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## Saint Mary's Basketball Opens Season on Road Returns home Saturday

By Michael Sakoda



Ashlee Smith Photos Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's women's basketball finished last season with a 22-11 record, and went 11-5 in conference play. They qualified for the WNIT and knocked off UNLV in the first round, before falling in the second. The Gaels look to improve on last year's success and, returning three-of-five starters, they are in a good position to do so.

In addition to sophomore forward Carli Rosenthal and junior forward Danielle Mauldin, returning to the starting line-up is junior guard Jackie Nared, who averaged 13 ppg, 7.5 rpg and was an All-WCC selection last season.

The Gaels also welcome back redshirts junior forward Ashlee Smith and junior guard Kate Gaze.

On her return, Gaze said that she is ready to play. "I feel really prepared. I feel like I haven't missed a beat," she added, "We worked really hard as a team."

Head coach Paul Thomas said that there is less emphasis on starting than on capitalizing on playing time. "You need to do your job when you're on the floor, whether it's one minute or 39 minutes...that's how our team views it."

As for the plan this year, Thomas said that they plan to stick with last year's strategy. "We're not going to stray too far from what our base philosophy and system is. We're just going to try to improve it," he explained.

The Gaels opened season play Nov. 9 at Washington, their first of three non-conference games against Pac-12 opponents.

Mauldin pointed out that one of the team's strengths is rebounding. Against Washington, Nared pulled a game-high 17 rebounds, and got help from senior guard, Morgan Hatten, who finished the game with 15 rebounds. Mauldin grabbed 11 boards of her own. The Gaels outrebounded the Huskies 60-34, but their effort wasn't enough, as they lost

70-68.

The tough loss to the Huskies was followed by a 78-69 victory at Oregon on Nov. 11. Thomas said the team learned from its mistakes. "We took our experience from Friday night at U.W. and over a course of less than 48 hours learned, and did a good job at Oregon," he said. "I was very pleased with that."

Mauldin, who finished the game at Oregon with 20 points and 16 rebounds, was named the WCC Player of the Week for her efforts. "I just see what we need...and then do what's needed to help win those games," she said.

On Nov. 15, the Gaels faced number #12 Cal, and suffered an 89-41 loss.

Thomas noted that the team play allows for potential blow-out losses. "We don't play a style that beats teams by 20 or 30 points. We're just not going to," he explained, "if we don't take care of the ball...we can be blown out a lot easier than we can blow teams out. It's all up to us."

The Gaels were not able to take care of the ball in the loss, and Cal forced the Gaels into a season-high 24 turnovers.

Looking towards the future, Thomas doesn't set his sights far, emphasizing the importance of practice. "My expectations right now are to go out and have a really good practice today. We'll put ourselves in a good position to be where ever this team deserves to be at the end of the season," he said.

However, he did note the team has the potential to be have a successful season. "I think this team is very capable of accomplishing a lot this year, and it's going to be up to them," he said.

The Gaels next game is their home opener Nov. 23 against Butler.



Kate Gaze

Reach the reporter at: [sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com)

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