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Cammon named Saint Mary's women's head basketball coach

By Jon Kingdon



Jeff Cammon Photo Jon Kingdon

After the Saint Mary's women's basketball team finished the season with an interim coach and a final record of 13-18, Athletic Director Mike Matoso wasted little time in hiring Jeff Cammon to be the Gaels' new head coach.

Cammon was a three-year starting point guard at Alcorn State University where he graduated with a bachelor's degree in political science in 2003 and a master's degree in physical education in 2005. Cammon comes to Saint Mary's from Long Beach State, where for the last six years he has been the women's head coach, having led the 2021-22 (19-9) and the 2022-23 teams (23-9) to the Women's National Invitational Tournament and was named the Big West Coach of the Year this past season.

Matoso used a search firm and reached out to Cammon and it was Saint Mary's and Matoso himself that won him over. "It's such a great community here and the academics are second to none," Cammon said. "Mike Matoso wants to win. He's very creative and forward thinking and he's put in the work in creating a high-level athletic department. The facilities and resources for all of the programs are not happening at a lot of schools similar to Saint Mary's. Mike and his staff are willing to do what it takes to compete at a high level. He painted the vision and the potential that he saw here, and my wife and I saw it as well. The men's team under Randy

Bennett has competed at a high level and I really believe that the women's program can create that type of environment and culture."

"We are thrilled to announce Jeff Cammon as our new head women's basketball coach. His resume speaks for itself with the success that he's had here in California and everywhere he's been at the NCAA level," said Matoso. "We welcome him into the Gael family and are excited for the future of the program under his leadership."

? Cammon sees himself as a teacher in his role as a coach, something which was imbued in him from his parents and siblings. "I come from a family of educators and when you're around it all the time, it's in you," Cammon said. "Both of my parents are teachers, I have a sister who's a principal, another sister who's an English teacher and one who is in childcare. My older brother was a high school basketball coach, and my younger brother is a trainer. It's all about servitude and giving back. Obviously, it's my passion for basketball and sports in general, but it's also a great way to serve, to be able to impact lives through something that you love."

Cammon was not quick to forget his time and the people at Long Beach State and the first thing he did after accepting the offer to come to Saint Mary's was to contact the people he had worked so closely with the past six years. "I spoke with the administration, my team and staff, the boosters and donors and those conversations were very tough," Cammon said. "I love Long Beach State and I let them know that I'd be taking on a new challenge and opening up a new page in this journey of life."

As for his arrival at Saint Mary's, Cammon is hitting the ground running. "The first thing I did was talk to the team and get to know them a little bit," Cammon said. "We have amazing young ladies in the locker room but there's work to do as far as creating and building the team. We have to put the pieces together and figure out how we can go into next year and be ready to compete at a high level."

There's also the matter of recruiting and putting a staff together. "I want to make sure we're bringing in players that are the right fit," Cammon said. "Right now, we just want to evaluate and assess, and we'll figure out what we need to field a top team this year. I may keep some of the current staff and I may bring in assistants from my staff at Long Beach. I just want to make sure that we're doing our due diligence. I have some great people in mind and we're going to put a great staff together."

Like Paul Thomas before him, Cammon will not be overlooking Australia as fertile ground for basketball talent: "When I started at Long Beach State, I did not have ties in Australia so I just got myself a ticket and went over there to see the Under 20's and Under 18 teams and I was able to meet some amazing people. I

had two Australians on the Long Beach roster last year and had already signed two more for next year's class. Saint Mary's has a brand over there. Coach Bennett has done a great job bringing in some great talent from Australia and I look forward to continuing recruiting over there and showing them that it's a great benefit for them to be here."

Cammon describes himself as a hard hat, blue collar type of coach which can be seen in how his teams played at Long Beach State: "I'm a defensive minded coach. My teams at Long Beach have been really good defensively, particularly the last three years (57.4, 57.3, 59.5 points allowed). I love basketball and I love learning. So, my job is to take all that knowledge and put our players in position to be successful. The teams I've coached are gritty, play hard and are not going to be outworked. The last three years, we used matchups, multiple zones and presses that kept our opponents off balance. We want to dictate the game and that's how we've played since I've been a head coach."

As a team, Long Beach ranked in the Top 10 nationally in steals per game (11.5) and turnover margin (6.1), long an Achilles heel for Saint Mary's. "We just put a lot of time into it and put the players in situations where we make it harder for them in every practice so when they're put in those situations in a game, they will be composed," Cammon said. "We have to have guards who are tough enough to handle the pressure and skilled enough to make the right plays on the offensive end of the floor."

On offense, it's a matter of adjusting to the type of personnel on the roster. "We want to share the basketball and play together," Cammon said. "We want to get up and down the floor playing fast but under control. I'm more of a motion coach but I'm flexible and when I've had some teams where I couldn't run motion, we ran more sets to be able to take care of the basketball and put our players in the right positions. I've been fortunate enough, on the men's and women's teams where I've been an assistant coach, to have been mentored by some great coaches so it's not necessarily hard for my teams to adjust if we have to."

What is Cammon looking for from the Saint Mary's players? "It's important that they be coachable. It can be tough when you being told to run harder and be held accountable but it makes you better. There's no secret formula. The players have to want to put in the work. We're going to create that here and hopefully we can do that sooner than later. I have much respect for all the coaches that have come through here and I'm just privileged and blessed to be able to come in and take on where they left off."

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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