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Saint Mary's Bows Out of NIT in Opening Round

By Karl Buscheck



Brad Waldow Photo Tod Fierner

For Saint Mary's, the final game of the year was a microcosm of the season. On March 18, in the opening round of the NIT, the Gaels jumped out to a fast start, but ultimately couldn't keep up.

"I feel like we just ran out of gas towards the end of the season," said senior forward Brad Waldow after the team lost 75-64 to Vanderbilt at McKeon Pavilion on March 18. Waldow had a big night, grabbing 13 boards and contributing 12 points to move into fourth place on the school's all-time scoring list.

On the year, Saint Mary's posted a 21-10 record, but the squad was on the wrong side of the score line in its final three contests.

"It's tough to finish with three losses in a row," said head coach Randy Bennett. "That hurt us. You don't like going out like that. You remember seasons how you finish. So, that leaves

a bad taste in our mouth, but the overall body of work [was] pretty good."

The night began promisingly, as Saint Mary's claimed a 19-12 lead after 10 minutes of play. The Commodores then proceeded to rip off a 10-0 run, and the visitors never looked back.

The shots weren't falling for the hosts, and it didn't help that Saint Mary's failed to protect the ball. "The first half we had 10 turnovers," said Bennett. "And that was pretty much the difference in the game."

The Gaels also ran up against a quality opponent: "We brought it. We just got beat by a team that was better than us tonight," said Bennett. "They're playing like an NCAA tournament team right now. We've seen a few."

Forward Garrett Jackson led the way with 23 points and Bennett was impressed with the senior both on the court and off it. "I thought Garrett made some huge strides as a player. I was really proud of what he's done. Unselfish as a leader. Not many guys come as far as he has."

The playoffs lasted just one game, but it was the eighth year in a row that Saint Mary's earned a postseason berth. "It's hard to do," said Bennett of the accomplishment. "I want those guys to understand that. For them to get into the NIT, it's tough."

With seniors like Jackson and Waldow departing, keeping that streak alive now falls to the young players. "Who's going to be the guys who step up and be your all-league type players because we need those," said Bennett. "I could guess who they are, but they haven't done it. They got to do it. We just got to pound the rock. Work hard. And, I think, we will."

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