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## SMC to Face Tough Opponent

By Michael Sakoda



Lauren Nicholson Photos Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's women's basketball team will face BYU in one of its biggest games of the regular season. On Thursday, the Gaels take on the Cougars (19-5, 11-2 WCC) to stay in contention for the WCC title. The game is even more important for Saint Mary's after the team lost to Pacific 61-48 for the second time this season (17-6, 9-3 WCC) on Saturday.

The Gaels (16-7, 9-3 WCC) have only lost consecutive games once this season, and they've followed up their last two losses, Pacific on Jan. 10 and Gonzaga on Jan. 22, with two and three game winning streaks, so Thursday's game should be a battle.

"After a loss, you become focused," said head coach Paul Thomas. "[We] have a tendency to pay more attention to the details of why we lost a game, if we lost because of rebounding, lost

because we didn't take good shots, lost because we missed free throws, all of our players are going to pay attention to that detail."

Saturday's game at Pacific gives Thomas' team a few goals to keep in mind: defend the paint, defend the three, and rebound the basketball. Saint Mary's failed to convert a single one of their five 3-point attempts while the Tigers knocked down 10 in the game.

"[They're] just a tough matchup for us," said Thomas. "We, at times, struggle defending the drive, and that's what they do well. And we struggle to defend the kind of post player they have."

Kendall Kenyon, Pacific's 6-foot-2 forward, was critical down the stretch during the Tigers' overtime road win at Saint Mary's on Jan. 11, and she played big again Saturday, going for 12 points on four of five shooting, with a game-high 17 rebounds and two blocks.

The Gaels managed to outrebound Pacific, 38-37, despite Kenyon's efforts, but the one rebound margin is 10 short of their plus-11 season average, and Thomas knows they'll need to be nothing shy of perfect to beat a tough BYU team.

"BYU spreads you out," said Thomas. "[Morgan] Bailey, is strong and physical, tough to guard one-on-one, so if you help down on her, she's good enough to find the open person, and that gets you rotating and helping, and helping the helper, and that's how they're successful offensively."

Bailey is averaging just shy of 19 points per game to go with just over 11 rebounds per game, so the Gaels' front court is going to have their hands full on the defensive end, but it's the Gaels' offense that Thomas says will need to step up to come out of the game with a win.

"They make it tough for you to score," he said. "At times we have scored easily, but overall this year we've had difficulty scoring. We've been efficient, but we've also made some tough shots, and that's going to eventually catch up to us."

As the regular season winds down in a WCC conference with virtually no separation, the Gaels find themselves in the fourth seed with a 9-3 record (Pacific holds the tie-breaker), but could jump as high as No. 2 with a win on Feb. 12.



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