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## Saint Mary's women's basketball preview

By Jon Kingdon



Photo Tod Fierner

With eight seniors and juniors and eight freshmen and sophomores, the Saint Mary's women's basketball team is both experienced and youthful. Entering his 13th year at Saint Mary's and coming off a 20-11 season, head coach Paul Thomas is approaching this season with great optimism: "The team has done a really good job of coming together. They have a strong bond off the court and they are doing a very good job of applying it on the court."

Despite losing their leading scorer to graduation, Stella Beck, who now is playing professionally in Australia, the Gaels are returning seven of their next leading scorers from last season. With so many returning players, Thomas' initial goal is to bring the group together: "On the court there is only one ball and they have to share it. That is what practice is about. The job of our players is to make their teammates look the best."

Senior forwards Megan McKay (First team All-Conference) and Sydney Raggio (Second team All-Conference) were the second and third leading scorers and two leading rebounders from last year's team and have become the leaders on the team, says Thomas: "Megan and Syd have taken over that role. They are both very vocal."

Redshirt senior guard Carly Turner, who missed last season due to a knee injury, is back for her redshirt senior season and is in the school's MBA program. Turner averaged 10.1 points and five rebounds as a junior and was Honorable Mention All-Conference her junior year.

Junior Jasmine Forcadilla, who averaged 7.1 points last season and led the team in assists, is going to be the leader on the floor as the team's point guard. Forwards Madeline Holland and Tyra Moe, center Claire Ferguson and guard Emily Coddling have all stepped up their game, says Thomas.

Along with the many returning players, Thomas is excited about his three freshmen recruits who he will be counting on to contribute this year: "I love the mix and the makeup of our team. We are going to incorporate the three freshmen on the floor. It is a great way for them to learn and get the game experience and not bear the load of making the majority of the plays."

One of Thomas' goal this season is to "simply make and take more 3 pointers this year." Freshman guard Taycee Wedin, from Milwaukie, Oregon, is being counted on to fulfill that role for the Gaels. Wedin brings an impressive pedigree, having been named second team all-state as a freshman and sophomore and all-state as a junior and senior. Just as impressive, Wedin never lost a regular season game in her high school career and is the all-time leading 3-point maker (359) in Oregon history.

The other two freshman recruits are guards Milly Yates and Sam Simons, both from Australia. Yates was a five-time selection for the New South Wales Metro State team and also won a gold medal in the Australia Schools Championship, averaging 16 points and six rebounds per game.

Simons brings both size and a good shot to her game, says Thomas: "She is a very good shooter, but more of a scorer. At 6'2", Sam can score both inside and outside, scoring on all three levels." Simons has had a great deal of international experience having competed in Spain, Italy, New Zealand and Fiji.

Thomas likes his options on offense: "Megan is very strong inside and Sydney is very versatile in that along with her strength, she can handle the ball and shoot the ball as well. We are going to enjoy multiple lineups on the floor. We will be more creative with our lineups."

With 19 turnovers a game last season, this is one area Thomas really is looking for improvement: "We have to reduce the number of turnovers and live ball turnovers."

The Gaels have a very competitive non-league schedule, playing games against Pac 12 schools, California, Oregon, Oregon State and Washington State. Says Thomas: "We value the competition."

Saint Mary's opens the season at home against the University of Wyoming on Friday, Nov 9.

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