

Published September 20th, 2017

High hopes for Gaels men's soccer

By Gerardo Recinos



This season is going to be a journey for the Saint Mary's College men's soccer team - not just in the hyperbolic sports-speak sense of the word, but in actual miles traveled.

In order to make it toward the top of the West Coast Conference league table, the Gaels' men will need to get through what coach Adam Cooper is calling "one of the toughest road trips in the country," among many other challenges facing the young team.

And to make matters worse, the Saint Mary's men have started the season off in less than desirable fashion, placing that much more importance on how they play outside of Moraga.

Filippo Zattarin Photos Tod Fierner

although the slow start isn't ideal, he's got proof that they can turn it around.

"We've got a pretty resilient group," Cooper said of the players on his team. The 12th-year head coach said that

"We started off in a similar fashion last year as well, and we were able to put it together and get results," he said. "I'm not discouraged by any stretch of the imagination."

And why would he be?

After starting last season's campaign with only a single win in their opening six contests, the Gaels were able to finish in the top half of the West Coast Conference.

That resurgence itself from a team full of underclassmen stepping into important roles shows that this team is one that's going to continue to grow together as they log more time on the pitch.

Players like freshman Filippo Zattarin have immediately stepped into the fold. The Italian transfer has made it into every one of Cooper's teamsheets so far this season, and has yet to come off the pitch for the Gaels.

"Last year we brought in 10 or 11 guys, and this year we brought in another 11 or 12 guys," Cooper said.

Right now what the two-time WCC coach of the year sees is a team that's lacking the killer instinct to finish the chances they're creating.

But that's what leaves the team with high hopes.

They're doing the difficult part, creating chances from the middle of the park. What's currently plaguing the team is what Cooper called the killer instinct.

"It's really in the 18-yard box that we need to do a better job," Cooper said. "We kind of need to reward ourselves for that hard work in possession."

That too can be put down to the continued meshing of younger players with less experience, and guys who have played together for multiple years. While young upstart players have been doing a job for Cooper this season, it wouldn't be as effective without the stability provided by players like Fred Karman.

Karman has been a vocal leader for the team, as has Acalanes graduate Max Mirner in the midfield. The two are the team's captains, and both are having excellent seasons as older role models and leaders for the club - all necessary to form a cohesive unit that can not only finish in terms of scoring, but finish in terms of dictating the program's overall success this season.

With a tough schedule leading up to conference play that includes successive road games in Colorado, the Gaels should be battle-tested by the time they arrive in Spokane on Oct. 7 to take on Gonzaga and it will be 20 days until they play a home game in WCC play.

By that time the fate of their season can be decided.

"I think that's an advantage," Cooper said. "At the end of the day you still want to get results, but as we move into conference that's a challenge."

"I think the West Coast Conference is better from top to bottom than it has been in the last 10 years," he said.



Frederick Karman



Max Mirner

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