

Published September 24th, 2014

Injured Team Looks to Improve

By Michael Sakoda



Senior Rachel Gillcrist is a leader on the young team. Photo Gint Federas

"The team has performed really well at times," said Browning. "But we're not doing that on a consistent basis, which is not at all surprising given our youth and inexperience. Consistency is something that comes with experience more than anything else."

Like their coach, senior Rachel Gillcrist and the rest of her teammates aren't letting the early struggles keep their spirits down.

"If anything, these losses just shine a light on everything we need to work on in conference," she said. "The most important thing right now is finding our identity as a team, how we can play together, how we come back from tough situations, what it means when we play well."

The team is rallying around each other, and despite her injury, Hutson is continuing to lead her teammates.

"She's always there at practice, a leader from the bench," said Gillcrist. "Even though we lose her physically, she's there doing everything she can to have an impact."

But the WCC is a ruthless conference, and Browning knows his team will need to be ready for the challenges ahead.

"In the past, we've been clearly one of the top two or three teams in the conference; this year, we're not," he said. "We're certainly capable of beating every team in our conference, but we're going to have to show up every day, every single match against every single team."

With an improving freshman class (Mary Hernandez, Clare Powers, Agnieszka Kudziela, Madi

After wrapping up their 2013 campaign with a record of 18-9, good for third place in the WCC, the Saint Mary's volleyball team has gotten off to a tough start, as injuries have hindered what might have been another strong season for the Gaels.

Despite projections to repeat as the conference's third best team, the Gaels will open WCC play Thursday with the worst record in the conference. Saint Mary's (4-6) opened the year winning four of their first seven matches but have been on a three game skid since, losing to Teaxs A&M, Long Beach State, and California.

The team lost key performers, Jordan Shaw, Kristina Graven, and Sarah Reams to graduation and is now down All-WCC preseason selection, Madelyn Hutson.

"We're trying to replace a lot," said head coach Rob Browning. "Madelyn had surgery on her foot about a month ago and is out for the season, so we're trying to replace four starters, really."

In addition to these losses, the Gaels have lost other key players. Redshirt-freshman Nicole Powers has sat out all year with a foot injury. All-WCC First Team performer Dallas Dodd, who led the WCC in assists per set a year ago (11.49) while serving up 38 aces (second-best in the WCC), is suffering from an injury. Seniors Natalie Loos and Samantha Tinsley are also dealing with injuries that Browning described as, "limiting," leaving the Gaels to rely heavily on an inexperienced group of players.

Wilkerson and Alexis Salmons) and incredible senior leadership, the Gaels press forward, unfazed by what has been anything but the ideal start to their year.

"We still haven't played our best, even in games we've won," said Gillcrist. "We're continuing to figure things out, and we're continuing to make progress every day. Because of that progress, I expect great things from us."



First Team All-WCC selection Dalas Dodd is one of many injured players for SMC.

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