the Gaels at SMC Stadium tomorrow, Thursday, September 1 at 4:00 p.m. or Sunday, September 4 at 12:00 p.m.



Jordan Marada



Vicki Shimkus

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