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# LAMORINDA SPORTS

## Saint Mary's Men's Soccer performs as a whole

By Jon Kingdon



Steve Dougherty

Photo Tod Fierner

When an athlete performs to his absolute maximum on the field, it's called "being in the zone." It's not a common event but neither is it a rarity. Seldom is it when a team as a whole performs in said zone. Such is the case with the Saint Mary's Men's Soccer Team this year. The Gaels have won their first 13 games and are the only Division I soccer team that is undefeated and untied, which includes the women's teams as well.

Currently ranked sixth nationally, it's the first time since 2014 Saint Mary's has been ranked at all. Still, the team is taking it in stride says Cooper: "Everyone is in form and the guys are just treating every day like professionals. I know they are enjoying it and are humbled by it and we now have a target on our back. We can only control what we can control."

The team's record is all the more impressive as they were coming off a 6-6-5 record in 2017. Saint Mary's head coach Adam Cooper attributes the im-

provement to the growth of the team: "When you look at our record, a lot of it comes down to maturity. A lot of the ties from last season are now becoming wins as the players have grown in the game."

Still, the team has only one true senior, Steve Dougherty, along with seven juniors (two redshirt juniors) and 18 freshmen and sophomores. Cooper admits that "this is still a relatively young team but a number of the juniors are in their third year as starters. I'm not afraid to play freshmen. I want the best 11 players on the field and the young players have to be ready and get the experience."

Cooper is starting two of the 11 freshmen on the team: midfielder Sebastian Schacht and defender James Person with still other freshmen getting significant playing time. Says Cooper: "They are learning quickly though they will make some mistakes but the older players are good at leading the team."

Mark Twain said that there are

lies, damned lies and statistics. However, with Saint Mary's, it's a case where the statistics tell the story. Last year the Saint Mary's offense averaged 1.41 goals per game. This year they are averaging 3.15 goals per game. The defense has been even better. In the goal, junior Remi Prieur has only given up four goals for a miniscule 0.31 goals per game with 11 shutouts.

It's not just Prieur's physical skills, it's the intangibles as well, says Cooper: "Remi is a great leader in the back. He is vocal in organizing our team. He organizes the defense and comes up big when needed."

Assistant coach Josh Duffy attributes the success of the defense to the unit as a whole: "The back line, Filippo Zattarin, James Person, Valentin Spomer and Jeremiah Michael, have all stepped up this year." In a classic team performance by the defense in their opening league game last week, a 4-0 win over Pacific, Prieur did not have to make a single save. Pacific took all of three shots the entire game and in fact got no shots off in the second half.

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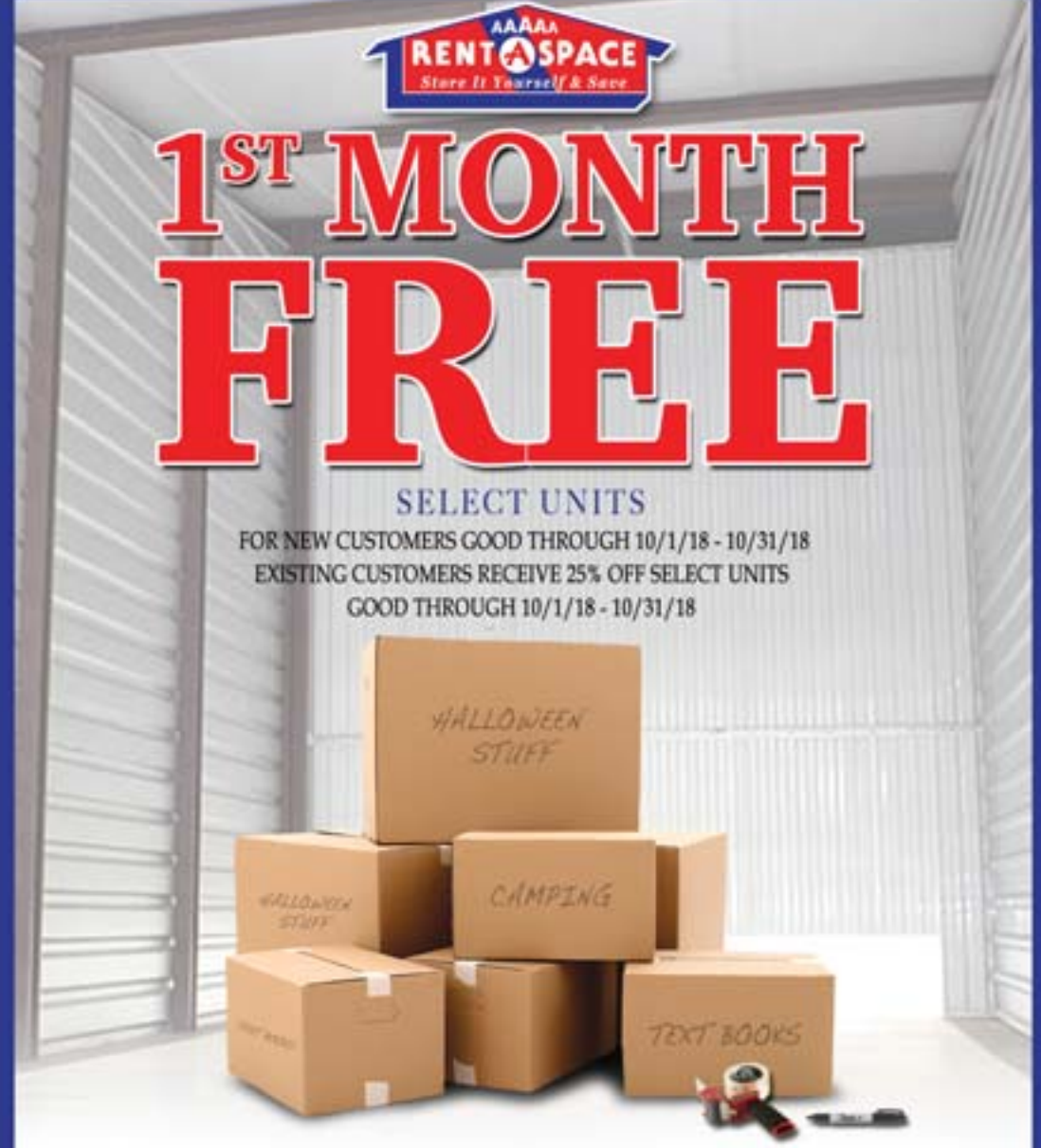
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