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Saint Mary's rugby outlasts Cal 38-34

By Jon Kingdon



Joe Marchant Photos Karen Drinkwater

There are rivalries and there are rivalries, but for the Saint Mary's and Cal rugby fans, there is no comparison to their annual games on the pitch. Chase Jones, a player on last year's Saint Mary's team, now playing professionally, carries that sentiment with him. "Cal-Stanford football doesn't even compare to this rivalry which really runs deep," Jones said.

With the Saint Mary's grass field deemed unplayable, the game was moved to Cal's field turf, losing Saint Mary's homefield advantage. "It's a different game on turf, especially with an oblong shaped ball," Saint Mary's head coach Tim O'Brien said.

For Jones, it didn't matter where he played against Cal. "Whenever we played at Cal, it gave me an opportunity to show them up on their home turf. I was always more hyped up for that game than any other I played."

Saint Mary's jumped out to a 12-0 lead and led by 27-19 at the half. After 17 minutes in the second half, Cal went ahead 34-26, but two scores by Saint Mary's with 16 and 14 minutes left in the game, clinched the Saint Mary's victory 38-24.

The Gaels' victory over Cal last year was in the national semifinals game. This penultimate game of the regular season did have playoff implications for both teams. "We're going to be in the playoffs because we're going to win our league," O'Brien said. "Twelve teams will be in the playoffs and the top four teams get a first-round bye. With this win, we should be getting a bye."

In what was a team effort on both offense and defense, Mario Storti, Inoke Waqaveski and Joe Marchant all came up with big plays. "Mario's score at the end of the first half was a pretty cool play that came out of nowhere," O'Brien said. "Inoke is a baller who was only playing just his third game at scrum half and had a great game. Joe who made a beautiful breakout run was pretty remarkable on defense."

After the two early scores, O'Brien was disappointed in the way Cal took advantage of Saint Mary's mistakes: "The game was more exciting than it needed to be. For the first 20 minutes, we were really hitting on the right cylinders but Cal is so athletic and when we made a couple of errors and missed a couple of tackles - doomsday."

O'Brien kept things on an even keel all week in practice and anticipates an even better performance if they were to face Cal in the playoffs. "We tried to not overhype the Saint Mary's - Cal thing," O'Brien said. "I just wanted to come here and just get a taste of it because if things go well for us, we'll see Cal again, and we did not want to blow it all out now. We can be better because we wasted a lot of opportunities. We'd make a good run and then chuck the ball away. We did not capitalize on enough of our breaks to come away with points."

The post-game self-analysis for O'Brien is something that he looks forward to. "One of the reasons I love rugby is because it's a problem-solving activity," O'Brien said. "We're trying to solve problems like invading their space and coming away with points. There's a lot of great lessons that came out of our game today."

Games like these are just what the game needs, according to O'Brien: "I think it's great for college rugby to have this type of rivalry. College rugby needs this; high school rugby needs this; U.S. rugby needs this. The United States is hosting the World Cup in eight years and we're not even in this year's World Cup. Enthusiasm drives everything. When people get to watch the sport and have people that they follow and kids see players that they follow, to me it just makes nothing but perfect sense."



Mario Storti Photos Karen Drinkwater



Inoke Waqavesi Photos Karen Drinkwater

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