

Published March 28th, 2012

Saint Mary's Adds Track Team to Athletic Program

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Sophomore Rajpaul Pannu, ran a 14:58 5K in his first track race of the season. Photos provided

season. "It means a lot to me," he said before practice on a spring day-- something a Saint Mary's distance runner has not experienced before. "I really look forward to the next four years here at Saint Mary's... and being on the first Saint Mary's track team."

The next stop for the new track team is a meet at Chico State on April 13th. Selected athletes will compete at the West Coast invite, hosted by the University of Portland, to close the season.

Saint Mary's College added a new sport to its athletic program this spring. The Gaels now boast a track team.

Though the new program technically offers no scholarships, the NCAA grants additional funds to Saint Mary's athletics for use toward athletes in the cross country and track programs. It also grants athletes with additional training time.

Junior Erin Burke said the addition of the track team will help her improve as a runner. "Now I can train and race more seriously than I have in the past."

Without a track program, a SMC runner received 656 fewer practice hours over the course of a four-year career than an athlete at other West Coast Conference schools and SMC athletes only had an opportunity to compete in 48 competitions, where comparatively, other athletes competed in nearly 100 meets.

Recruiting new talent has also become easier, according to assistant coach Mark Carberry. "Good runners didn't want to commit to a program that didn't have track," he said. "[With the addition of track], we can now utilize the beautiful area we train in year-round... it's going to put us in a good position."

"As an alumni of Saint Mary's cross country, it was hard to see the WCC grow while SMC didn't progress at the same rate. It's exciting to see us step up with a full-time coaching staff, and now, a track program-- we're going to become an even stronger team," said head coach Marty Kinsey.

They began their season on March 3rd, running the Kim Dunst Invitational at Cal State Stanislaus, followed by the UC Davis Aggie Open on March 10th. This past week, the Gaels competed at the Johnny Mathis Invitational hosted by San Francisco State.

The athletes will focus on middle-to-long distances, running the 800 meter (or half-mile) to the 5,000 meter (3.12 mile) races.

Early this season, redshirt sophomore Rajpaul Pannu set a school record in the 5000m at the Kim Duyst Invitational. Pannu placed 8th with a time of 14:58.

For the women, strong middle distance races have been the headlines in this young season. Sophomore Alicia Doohan ran the 1500m in 4:52.41 in her first race of the season at Stanislaus. She continued an impressive running day finishing 2:22.81 for 800m.

Freshman Gilbert Mundo is happy about the new



Freshman Cristina Garcia ran an 11:12.31 3000m race at the Aggie Open hosted by UC Davis.

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