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Saint Mary's Earns First WNIT Win in Over 10 Years

Alex Kozela



Alex Carbonel Photo Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's women's basketball team capped off one of its best seasons ever with a victory over UNLV in the first round of the WNIT.

The Gaels (22-11) won their first postseason game since 2001, defeating UNLV 71-63 on March 15 at McKeon Pavilion. It was the team's 22nd win of this season, tying the second most in school history.

It was a special night for the seniors, who were given the opportunity to play one last game in front of a home crowd.

"We were really excited," senior guard Jasmine Smith said of the last chance to play in front of the Saint Mary's faithful. "Being a senior, it meant a lot to me, and the rest of [the seniors.]"

Smith had 21 points in the win. Sophomore guard Jackie Nared led the Gaels, scoring 22 points and grabbing eight boards.

Saint Mary's carved out a 19-point lead early in the second half, but the Rebels fought back, cutting the lead to 42-35 with 15:19 left. After Smith and senior guard Alex Carbonel scored baskets to regain the Gaels' double-digit lead, UNLV once again pulled close, trailing only 51-47 at the 7:10 mark. The Gaels scored the next five points to build a nine-point lead and never looked back.

Saint Mary's head coach Paul Thomas was impressed by his team's performance.

"Our kids showed such character tonight," said Thomas. "We weren't feeling that comfortable [early in the second half], and our kids just picked it right back up. I couldn't be happier."

Two days later the team took the court in Corvallis to face Oregon State, and despite shooting just 23.4 percent from the floor, the Gaels kept the deficit manageable the entire game, but still eventually lost 56-41.

Smith was the only Gael to score in double figures with 12 points, while Nared scored eight while nabbing 11 rebounds.

Despite the second round loss, the Gaels' postseason berth served as a culmination of how far the team has progressed over the last few years. The team garnered big wins against Brigham Young (54-48 on December 31), at Gonzaga (66-63 on January 14), and in the WCC Tournament against Pepperdine (67-63 on March 2) en route to their third WNIT appearance in as many years.

Thomas attributed this year's success to those who have helped build the team into what it is today.

"This season is a combination of what everybody who came before them has added to this team. They helped this team understand how to win a postseason game. I think they're all a part of this as much as the people in uniform right now," said Thomas.

"They knew they made history. We've made history for a lot of this year."

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