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SMC Women's Tennis Vies for Spot in NCAA Tournament

By Marissa Harnett



Elizabeth Searl Photos Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's women's tennis team concluded the regular season with two decisive wins to earn the #2 seed in the upcoming WCC tournament. The #42 Gaels finished with a 14-6 record, going 7-1 in WCC play.

They played their final regular season match in San Diego on April 21 against the #68 Toreros. After losing all three doubles matches, the Gaels managed a 4-3 win with solid singles play.

The Gaels, whose only league loss came late in the season against Pepperdine, returned to their winning ways against south bay rival Santa Clara University, finishing 6-1 on April 15.

In their final home match, the Gaels doubles opened up a quick lead over the Broncos. Senior Molly Aloia and freshman Elizabeth Searl made quick work of their opponents, finishing 8-3. On court two senior Anna Chkhikvishvili and junior Catherine Isip crushed their opponents, 8-2.

The play on court one was a battle. Jade Frampton and Jenny Jullien struggled, trading the lead with SCU throughout the eight game pro-set. SMC gained solid footing at 7-5, but couldn't seal the deal, and SCU tied it up at 7-7 and then 8-8.

The tiebreaker mirrored the match, the teams exchanging the lead, but SMC took control and finished the match with a dramatic final point. Jullien hit a reflexive winner to clinch the match, 9-8 (7-3).

Going into singles play, the Gaels were up 3-0. SMC won the next five out of six matches to solidly secure their overall win.

In Isip's second match of the day, she faced off with SCU's top player and highest ranking singles player in the conference, Katie Le, in the #1 singles match. Isip easily won the first set, 6-2.

The second set saw a shift. Le gained confidence and Isip struggled. The pair battled and Isip dropped the set, 5-7. Isip eventually won the tiebreaker, 4-0.

Isip beamed with the win. "I lost to her the last time - the only time - we've played singles. I came in there and really wanted to win it."

The SMC tennis program has improved under the fourteen-year tenure of head coach Lisa Alipaz. "I scrapped together a few girls early on that were super ambitious and each team has built off what the team before has left us."

Alipaz tries not to create hard set goals. "We're just trying to get better every single match and play to our potential. We know that if we do that then we're definitely a contender for a conference title and we definitely want to be in the NCAA tournament because we're capable."

SMC won the WCC championship in 2010 and has earned a spot in the NCAA for the past two years. If they win the WCC, they will automatically enter the NCAA tournament.

If not, the Gaels must secure a ranking of 42 or better to receive an at-large bid to qualify for the tournament. With the rankings constantly fluctuating, Alipaz knows it is hard to predict. "It's going to come down to the wire. We've got to play and practice as if every point, every match, every hour we spend out there is crucial."

The WCC championships begin today, April 25 in San Diego with SMC as the #2 seed.



Jenny Jullien



Catherine Isip

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