

Published March 11th, 2015

Saint Mary's Loses in WCC Quarterfinals

By Michael Sakoda



Carli Rosenthal Photos Tod Fierner

Like the fate of those in casinos around Orleans Arena in Las Vegas, the basketball teams of Saint Mary's College seemed to have had the odds stacked against them for a shot at the NCAA tournament.

The women's team wrapped up their season with a 20-9 record (13-5 WCC) earning the No. 4 seed in the WCC tournament. The Gaels drew a tough quarterfinal showdown with BYU on March 5.

It was a thriller, featuring 18 lead changes, several within the last two minutes, but BYU's Lexi Eaton dropped in the game winner with two seconds left, sealing a 65-64 heartbreaker for the Gaels.

"We really tried, and sometimes that just happens," said senior Carli Rosenthal, who finished with 14 points (4-4 FG; 6-6 FT), 12 rebounds.

Trailing 63-62 with under a minute to go, Rosenthal came up with a steal, and scored a put-back on the ensuing possession, giving Saint Mary's a 64-63 lead with 19 seconds left, but Eaton would get the final shot.

"Carli makes a play ... and the bench is going crazy. Seconds later, they make a play. That's what college basketball is all about," said head coach Paul Thomas. "Unfortunately, one team had to go home."

The Gaels turned heads this season, and Thomas was one of three coaches to be named WCC Co-Head Coach of the Year, while freshman Stella Beck was named WCC Newcomer of the Year, juniors Lauren Nicholson and Shannon Mauldin were named to the all-WCC first and second teams, and Rosenthal was named honorable mention all-league.

The men's team rounded out the regular season with a 21-8 record (13-5 WCC), good enough for the No. 3 seed in the WCC tournament, but a hungry Portland team proved to be too much for the Gaels on March 7.

The Pilots took a 32-26 lead into the locker room at the half, and it only got worse from there, as the Gaels squad was routed 69-52.

"I didn't push the right buttons to have them play well," said head coach Randy Bennett. "No excuses."

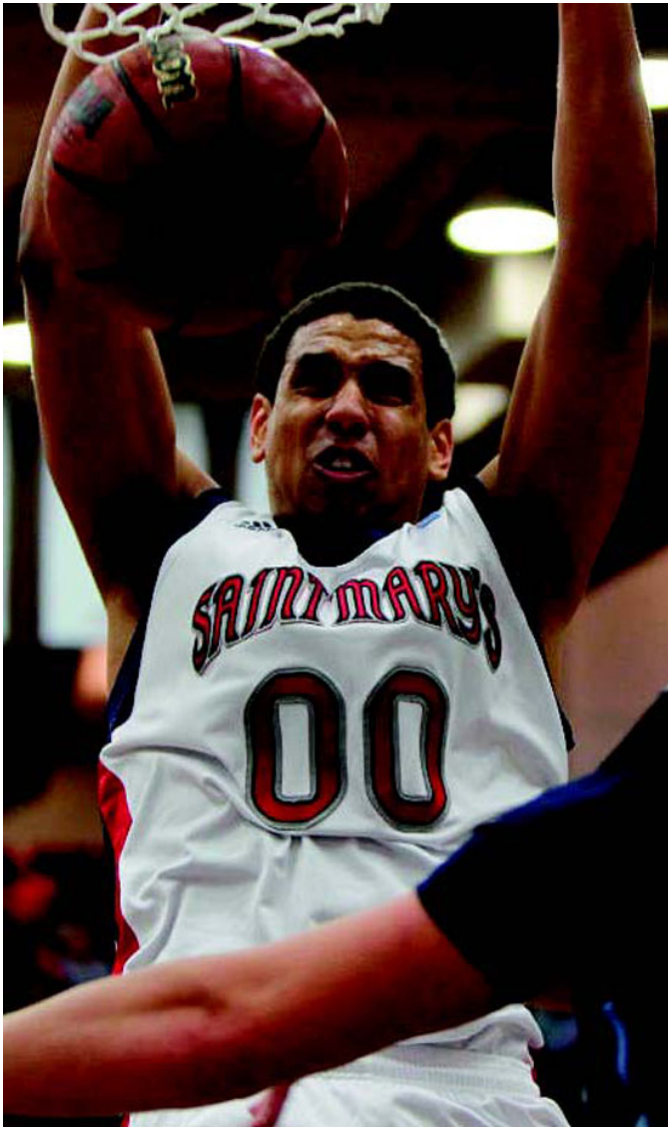
Portland beat Saint Mary's in just about every way, outshooting SMC 50 percent to 30 percent, out rebounding the Gaels 31-30 despite a considerable size disadvantage, and handing out 11 assists to the Gaels' four.

"We didn't come out with the normal energy and passion," said senior Brad Waldow, the only Gael to put up strong numbers (25 points, 8 rebounds).

Waldow's hard work didn't go unnoticed this season, as he and Kerry Carter were named to

the WCC's first team, with senior Aaron Bright earning an all-league honorable mention, and Emmett Naar being selected to the WCC's Freshman Team. Accolades aside, this loss could cost the Gaels a shot at the NCAA Tournament, a disappointing end to an incredible season.

For now, Bennett, Thomas, and their teams will have to keep their fingers crossed, waiting to find out if the cards hold a postseason berth.



Brad Waldow

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