

Published February 1st, 2012

Saint Mary's Still Undeclared after Tough Road Trip

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Matthew Dellavedova (4) and Kenton Walker II (30)
Photo Tod Fierner

The men's basketball team continues to creep up in the national polls as they remained undefeated in WCC play, moving from #20 to #16 in the USA/Coaches' poll and #18 in the AP poll.

Saint Mary's returned to Moraga from a three-game road stretch that saw the team earn hard-fought victories at Santa Clara, Loyola Marymount, and Brigham Young. Saint Mary's defeated Pepperdine the previous week at McKeon Pavilion, where the Gaels haven't lost all year.

"Our goal is to stay undefeated at home," said senior forward Rob Jones. "We go into each game with that on our minds. It helps motivate us."

Before hitting the road for the three-game stretch, Saint Mary's (21-3 overall, 10-0 WCC) played for the first time this season as a ranked team (#23/24), hosting Pepperdine (7-13, 11-8) on January 19. The Gaels came out with all the defensive stops to prevent any chance of an upset, as they handily defeated the Waves 61-47.

Jones registered his 13th double-double of the season with a game-high 17 points and 10 rebounds. Junior guard Matthew Dellavedova added 13 points, while sophomore guard Stephen Holt scored 12.

The game was a far closer affair than the two teams' previous meeting, a 74-45 Saint Mary's rout in December. "I think the game down at Pep was an aberration," said Gaels' head coach Randy Bennett. "It's closer than that, and it was tonight. Pepperdine came to play."

"If you're at the top of the league and you're ranked, you're going to have to be ready for that every night," said Bennett, referring to the Waves' energy. "I'm trying to get our guys to understand that, and if we do, it'll make our guys better because we're playing against better competition."

It wasn't any easier two days later at Santa Clara (8-12, 0-7). Despite their status as the WCC's last-placed team, the Broncos outworked the Gaels for most of the game. In front of the first sell-out crowd at the Leavey Center in two years, Saint Mary's only led by two points at the half, up 44-42.

The Gaels went on a 15-2 run at the end of the second half to escape an upset and defeat their rivals 93-77. The 93 points scored were the most for any Saint Mary's team against Santa Clara in a regulation game.

Dellavedova scored 26 points, while dishing out seven assists to lead the Gaels. Jones had another double-double with 14 points and 15 rebounds. Sophomore guard Jorden Page had a career-high 19 points, while freshman center Brad Waldow grabbed a career-high 16 rebounds.

The Gaels then travelled down to Los Angeles to face a feisty Loyola Marymount team. The dark horse in the WCC, with big wins over BYU in Provo and #17 UCLA and #23 Saint Louis in preseason, LMU fought hard for another upset this season.

Saint Mary's remained persistent and answered every Lions' attack to win, 71-64. Holt led Saint Mary's to victory with 19 points while Dellavedova added 13. It was the 11th straight victory for the Gaels over the Lions (12-9, 5-3).

In a physical game in Provo, Saint Mary's stayed tough to defeat WCC-newcomer BYU 80-66. The Gaels were called for 22 fouls and the Cougars, 26. Both head coaches had technical fouls and debris was thrown on the court multiple times.

The Gaels went on a 10-0 run to build a 40-28 lead at the half. Saint Mary's rode that momentum into the second period to extend the lead to 23 points. BYU fought to within nine points with about two and a half minutes to go, but Saint Mary's held on to sweep BYU in regular season play.

Senior forward Clint Steindl had 16 points for the Gaels, going 4-for-6 from behind the arc. Waldow came up huge for SMC, notching a team-high 19 points and eight rebounds.

Saint Mary's will host San Diego on Thursday, February 2 at McKeon Pavilion.

"We're keeping our goals the same as the first game of the year," said Jones, as he looks ahead to the rest of the season, "to hopefully end the season as great as possible."

Upcoming Home Games

Thu, Feb 02, 7:00 PM vs San Diego, SMC McKeon Pavilion

Sat, Feb 11, 8:00 PM vs Santa Clara, SMC McKeon Pavilion

Wed, Feb 15, 7:30 PM vs Loyola Marymount, SMC McKeon Pavilion

Get your tickets at the Athletics Ticket Office

Mon-Fri, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM



Freshman Brad Waldow steps up big for the Gaels in tough four game stretch. Saint Mary's stays perfect in WCC.
Photo Tod Fierner

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