

Published December 5th, 2012

## SMC Volleyball Advances to Second Round of NCAA Tournament

By Michael Sakoda



Lauren Corp

Saint Mary's College's volleyball team wrapped up a strong season, earning an at-large bid to the NCAA Tournament, the team's sixth tournament berth. The Gaels finished with a 17-10 record, including a 12-4 conference record, good for third place in the WCC.

Head coach Rob Browning said their performance was impressive. He also noted that the success came after a conscious effort. "Right after we started conference, the girls decided to fight harder and be tougher," he explained. "We won some close good matches against really good opponents, and that might have been the difference in those matches."

The Gaels faced San Diego State in the first round of the NCAA tournament, and prior to the Nov. 29 game against the Aztecs, Browning said that his team was looking forward to the match. "SDSU is really good. We'll have our hands full with them to say the least," he explained. "I don't see anything that is blatantly a weakness for them that we can exploit...they get after it, and we're ready to get after it too."

Browning's assessment was accurate and the game was a battle. After dropping the first two sets 17-25 and 23-25, Saint Mary's rallied. The Gaels won three straight sets 25-23, 25-22 and 15-12 to earn the win and a trip to the second round.

Junior Kristina Graven finished with a season-high 23 kills and a team-high 17 digs, and redshirt freshman Dallas

Dodd chipped in 28 assists to help lead the Gaels to victory.

The highs of the first round comeback were short lived, though. The Gaels were eliminated from the tournament on Nov. 30 by No. 4 USC in straight sets, bringing an end to an outstanding year for volleyball program.

Still, there is much for the Gaels to be proud of this season, including strong performances from multiple players.

"We're a very talented team, very highly skilled," Browning said. Four players-seniors Gabby Jolly and Lauren Corp, along with Graven and Dodd-earned All-WCC honors.

Graven, who led the Gaels with 310 kills (3.37 per set) and Jolly, the Gaels all-time and single-season record holder in attack percentage (.323/.370), were named to the All-WCC First team. Corp, third in all-time kills at SMC with 1,254 and MVP of the Sacramento State Tournament, was selected to the honorable mention team, her fourth time on the WCC All-Conference Team.

"All totally deserving... [but] we've got a few other players that could, would, should be on that list...there are just so many good players in our conference," said Browning. "But we're happy. Those players have been really great."

Dodd, who has a team-leading 31 aces on the season, including six in the match against Morgan State, which tied the school's single match record, earned a spot on the WCC All-Freshman team.

The Gaels graduate four seniors, but return a strong core for next season.



Dallas Dodd Photos Tod Fierner

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

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA