

Published April 29th, 2020

Four years of basketball excellence for Jordan Ford at SMC

By Jon Kingdon



Jordan Ford Photo Gint Federas

After a 26-8 regular season record, the Saint Mary's basketball team was preparing to learn who they were going to play in the National Collegiate Athletic Association tournament. At the same time, senior guard Jordan Ford, who was averaging 21.9 points per game this season, was on the verge of becoming the all-time leading scorer for the Gaels. Ford was trailing Matthew Dellavedova, who scored 1,933 points from 2009 to 2013, by four points, only to find out that due to the coronavirus, the rest of the season was being canceled.

Though there was some frustration for Ford, his first concern wasn't about his personal goals. "What was more frustrating was that we couldn't play in the NCAA tournament, not my being the leading career scorer at Saint Mary's because I know that I would have broken the scoring record," he said. "There's nothing I could do about it and I don't dwell on it, but it would have been cool to have passed someone like Dellavedova who is a Saint Mary's legend."

SMC head coach Randy Bennett was also disappointed for Ford but appreciated how he handled the situation. "He was so classy at not getting the scoring championship," he said. "You would never know it was on his mind but I'm sure he knew. We weren't even paying attention to it but when they canceled the season, they told me Jordan only needed four more points. I was like, 'Can it get any worse?' It would have been cool if he had that record because that was what he was really good at - scoring. We'll have to put an asterisk next to his name because he would have gotten that record."

As a senior at Folsom High School, Ford was named second team all-state by MaxPreps and was a two-time Sacramento Bee Player of the Year and a three-time all-NorCal selection after finishing his career averaging 19.7 points per game. It was not cut and dried that Ford would attend Saint Mary's. "Jordan had a number of schools that were recruiting him," Bennett said. "It was between us, California, Oregon and UC Santa Barbara."

As it is for most freshmen, playing at a Division I school was not an easy transition for Ford. "It was quite an adjustment in terms of getting my game ready on the defensive end and slowing the game down on the offensive end in my head, as I was too quick for my own good."

It was also a challenge to learn the Randy Bennett system: "It took a while for me to learn all of the plays. The other three freshman (Tommy Kuhse, Elijah Thomas and Jock Perry) and I would watch the upperclassmen and learn on the fly and then go back over it with each other. I also had to get used to the size of the other players. Everyone played good defense and I had to find a way to work around that."

Ford averaged 5.7 minutes a game as a freshman and only scored 2.4 points per game. "We had two very good starters in Joe Rahon and Emmett Naar so Jordan did not get as many minutes as I had anticipated he would get," said Bennett. "He improved his strength, his defense and moving to his left. His best role was as a scorer and when the ball was in his hands."

The talent of the upperclassmen was not lost on Ford: "Being able to watch players like Joe Rahon, who was a fantastic leader, Emmett Naar, Jock Landale and Calvin Hermanson really helped all of us. You just wanted to follow in their lead, to not mess it up and help them in any way we could."

It was toward the end of his sophomore year when it began to come together for Ford: "I started to build my confidence with each game and the team began to have confidence in me to make plays. As a sophomore, I was just a piece of the puzzle playing with Jock, Emmett and Calvin. My scoring improved towards the end of that season." Ford would go on to become the first Saint Mary's player to score more than 700 points for two seasons, his junior and senior year.

It was as a junior that it became Ford's team to lead, said Bennett. "The fact that Jordan paid attention those first two years enabled him to be a tremendous leader his junior and senior year. He was a little bit quiet but with his leadership style, he was very effective and unselfish, holding the team and himself accountable. He was always positive with his teammates and never got down on any of them."

It certainly helped that there was a great mutual respect between Ford and Bennett. "Coach Bennett did a

great job with me. He always told me what I needed to work on and helped me get to where I am, especially as a shooter, making sure my footwork was right and shooting the ball correctly. He would also work with me on going to my left more and he said that he would figure out a way to get that done. It was one of those relationships where he had no problem saying what he needed from me and if I had an issue that I wanted to bring to him, I felt comfortable going into his office and expressing that."

The respect Bennett has for Ford goes beyond his ability as an athlete: "Jordan's a great human being, with a great attitude and was really easy to coach. You could coach him hard and he would take the parts he needed out of what you said to him and transfer it to his game. You want a player like that. He would tell me what was on his mind in the right way. I respected that he had enough self-confidence and he would never go out of bounds with it. He was great that way. I cannot remember a game where he wasn't ready and did not bring his best effort. There were not a lot of guys that you could say that about. I knew that in big games he was going to bring it to another level."

With the campus closed, Ford is back in Folsom with his parents and taking his final class, a communications project on mental training and how it effects your performance. He will be receiving his degree in Communications in late May. "Right now, I'm staying locked down and shooting in my backyard," said Ford. "I've been able to find some gyms here and there and making sure I'm not getting any exposure to the coronavirus."

Ford is hoping to follow in the footsteps of former Gaels Dellavedova and Patty Mills to play professional basketball. "I want to play in the NBA and I'm working very hard to prepare for that now. The process is a little different this year. It will probably be limited or no workouts for the players. The NBA draft combine could get canceled or pushed back. All teams can do right now is set up interview calls. I had my first interview call with the San Antonio Spurs, which was really cool, and will be talking soon with Utah and Denver."

Bennett sees the NBA as a realistic goal for Ford: "I have been contacted by a number of teams about Jordan and he has a good reputation with the NBA scouts. I've had enough of them contact me and I can tell there's a buzz about him. The more they get to know him, the more they are going to like him. He is still only 21, which is young for a college senior. He's going to get stronger and he will keep getting better as a player. He reminds me a lot of Patty Mills (who was drafted in the second round in 2009 by Portland and has played 10 seasons, and is currently on the San Antonio Spurs' roster) as a scoring point guard. I think he has a good chance to make it."

Ford took his academics seriously from the start: "It was just a matter of prioritizing my time correctly and making sure I stayed on top of my schoolwork and staying organized. There were outlets for me to go to and get help if I needed it. The best part about college, I would like to say, was just meeting all the great people at Saint Mary's, from the students and the fans after the games and having all of the relationships I built with my teammates and the coaching staff, which will last forever."

It was during the final team meeting, when the team learned that the rest of the season was being canceled, where the real meaning of what the last four years of playing at Saint Mary's meant to Ford: "It was frustrating not to finish out the season because we had worked so hard to get where we were. To not be able finish out something that meant so much to us, it was a disappointing time because we believed we could have made some legitimate noise in the tournament. We were all in shock at what was going on. Despite that, everyone was showing love to each other, especially to the seniors."

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