

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Saint Mary's Wins WCC

By Alex Kozela



Saint Mary's seniors honored at Senior Night. From left: Kenton Walker II, Clint Steindl, Rob Jones and Randy Bennett
Photos Tod Fierner

Despite a couple of hiccups towards the end of the WCC regular season, the Saint Mary's men's basketball team is headed to Las Vegas with their first outright conference title in 23 years.

Road wins over Portland, 70-43, and San Francisco, 67-60, overshadowed recent losses to Gonzaga, Loyola Marymount, and Murray State and put the exclamation point to the Gaels' regular season. The Gaels earned the #1 seed for the WCC

Championship, which begins today.

Last Saturday's victory over San Francisco ended Gonzaga's 11-year hold on the WCC regular season title. The Gaels and Zags shared 2011's title.

"With three weeks to go I had doubts. I was concerned," said Saint Mary's head coach Randy Bennett, who has coached the team to a 25-5 overall record this season, going 14-2 in WCC play. "But we did something special."

After starting the WCC season 11-0, garnering a resounding 83-62 win over Gonzaga at McKeon Pavilion on January 12 and big road wins over Loyola Marymount, 71-64 on January 26 and Brigham Young, 80-66 on January 28, the Gaels lost their first conference game on February 9 at Gonzaga, falling 73-59.

After defeating local rivals Santa Clara two days later, the Gaels were upset by Loyola Marymount, who became the first team to defeat the Gaels in Moraga all season.

It didn't get any better three days later at Murray State for the 2012 Sears Bracketbusters. The Gaels lost two straight games for the first time this season, falling 65-51.

"This season's been a fun roller coaster ride," said senior forward Rob Jones. "There's been a lot of highs, we've had a couple of lows recently in the past couple of weeks, but we're back on track with where we need to be. It's been exciting."

Bennett attributes much of Saint Mary's success this year to the stellar play of the senior class, made up of forwards Jones (second on the team in points, averaging 14.8 and first on the team in rebounds with 10.7), Clint Steindl, and Kenton Walker.

"We don't win a championship like this in a league like this without great leadership from your seniors," Bennett said. "It takes a lot of unselfishness."

Although the WCC Championship begins today in Las Vegas with the opening round game, the Gaels have a bye until Saturday, when they play a to-be-determined opponent at 6:00 p.m. in the semifinal. If they win that game, they will play in the championship game on Monday, also at 6:00 p.m.

"Our expectations are high," said Jones. "We want to win it all."



Junior guard Matthew Dellavedova was recently selected to the Capital One Academic All-America® Division I Men's Basketball Team with a GPA of a 3.61.

Dons Join Gaels to Fight Cancer



The University of San Francisco may be the Gaels' bay area rival, but the soccer programs put their competitive spirits aside to team up to support fellow soccer player, Saint Mary's senior Emmanuel "Morro" Sarabia. Sarabia was diagnosed with Leukemia last month.

Saint Mary's was joined by the Dons at the War Memorial Gym prior to the last WCC men's basketball game of the season between SMC and USF on February 25. The teams asked for donations to raise funds for Sarabia's medical expenses.



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