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Gaels Gear Up for WCC Play

By Michael Sakoda



Matthew Dellavedova has the most three-pointers in SMC history. Photos Tod Fierner

Over the past five seasons, Saint Mary's men's basketball has a record of 142-38 and only Kansas, Duke, North Carolina and Memphis have done better, so expectations are high for this team.

"There probably are (expectations)," Bennett said. "We don't like to talk about them... but I'd much rather be dealing with that, than dealing things teams deal with when they haven't been winning."

The Gaels began this season going 9-3, losing to Pacific, Georgia Tech and Northern Iowa. Bennett noted that the team needs to continue to improve.

"This team's not where we were at the end of last year," he explained. "We have a lot of room to improve."

"If we do things right...this team has a chance to be very good. We're not a finished product; we're not close to a finished product," he added.

Losing Rob Jones has left the Gaels with big shoes to fill in the front court. "Beau Levesque and Mitch Young are playing that spot," Bennett said. "They're getting better and better, but...we miss Rob's leadership, his toughness, his defense...hopefully they can replace that."

Despite losing Jones, the Gaels have a leader in last year's WCC Player of the Year senior guard Matthew Dellavedova. This year Dellavedova is averaging 19.8 points and six assists. He was selected to the Basketball Times 4th-team preseason All-American and All-WCC teams and is showing no sign of slowing down.

"The great thing about Matt is he's gotten better every year," Bennett said. "Sometimes guys plateau; he hasn't. Sometimes guys get worse; he definitely hasn't done that."

On Dec. 30, Saint Mary's played the front end of a back-to-back, defeating Yale (4-9) before taking on Harvard on New Year's Eve.

Dellavedova logged 24 points and six assists on his way to school history in the win. He hit four three-pointers (239 career), moving him to No. 1 on the school's all-time list, surpassing David Sivulich (238 career). The 24 points (1,620 career) also vaulted him past Diamon Simpson (1,603 career) to fourth on the Gael's all-time scoring list.

The first half saw back and forth scoring from both sides, and the crowd held its collective breath as junior guard Stephen Holt came up limping after a collision on a fast break.

Holt was sidelined by a knee injury at the end of last season, and sat out five games this year with a bone bruise.

"It was just a contact thing," Holt said after the game. "I just ran into the board, but it was nothing too serious. I'm thankful for that."

The Gaels headed into the break with a ten point lead, 30-40.

The Gaels surged out of the locker room in the second half with a 10-0 run, extending their lead to 20. "We had to keep them off the offensive boards," Dellavedova said about the first half effort. "They killed us on that...it was a matter of focus."

From there, Saint Mary's went on cruise-control, trading baskets with Yale, who couldn't seem to battle back in the second half. Saint Mary's cruised to a 78-62 win, recording their tenth win of the season.

"It was a gritty win for us," Holt commented. "I'm very proud of the guys."

Holt was selected to the preseason All-WCC team, and if Saint Mary's is going to have the sort of run they had last year, Holt's health will be a concern. "We need him. He's a key player for us," Bennett said.

Holt had nine points and two steals in the win.

Sophomore forward Brad Waldow, junior guard Jorden Page and Levesque added ten points each.

Saint Mary's finished its preseason on Dec. 31 against Harvard, who was fresh off a win at Cal. "It will be a tough game," Bennett said before the match-up. "We need to defend. We have to be tough on the boards, and we have to take care of the ball. It always comes down to those three things."

Conference play opens on Jan. 5 when the Gaels host Loyola Marymount. The Gaels will face a tough Gonzaga team on Jan. 10 in Spokane.



Lafayette's Beau Levesque is stepping up for the Gaels.



Stephen Holt scored nine points in his second game back from injury.

Reach the reporter at: sportsdesk@lamorindaweekly.com

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