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## Gaels Seek to Defend WCC Golf Crown

By Hunter Hewitt



Ben Geyer Photo Don Jedlovec

Two years ago, an unfortunate statistic haunted the Saint Mary's men's golf program: it had never won a West Coast Conference Championship. Last year, the Gaels were able to chip that monkey off their backs with a spare pitching wedge by claiming their first WCC Championship in school history.

After making history last season, Saint Mary's has carried over the success and is now eyeing its second straight conference title.

The Gaels have put together an impressive 2012-2013 campaign, recording seven top-three finishes in nine highly competitive tournaments. With several returners from last year's championship team, they are poised for a repeat.

"We really want to defend our title," head coach Scott Hardy said. "Winning that two years in a row would be a great accomplishment for this group."

Saint Mary's is ranked No. 24 in the latest Golf Coaches Association of America Division I poll, and it has competed closely with many top-ranked teams this season.

Most recently, the Gaels placed third amongst a talent-filled pool in the U.S. Intercollegiate, a three-day tournament at Stanford Golf Club that concluded on March 30. Saint Mary's finished 10 strokes ahead of No. 7-ranked USC, and fell just behind No. 9 Stanford and No. 11 TCU, who finished first and second, respectively.

The Gaels have been led by senior Ben Geyer, a 2012 WCC all-conference selection and the reigning individual champion of the 2012 WCC Championships.

Despite Geyer's individual prowess, Hardy attests to his team's depth as the main reason for its success, acknowledging key components like senior Mac McClung, sophomore Jonathan De Los Reyes and juniors Dalan Refioglu and Alex Bungert.

Although reclaiming the WCC crown is the top goal, Hardy and Geyer believe their team is capable of much more. If Saint Mary's wins the conference, it will advance to the NCAA Regional Championships, where it could then potentially advance to the NCAA National Championships.

"I believe if we can make it to the NCAA Championships, we have a very good chance of challenging for one of the top-eight spots and advancing to the match play portion," Hardy said. "I know we have players that could win a match against anyone in college golf, and I would love to see them get that opportunity."

Geyer echoed the confidence of his coach.

"We want to prove that we are the best team in the WCC, and then we want to make it to the NCAA Championships," he said. "Once we get there, we will stride towards making it to match-play."

"We know that once we make it to match-play, anything can happen," he added. "We can beat any team in the country on any given day if we play well."

The three-day WCC Championship tournament begins on April 15.

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