

Published August 28th, 2013

Saint Mary's Men's Soccer Young, but Ready

By Michael Sakoda



Photos Tod Fierner

Cunningham.

Luckily for the Gaels, junior goalkeeper Andre Rawls returns after earning an all-league honorable mention last season. Saint Mary's also welcomes back new sophomore defender Forrest Solis, who earned an honorable mention and was named to the WCC All-Freshman Team in his first season as a Gael.

"Andre Rawls is, to me, the best goal keeper in the conference," said Cooper. "He had a great season last year, and I expect big things from him this year."

Junior defender Bobby Connor will also be a key player. "Bobby Connor is stepping into a big role right now and filling that center-back spot," said Cooper.

Losing five players to graduation and returning only three seniors, Cooper knows his team is going to face challenges this year. "Experience goes a long way in college soccer," he said. "It's not talent or size...just experience, and you can't teach that. Overcoming that lack of experience is going to be our biggest hurdle this season."

The Gaels will have their work cut out for them in the preseason against No. 19 Northwestern and Northridge, which has received votes in the NCAA coaches' poll. Even with a core of young talent, Cooper predicts a great season.

"I always expect to win. Our guys always expect to win," said Cooper. "We put that kind of pressure on ourselves. We embrace that kind of pressure."

The Gaels host their home opener on Friday, Aug.30 against Air Force at 4 p.m. They return to the pitch on Sunday at 2 p.m. to face LIU Brooklyn.



Junior defender Bobby Connor will have a big role this season.

The Saint Mary's men's soccer team finished third in the WCC last year and it looks to build on its success this year.

Overall, I thought we performed real well last season, especially being a young team," said head coach Adam Cooper. "I thought it was a very positive season."

The Gaels finished the 2012 campaign with a 9-5-5 record, including a 5-4-3 record in conference play, behind a core of experienced talent and with the support of underclassmen up-and-comers.

It will be a tough road since the Gaels have a young team, but Cooper is excited about the season.

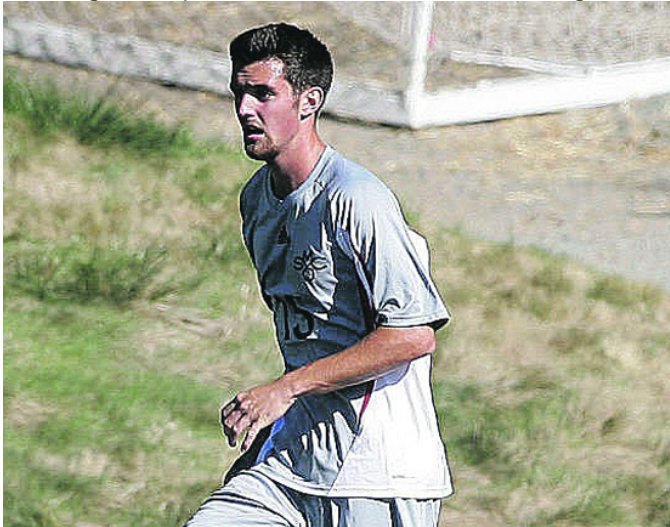
"We have a good team-group here," commented Cooper. "We're even younger than we were last year. They all work hard. They all want to win."

Last season, six Gaels earned WCC recognition for the 2012 season, but four of them were seniors.

"We have five guys that were really big contributors, who played important roles for us last year that we have to replace," said Cooper. The Gaels lost all-WCC performers Tariq Adam, Nathan Arambula, Jose Cabeza and Trevor Newquist to graduation, as well as the experience of Conroy



Junior goalkeeper Andre Rawls earned All-League honorable mention last year.



Sophomore defender Forrest Solis was named to the WCC All-Freshman team last year.

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