

Published November 7th, 2012

Gaels Look to Repeat as WCC Champs Men's basketball season starts Saturday

By Simon Tryzna



Coach Randy Bennett with Jorden Page Photos Tod Fierner

[guards] that have been through the battle," said Bennett. "That is going to be the strength of our team this year - the guard play."

With only one true small-forward in the rotation, junior Beau Levesque, Saint Mary's will likely play three guards as part of their offense, which worked well last year. Newcomer and Southern California Junior College Player of the Year James Walker III and junior Jorden Page will provide depth to guard play.

Replacing Jones at the power forward position will be 6'-11" Matt Hodgson, who has impressed Bennett already. "Matt Hodgson will help right away and I think could be a really good player," he said.

He will be joined with sophomore Brad Waldow, who will be an impact player at center. Mitchell Young will also be a key piece of the offense. Lastly, senior seven-footer Kyle Rowley will look to provide a huge boost off the bench for the Gaels.

"We return 13 guys off that team from last year," said Bennett. "We have a lot coming back off of a very positive experience from last year, and I think that's always important in college basketball."

In addition to a tough conference slate, the Gaels have a fairly tough, but manageable, non-conference slate. After opening the season against Sonoma State, the Gaels will travel to take on Utah State. The Utes have compiled an impressive 157-12 home record (with one of the losses coming from the Gaels) since 1998. Over Thanksgiving break, Saint Mary's will participate in the DirectTV Classic in Anaheim, opening up against CAA favorite Drexel on Thanksgiving Day at 1:30 p.m. on ESPN2.

On New Year's Eve, McKeon Pavilion will play host to a nationally televised matchup against the Harvard Crimson.

One of the most important keys for the Gaels is to see if they can improve on the 16-1 home record from last year.

"McKeon Pavilion is a great atmosphere for college basketball," said Steven Holt. "To have our student section be right on top of the court adds that flair, that intensity, just makes it a tough environment for opposing teams, [which is] obviously an advantage for us."

The Gaels will kick off their season this Saturday, November 10 against Sonoma State in McKeon Pavilion at 7 p.m.

It might be tough for the Gaels to follow-up one of the most successful men's basketball seasons in school history. The 2011-2012 team won both the WCC league title and the WCC tournament.

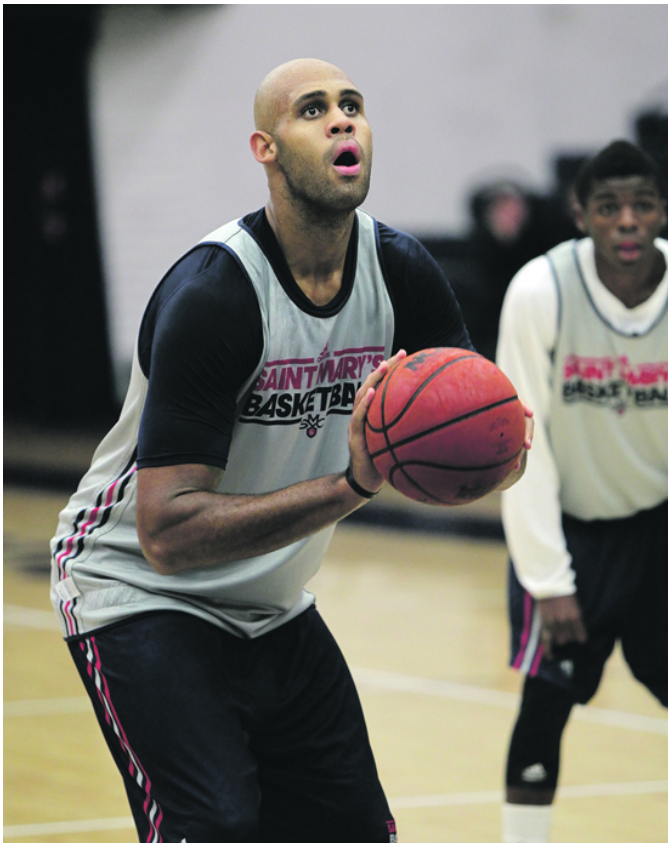
Although the team graduated a key component of last year's squad in Rob Jones, who finished eighth in the nation in rebounds, the Gaels return one of the best point guards in the nation in senior Matthew Dellavedova. Dellavedova, who was one of the five finalists last year for the Bob Cousy Award, given to the nation's top point guard, gained experience playing for the Australian National Team in the 2012 Olympics.

Still, citing the loss of Jones, many of the national media outlets and the WCC coaches have the Gaels finishing third in conference play, behind Gonzaga and BYU.

"It's a good league," said Bennett in response to his team being chosen third by his fellow coaches. "You can make an argument for picking several of those teams."

While the league may have improved from top to bottom, the Gaels still return a strong backcourt. Dellavedova is joined by junior Stephen Holt, who averaged 10.1 points per game and was second in the WCC in steals, averaging 1.8 steals per game last year. He was named honorable mention on the All-WCC Team.

"[Dellavedova & Holt are] pretty good experienced



Kyle Rowley



Matthew Dellavedova

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