

# SPORTS

## LAMORINDA'S LOCAL SPORTS NEWS

### We're March-in' NCAA Style

By Kevin D. Shallat



SMC players talk to fans, media at the College following the NCAA Division I selection announcement

Photo Tod Fierner

It's been six days since the Gaels dropped their semi-final game against the University of San Diego, but to the Saint Mary's basketball players it has felt like a lifetime. After dropping their one and only West Coast Conference tournament game to the Toreros, the Gaels have had to play the waiting game to see if they would be selected as one of 65 NCAA Division I teams to make the tournament. On Sunday, March 16, Saint Mary's invited fans to a party at the Soda Center on campus to view the live coverage of the NCAA selection process on the big screen. While the players waited anxiously in one room, the fans waited with pins and needles in their own conference room.

The mood in the player's room was upbeat, but decidedly serious. Omar Samhan was admittedly nervous, however, he wasn't alone. When Head Coach Randy Bennett was asked if he had a preference for a certain seeding or location, his response

was simple, yet to the point. "As long as they call our name," he said.

Ten minutes later, they did. When Greg Gumbel uttered the word "Gaels," the room erupted. The close-knit group of players stood up in unison, and hugged one another, followed by a few hard fist pumps to even out the mood. The Galloping Gaels of Moraga would return to the hallowed hardwoods of the NCAA tournament, a place they hadn't seen for three years.

While it may seem to some that the Gaels would make the NCAA tournament easily, given their incredible year, there were some lofty hurdles that could have kept Saint Mary's out of the big dance. The loss to San Diego may have passed without much fanfare had Gonzaga won the tournament, but the Toreros had other plans. San Diego pulled the upset win over the Bulldogs in the WCC tournament and received a guaranteed ticket to the NCAA tournament. As Gonzaga is a

ranked team, they too received an invite, albeit an at-large birth. Saint Mary's was the odd team out, or so it would seem. Perhaps the biggest hurdle was that the West Coast Conference had never, in its 56 years in existence, had three teams make the NCAA tournament.

As it turned out, the Gaels didn't have to win the WCC tournament, or even win one game in the tournament. It appears that the selection committee thought enough of the Saint Mary's resume to warrant a 10 seed to the Gaels, the same seed they received three years ago. The Gaels (25-6) will play the seventh seeded University of Miami (22-10) in a South Regional first round game on Friday, Mar. 21 at Alltel Arena in Little Rock, Ark.

"They (Miami) like to get up and down, and we love to get up and down. I think it's a great match-up, and I'm just excited about it," said Gael forward Ian O'Leary.

### SMC Plays Stanford for Nine Innings: No Win, No Tie, No Loss

By Kevin D. Shallat

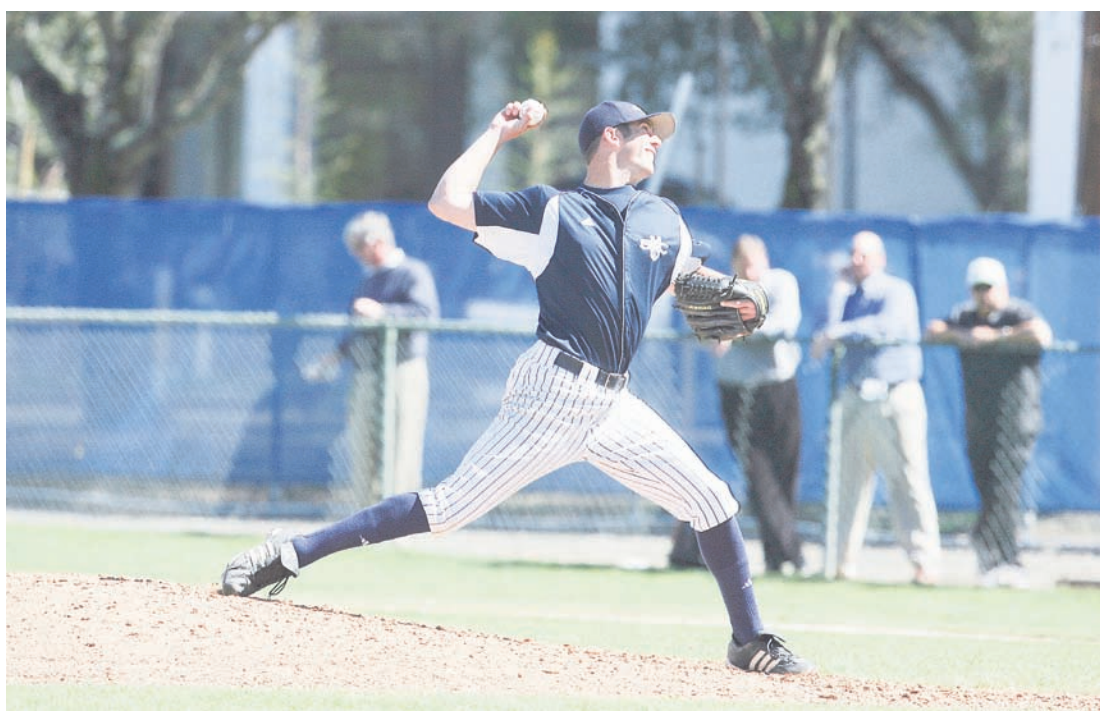


Photo Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's baseball team was back in action Wednesday, Mar. 5, at beautiful Louis Guisto field on the Saint Mary's campus. After beating the Stanford Cardinal at the Sunken Diamond this year, the Gaels looked to sweep the home and home series. With the sight of a packed crowd basking in the warm afternoon sun, and the rolling green hills and pink cherry

blossoms providing the backdrop, the stage was set for another impressive win for the Gaels.

As it turned out, the sun was not a luxury in this game, but a necessity, as the current stadium has no lights. After trailing by one run in the ninth, the Gaels were able to tie the game at 7-7 before the coaches were forced to put the game on hold due to darkness, and fin-

ish the contest on a later date.

This game was a treat for fans from both ends of the spectrum. The first half of the game was a pitcher's duel between Stanford's starting pitcher and Saint Mary's starting pitcher, Anthony Aliotti. The second half featured a seesaw battle of the bats, which tested the bullpens of both teams.

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### Saint Mary's Lacrosse Falls To Monmouth

By Kevin D. Shallat



Goal Keeper Hilary Gardner (00), Ciara Breckenridge (10) and Abby Morgan (9)

Photo Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's women's lacrosse team hosted Monmouth University on Thursday, March 13. The Hawks flew all the way across the country for this match-up, as they were unable to schedule any other local teams during their spring break period. It was a tough assignment for the Gaels going into this game, as Monmouth held a 3-1 record prior to Thursday's game, but Saint Mary's walked away with some great experience that should help them when their league games begin. The Gaels scored a season high 12 points in this game, but eventually lost to the Hawks, 18-12.

The Hawks jumped out to a 5-0 lead as the Gaels seemed to be overwhelmed on defense. Monmouth was able to get to the net with ease, and took most of their shots at point-blank range.

The Gaels were finally able to get on the scoreboard after Lisa Vogeley got an assist from Chloe

Dee to make it a 5-1 lead in favor of the Hawks. Vogeley showed great patience around the goal after receiving the pass, as she made sure she got as close as she could to the goal before attempting the shot. Two and a half minutes later Vogeley struck again, and recorded her second goal of the game on a pass over the net from P.J. Hainley to cut the Hawks lead to three.

Saint Mary's settled down defensively, but still allowed Monmouth to finish out the first half with nine goals, as the Gaels were able to record only one save in the half. Saint Mary's went into halftime trailing the Hawks by only four points, thanks to the gritty, heads up play from Dee. In the closing minutes of the first half, the Gaels trailed 9-4.

Saint Mary's desperately needed a goal to keep it close.

Abbie Coleman missed a hard shot that caromed off the crossbar, but Dee was there to pick up

the deflection, and hammered it home for the Gaels with 22 seconds left in the opening period. Saint Mary's trailed the Hawks 9-5 at half, largely from the efforts of Vogeley and Dee, who scored two and three goals respectively in the opening period.

Saint Mary's was able to score seven goals in the second half, but still struggled to stop the Hawks on defense. With 21 minutes left Hainley scored on a free-position goal that occurred on a Monmouth penalty. Despite Hainley's shot, the Gaels were unable to take advantage of their penalty shots, as they converted on only two of their six free-position shots. Conversely, the Hawks made good on three of their five free-position shots.

Despite Dee's incredible six-goal performance, and a season team high of 12 goals, the Gaels had too many lapses on defense that enabled the Hawks to win this game, 18-12.

### Saint Mary's Rugby Tops Texas A&M, 40-24

By Kevin D. Shallat



Photos Tod Fierner

Fifth ranked Saint Mary's continued their winning ways Tuesday, March 11, as they hosted the Texas A&M Aggies, and won in convincing fashion. It took the Gaels about a half to finally get into gear, but once they got going, there was no stopping the Saint Mary's rugby squad. After trailing the Aggies 24-21 well into the second half of play, the Gaels found their second wind to go up 28-24, and never looked back. Saint Mary's poured it on to take down the 12th ranked Aggies, 40-24.

The first half was uncharacteristically sloppy for the Gaels. Saint Mary's did a good job to get themselves plenty of scoring opportunities, but found themselves making some bad passes before reaching the try zone. If a team can be guilty of being too unselfish, the Gaels were just that in the first half of play.

Too often they elected to continue the run, or simply taking the tackle and securing the ball. After trailing the Aggies 7-0,

Kevin Swiryn found himself in a breakaway situation with a run down the field. The crowd had seen too many miss-handled passes, and when Swiryn looked to pass the ball, the home fans seemed to gasp in disbelief. Luckily for the Gaels, Swiryn elected not to pass and ran the ball all the way in for a 40-yard game tying try.

The Aggies did a good job of taking away the ball from the Gaels on gambles that paid off. They were able to step through the passing lanes and secure two interceptions.

After falling behind 17-7, the crowd appeared more nervous than the players. The players understood that Saint Mary's would make their run at some point. That run came when Chad Clark was able to pick up a loose ball near the try zone for the Gaels, and punch it in for the final try of the half. Despite the loose play, the Gaels stayed close, and trailed the Aggies 17-14 at halftime.

Blake McGahan started off

the second half with a long run down the sideline for Saint Mary's. "We started to get the ball in hand a lot better (in the second half) and run with it. We started to play our game," McGahan said.

Brandon Vedder was also very active for the Gaels, and was rewarded with a try to put the Gaels up 21-17. Saint Mary's fell behind again, though, allowing the Aggies to re-take the lead, 24-21. As the game wore on, however, the Aggies seemed to slow down while the Gaels appeared to speed up. After Swiryn scored the go-ahead try to make it 28-24, the Gaels scored at will, finishing off the Aggies with a beautiful two pass sequence from Swiryn, to Austin Mount, and finally to Brendan O'Meara for the final try of the game.



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Saint Mary's College

Men's Tennis vs.  
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Wednesday, March 19 at 3 p.m.  
SMC

Women's Tennis vs. Wyoming  
Thursday, March 20 at 11 a.m.  
SMC

Women's Tennis vs. Cal Poly  
Wednesday, March 26 at 3 p.m.  
SMC

Women's Tennis vs.  
UC Santa Barbara  
Saturday, March 29 at 11 a.m.  
SMC

For information about upcoming season schedules, visit the official Saint Mary's athletics website at www.SMCGaels.com.