A new year with new challenges and new optimism for Saint Mary's basketball

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"Our new players are going to have to be a part of our top 10 this year so how fast we can get them up to the level they have to be against good teams is the question," said Bennett. "They're learning and catching on quick and will help us. We should get better as the

season goes on because they are some of our top talent."

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Under these trying conditions, team unity is that much more difficult to maintain, but Fotu hasn't seen that as a problem: "The new players have adapted to our system and culture. They're seeing that it's a family mentality here and we push each other to be our best."

It's not by accident that these are the types of players that are on the Gaels' roster, Bennett said: "That's how we run our program. We recruit guys who value and want that culture. We look out for one another and care for one another and spend a lot of time together. These guys have gone through something that's been tough for all of us

and they have had to fight through it all summer and fall, so when you go through tough times together, you become pretty tight. This will be a tough and gritty team. There are several guys on this team that see themselves as hard-nosed, tough and competitive and hang their hat on that and I feel it in practice every day."

Saint Mary's will open their season at the Bad Boys Crossover Classic in Sioux Falls, South Dakota against the University of Memphis. The team's first home game will be on Dec. 1 against Nicholls State and its first league game will also be at home against Pepperdine on Jan. 2

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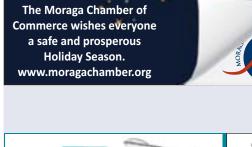
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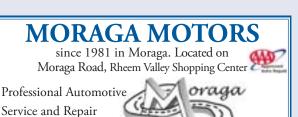




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