

Published January 28th, 2015

SMC Basketball Improving on Strong Start

By Michael Sakoda



Brad Waldow is central to the Gaels' success, averaging over 20 points per game. Photos
Tod Fierner

20 St. John's. The team then rattled off nine straight wins before losing to Gonzaga.

No one's as surprised by the team's success as Bennett.

"Going into the season, I just didn't know," he said. "I knew we had some good talent, but I didn't know how it was all going to fit together, and we're not done yet."

After being named to the All-WCC Pre-Season team, Brad Waldow has earned WCC Player of the Week honors and emerged as one of the front runners for the Lou Henson Player of the Year Award, given to the nation's top player from a mid-major school.

The 6-foot-10-inch 270-pound forward is averaging 20.2 points per game (second in the WCC) and 9.9 rebounds per game (first in the WCC).

"What no one talks about is [Brad's] two and a half assists a game," said Bennett. "That's where I think he really stands out. The ball goes through his hands and he makes a lot of decisions."

But for all the good, there's always room to improve, and Bennett knows his team's weaknesses as well as he knows its strengths.

"Defense," he said. "This team needs to improve that. We've gotten better, but we have another jump to go. We're a pretty good rebounding team, pretty good scoring team, but our shot selection is still something we're working through. The number one thing is to get that field goal percentage defense number down."

With nine games left in conference play, the Gaels sit in firm control of the No. 2 spot in the WCC, but it's a tough conference and the tides can turn at any moment.

"It will depend on these last games," said Bennett. "The big thing is if we keep improving through January and February. If we do, we're going to be a good team. If we stay the same, we'll be okay, but this team has room to improve."

The Saint Mary's men's basketball team (16-4, 8-1 WCC) is off to an unexpectedly hot start this year, despite some big changes in the roster.

This past week, the team bounced back from a 68-47 loss at No. 3 Gonzaga on Jan. 21 by beating Portland 74-64 on Jan. 23, notching their eighth conference win of the season.

"The reason we're in this position is our seniors have been great," said head coach Randy Bennett. "Garrett Jackson's turned himself into a player, and then Brad (Waldow) and Kerry (Carter) were ready to go."

Rounding out this year's starting five are senior transfers Aaron Bright (Stanford) and Desmond Simmons (Washington).

"Aaron and Des had to get adjusted," said Bennett. "But those five have been able to give us the confidence, the toughness, the leadership, the experience to be where we're at."

Saint Mary's opened the season winning five straight before losing to Boise State on Dec. 6. They squeaked by Creighton 71-67 in overtime and then lost two straight to Northern Arizona and No.



Senior Kerry Carter is a leader for the Gaels.

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