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## Campo Girls Volleyball Lose NCS Final, Make Strong CIF Run

By Emily Dugdale



Kristen Sibley

Photos Gint Federas

Despite a thrilling third set comeback, the Campolindo Cougars (12-0, 25-12) fell to Bishop O'Dowd (8-0, 26-12) 3-0 in the NCS championship match Saturday Nov. 21.

The Lady Cougars – who were also runners-up in last year's NCS champions – couldn't make up for a game characterized by unforced errors. Despite key players putting up big numbers – junior Jaime Brown had 16 assists and 10 digs, Kristen Sibley nailed 10 kills and 11 digs and junior Sabrina Smith had 8 kills – the team couldn't recover after two shaky sets.

The Dragons ultimately clinched the title after battling out the final few points in an intense third set (18-25, 19-25, 24-26).

The championship was the first time that Campo and Bishop O'Dowd had met this season, and the crowd loved it: parents joined the students in standing on the bleachers and cheering till the final point. In the rousing semifinals on Nov. 18, the Lady Cougars defeated rival Acalanes

in three straight sets (18-25, 22-25, 14-25).

John Vuong, Campo head coach, called the NCS championship loss "disappointing."

"O'Dowd came out to play, and they did," Vuong said as the crowd spilled onto the court after the final set point. "If we had taken out all of our unforced errors, I think the outcome of the game would have been different," he added before joining his tearful team to accept their runner-up award.

The team finished with 27 team

kills, 11 blocks, 31 digs and 27 assists.

By finishing in the top two in NCS the Lady Cougars earned a berth in the CIF State Tournament – the Cougars were the only Lamorinda team to earn a berth in this year's inaugural tournament.

When speaking of his team's preparation before their first state match, Vuong made his goal clear. "We need to refocus," he said. "We need to continue to work on our technical skills and minimize our unforced errors."

Vuong added that the teams Campo would meet at state are "all pretty good."

"We have to play our best game every night," he said.

The Lady Cougars entered the tournament as the fourth seed. They kicked off the tournament on Nov. 24 with a win against Christian Brothers in a score of 3-1 (25-18, 20-25, 25-21, 25-19).

"We knew playing CB was not going to be easy," said Vuong after their victory. The Lady Cougars barely beat the Falcons at the Super 8 tournament earlier this year. "They are fast in the back and played great defense," he said.

Despite a tough opponent, Campo cruised to victory in their first state match. "We maintained our focus throughout the matches and (were) not worried what the scores said. Our serves were tough and threw them out of systems throughout the night," said Vuong.

The Lady Cougars fell to No. 1 seed Valley Christian on Nov. 28 (25-16, 25-17, 25-20) in the NorCal semifinals.



## Saint Mary's Basketball Teams off to Promising Start

By Dean Boerner



Joe Rahon

Photos Tod Fierner

Both Saint Mary's basketball teams are projected to be top-four finishers in the WCC, but they couldn't be more different. The men are young and have a perimeter-oriented offense, while the women are replete with veterans looking to score in the paint.

Through their first three contests, the men are scoring at a torrid pace, putting up 82 points per game at a .542 field goal percentage. The composition of head coach Randy Bennet's team is almost completely different from last year, as the Gaels lost their entire starting lineup to graduation.

Consequently, younger players, like sophomore Emmett Naar have had to step up. "My role has increased leadership-wise and I've had to take on a bigger role scoring," Naar said. The sophomore guard is scoring a team-high 19 points per game.

Naar has shared the great majority of ball-handling duties early on with Joe Rahon, a junior transfer from Boston College. Naar and Rahon have been the Gaels' offensive spark-plugs, yielding 18 and 21 assists respectively, while no other player on the team has more than three.

With the entirety of Saint Mary's starting lineup last season graduated, other players are taking on more responsibility. This has led to the emergence of a young core of post players consisting of Evan Fitzner, Jock Landale, and Jordan Hunter.

"Guys who didn't have as big of a role last year have stepped up," Naar explained. "It's definitely very different going from one of the oldest starting lineups in college basketball to now one of the youngest ones."

Evan Fitzner, one of the upstart Gaels, credits past players like Brad Waldow and Desmond Simmons for his transition into the starting lineup as a redshirt freshman. "I think it really helped just learning from those guys last year, says Fitzner, who's averaging 10.7 points per game thus far. With three wins already under their belt, including a convincing 78-61 victory over Stanford Nov. 22, in Moraga, the Gaels will look to push perennial WCC frontrunner Gonzaga later in the season.

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Evan Fitzner

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