

Published February 15th, 2012

Saint Mary's Bounces Back to Beat the Broncos

Alex Kozela



Rob Jones #22 Photo Tod Fierner

The Gaels' incredible undefeated WCC run came crashing to a close at the likeliest of locations. The Gaels fell to perennial rivals, Gonzaga, in front of a boisterous crowd at "The Kennel" in Spokane on February 9.

Saint Mary's, ranked #13 in the ESPN/USA Today coaches' poll, the highest ranking in the program's history, and #16 by the Associated Press, couldn't keep its streak alive last Thursday night, losing 73-59 in a match-up of WCC titans. The loss dropped SMC to #21 in the AP Poll and #16 in the Coaches Poll. Gonzaga's win over the Gaels helped propel them to #24 in both the AP and Coaches Polls.

The Gaels (22-3 overall, 12-1 WCC) got back on track Saturday at home with an 82-67 win over a plucky Santa Clara team. The Broncos were determined to pull an upset despite residing at the bottom of the WCC standings.

The win was an important one for the vulnerable Gaels, as the Zags (20-4, 10-2) are still very much alive in the race for the regular season WCC title.

"I think it just proves how tough a team we are," said Gaels' senior forward Rob Jones, who followed a quiet eight point, seven rebound night against Gonzaga with a commanding 25 point, 12 rebound performance against Santa Clara.

"You can't be proven as tough if you don't face adversity. After last game, I just really had to come out tonight and prove to myself and everyone that I'm still here with this team," added Jones.

Despite having the worst record in the WCC (8-17, 0-12), the Broncos were a solid test for the Gaels to regain their confidence.

Jones and junior guard Matthew Dellavedova both had double-doubles, with Jones notching his 15th of the season, while Dellavedova scored 16 points and added 10 assists. Despite the 82-67 score line, the Broncos fought back on numerous occasions.

"Santa Clara's playing well for their record," said Saint Mary's head coach Randy Bennett. "I thought it was going to be a tough game, [with the teams] tough to separate."

After a back-and-forth second half that saw Saint Mary's lead 40-35 at the half, the Gaels sprang out to a 54-40 lead with 15:48 remaining. The Broncos pulled within

three, trailing 62-59, after going on a 19-8 run, before the Gaels went ahead to take the lead for good.

"When it got close, I'm glad our guys responded the right way: hit some shots, got some stops. It was a good win," said Bennett.

Last Thursday in Spokane, the Bulldogs avenged the 83-62 drubbing they suffered in Moraga a month ago in a big way, as freshman Kevin Pangos hit 27 points to keep the Zags in the running for their 12th consecutive regular season title. Dellavedova scored 20 points for Saint Mary's, who shot a season-low 38 percent from the field, going 21-55, including 5-21 from three-point range.

The Gaels only trailed by three at the half, losing 34-31, and opened the second half on a 9-4 run. The Zags, who shot 52 percent from the field, including 7-15 on threes, were persistent, however. Big threes by the freshman guard duo of Pangos and Gary Bell Jr. down the stretch sealed the victory for the Bulldogs.

"We had a great stretch," said the Gaels' Jones, referring to the Gaels 11 straight wins in WCC play. "But it happens. We didn't play our best and Gonzaga got us."

The Gaels will look to complete its second undefeated home season in school history tomorrow against Loyola Marymount in the last regular season game.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA