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Injuries Don't Stop Gaels

By Michael Sakoda



Michael Semenza (9) and Rafael Sanchez (4)

Photo Gint Federas

The Saint Mary's men's soccer team (8-4-2, 1-1 WCC) heads into conference play after earning the best non-conference win percentage in school history (7-3-2), despite a slew of injuries to key players.

Eleven players for the Gaels have missed games with injuries, and 10 of the 22 players to have played at least one game are freshman or sophomores.

"It's always tough losing some of your players, especially your older ones, where some of the younger guys have to grow up a little bit," said senior Emmanuel Sarabia. "We all need to stay focused, make sure that when our number is called, we're ready to help this team, whatever it means."

One player coming up big for the Gaels is senior keeper Andre Rawls. With 69 saves on the season, Rawls is leading the WCC and is 12th best in the NCAA. He was selected as WCC Player of the Week for games played Oct. 5-11.

"I keep the mindset of trying to play the perfect game," said Rawls. "I come in every day trying to get to that level."

Head coach Adam Cooper said that while he's pleased with Rawls' performance, his success is evidence of a lingering problem.

"You can look at [the saves] as a good stat for Rawls and a bad stat for the team [since] he's had to face that many shots," said Cooper. "He's had to deal with a different back four in front of him almost every game this year, and that's not easy for a goal keeper. He's handled it just like a leader should."

The inexperience has at times hindered Saint Mary's, but the young players are improving,

rounding into shape for league play.

"They've all done really well and stepped up," said Cooper of his underclassmen. "They made some mistakes, but they've done a good job of learning from those mistakes and making adjustments to their individual games."

Sophomore Rafael Sanchez is one of the young players having a huge impact for the Gaels, filling in wherever the team needs him and ranking among the top five in assists for the WCC.

"Rafael is our utility man this year. He's had to play four or five different positions," said Cooper. "Talk about a warrior and a gamer, a guy that you can absolutely rely on for 90 minutes every game."

Helping out Sanchez on the offensive side of things is senior forward Michael Semenza, who leads the WCC in total points (4). Semenza has had to raise the level of his play after an ACL injury sidelined junior Cory Schmidt (top 5 in assists WCC) for the season.

The Gaels opened conference play Friday with a 0-2 loss at San Diego, but rallied for a 2-0 win Sunday against defending WCC champions, LMU.

As his team improves, Cooper is optimistic about their chances in a tough conference.

"I think the WCC is, as every year, any man's race," said Cooper. "Everybody starts 0-0-0 going into these last seven games. On the road to open the conference season is a very good challenge, very difficult, but the WCC is anybody's, any day."

Saint Mary's looks to notch a second straight win when they host University of San Francisco Friday, Oct. 24.

Competition Fierce Among Water Polo Rivals

By Spencer Silva



Alexander Zamanian's goal clinched the win for the Mats.

Photo Andy Scheck

At the end of the third quarter of their match against Miramonte, the Acalanes boys' water polo team's chances looked bleak. On Oct. 15, Miramonte (10-4) pushed its 6-4 half-time lead to 12-7 on the back of Cal-bound senior Jordan Hoover's four-goal quarter.

However, even with the match seemingly out of reach, the Dons (6-11) refused to quit. They scored four unanswered goals in the fourth to cut the lead to 12-11, and, with minutes left, they were suddenly within reach of victory. But with 2:07 left Mats' junior Alexander Zamanian buried the match's final goal, and along with it, the threat of an Acalanes comeback.

It was an exciting final quarter, as these two rival teams left their hearts floating in the pool. "These guys play for the same club team," said Miramonte coach James Lathrop, "playing guys you're friends with is always an extra challenge."

Miramonte looked strong early, and, in spite of the late fireworks, they still managed to maintain the lead from sprint to final whistle. They looked to be in mid-season form, fresh off a tournament where they played a number of elite teams. The week before, on Oct. 8, the Mats suffered a heartbreaking 8-11 loss to crosstown rivals Campolindo, a rematch of last season's NCS championship game.

Lathrop believes the tough matches in the early season have prepared his team for the long haul. "We played a tournament in Southern California earlier in the season and got sixth place out of 32 teams," he explained, "it was good see the team go up against some of the best competition around."

Acalanes, on the other hand, has struggled early, but the team is rapidly improving. They lost seven seniors from last year's team and their new starters seem to be stepping into their expanded roles.

The Oct. 15 match was a crucial step in the right direction, as they gave one of the area's best teams a run for their money. "Miramonte is a really good team," said coach Clarke Tamariki after the match. "Towards the end of the match against Miramonte we focused on defense. We got some fortunate match-ups and capitalized."

Playing defense and capitalizing on "man-ups," plays in which the opposing team has one fewer man in the pool because of a penalty, will be the ingredients of greater success moving forward. "If we can do that, who knows?" he asked rhetorically, leaving room for a possible run in the playoffs.

Campo (11-4) is off to a hot start too. They're 2-0 in the DFAL, and have beaten both of their Lamorinda rivals. Two of their four losses have come at the hands of Sacred Heart (13-1), arguably Northern California's best team. In their latest meeting, the Cougars nearly bested the Gators, losing 14-15 in the finals of the NCS-Challenge tournament.

The DFAL ended in a three-way tie between Campo, Miramonte and Las Lomas in 2013. The landscape is similar as all three teams are poised for success in 2014. Campo head coach Miles Price noted that the Cougars have an important match against the Las Lomas Knights (12-6) on Oct. 22.

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