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## SMC Men's Soccer Seeks Consistency as WCC Play Looms

By Karl Buscheck



Freshman Stephen Dougherty (18) and senior Will Kendall celebrate Dougherty's first career goal vs Canisius Photo Tod Fierner

done well. It's been mostly on the road. Some long road trips and the guys have responded relatively well, but we need to find more consistency."

Early on, the Gaels have had mixed results on the road. To open up the season, the team dropped a pair of games at the John Rennie Nike Invitational at Koskinen Stadium in Durham, North Carolina. On Aug. 28, Saint Mary's lost 3-2 to Duke, the tournament host. A couple of days later, the Gaels fell 1-0 to Elon.

After picking up a pair of home wins over La Salle (3-2) on Sept. 4 and over Canisius (1-0) on Sept. 6, the Gaels split a two-game trip to Missouri. On Sept. 11, Saint Mary's lost 1-0 to Missouri State on an overtime penalty kick. The Gaels followed up that disappointing defeat with an overtime thriller of their own on Sept. 13. In the 101st minute, senior Will Kendall poured in a penalty to hand the Gaels a 2-1 win over Oral Roberts University.

On Sept. 18, in the team's return to Moraga, a lack of consistency doomed the Gaels to a 4-1 defeat at the hands of Cal State University Northridge.

"I think the score was misleading," Cooper said. "I think we played all right except for a seven-minute span there."

The Gaels jumped out to a 1-0 advantage in the 23rd minute, but the lead would be brief. Beginning in the 25th minute, CSUN crashed in three goals over a seven-minute stretch and the visitors never looked back.

As WCC play approaches - Saint Mary's opens its conference schedule by hosting Pacific on Oct. 11 - the Gaels will need to figure out who will be leading the attack. In the first eight games, eight players have found the back of the net and only freshman Stephen Dougherty and senior Will Kendall have scored more than once - they have two goals apiece.

"That's a good and bad thing sometimes," Cooper said. "At least we're scoring them by

The Saint Mary's men's soccer team has big plans for 2015.

"I mean we expect to challenge for the conference championship - that's for sure," Head Coach Adam Cooper said.

Cooper and his squad have a right to be confident, as the Gaels are returning eight starters from a 2014 team that set the program record for most wins overall and in West Coast Conference play.

"Whether we finish first, second or third - I don't know," Cooper said. "But we're going to challenge for that conference championship - that's for sure."

The rest of the conference expects a strong showing from the Gaels too, as WCC coaches tabbed Saint Mary's to finish second. For his part, Cooper knows games - let alone conference titles - aren't won on paper.

"Paper doesn't play, right?" Cooper chuckled.

As Saint Mary's (3-4-1) navigates the non-conference slate, there's no question what the team's central issue has been.

"[We've been] inconsistent," Cooper said.

"We've played some good games. The guys have

committee. If we keep scoring them by committee, whatever works. But we also need a guy to step up and score some goals."

Kendall scored an equalizer in the 56th minute of Sunday's match against UC Riverside, the Gaels' first draw of the season (the Gaels outshot their opponent 20-14).

While sorting out the offense remains a work in progress, Cooper also knows that the squad has to do whatever it can to cut out the mental errors that have been hampering the Gaels in non-conference play.

"Consistency. [That's the] bottom line for us," Cooper said when asked what the team needs to do to meet its lofty preseason expectations. "We've got to be more consistent. That's the No. 1 thing right now."

Reach the reporter at: [info@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:info@lamorindaweekly.com)

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