

LAMORINDA SPORTS

Strong shooting a hallmark for this year's SMC women's basketball team



Madeline Holland



Brianna Simonich

Photos Tod Fierner

By Jon Kingdon

Last year was a banner year for Saint Mary's women's basketball head coach Paul Thomas. He became the winningest coach in Saint Mary's women's basketball history with 256 victories, it was the eighth-straight year his team has won 20-plus games and the Gaels made their 10th consecutive post-season appearance.

It's the nature of college sports that one cannot rest on their laurels. This is particularly the case this season for Saint Mary's in that they have lost to graduation four key players from last season: Megan McKay (12.6 ppg, 7.8 reb), Sydney Raggio (12.8 ppg, 8.5 reb), Jasmine Forcadilla (10.0 ppg, 3.1 apg) and Carly Turner (6.0 ppg). All told, they accounted for 42% of the team's scoring and 54% of the team's rebounding.

As is the wont of all coaches, Thomas is both optimistic and realistic: "I'm very pleased where this team is at with the first week of November. I think this team has come a long way. All these kids are way smarter than I was at their age and they realize that they lost some very important pieces, players and people and they are smart enough to realize that they need to do something about it."

Of course, that is something that is easier said than done and it is going to take a group effort to fill the shoes of those players, says Thomas: "Losing Meg and Syd (who were both 1 and 2 in scoring and rebounding)

is hard and someone is going to have to get those points and rebounds. It won't be one person. It will probably have to be a combination of three to five people."

McKay also was a key on the court for the Gaels with her leadership and the ability to communicate on defense saved the team a number of baskets, said Thomas: "We don't have that yet this year. (junior) Maddie Holland and (junior) Emily Coddling have done a great job in stepping into the roles as leaders on the team."

Last season Holland started 28 games and finished second in the conference in three-point field goal percentage (.444). Coddling, who started 30 games, was named West Coast Conference All-Academic Honorable Mention and led the team with 33 steals, averaging 7.8 points and 3.7 rebounds per game and was second on the team with 45 three-point baskets.

As a freshman last season, Sam Simons made an immediate impact, starting 14 games and being named to the All-West Coast Conference Freshman Team after averaging 11.1 points and 3.5 rebounds per game. Sophomore Tayce Wedin, who broke the Oregon state high school record for three-point shooting was third on the Gaels last season with 44 three-pointers and finished sixth in the conference in three-point field-goal percentage (.396).

Both will be counted on to continue to improve, says Thomas: "Sam was a starter last year and will be counted

on to contribute right from the beginning. Wedin was more of a role player for us and will have to move up a level."

Senior Claire Ferguson, who has appeared in all 64 games the last two seasons, will be starting at center. Senior Tyra Moe and freshman Finau Tonga, from Salt Lake City, are both being counted on to provide size and strength inside as well: "My biggest concern is that I just don't know if we have the depth to get those rebounds. Claire has done a really good job stepping up as a leader," said Thomas. "At the pace that Finau is learning, she will be a real contributor and should get significant playing time."

There have been two pleasant surprises for the Gaels with the return of senior guard Katie Rathburn who redshirted last season and junior Brianna Simonich (both Carondelet graduates): "Katie should be good to go. She can really shoot the ball and I am super pleased where she is at," said Thomas. "Brianna is having a good fall this year. She has really put in the work and shot up the ladder and should play a lot this year."

Look for a lot of high scoring games this season, says Thomas: "The strength of the team is that we really shoot the ball well. We can really spread people out. Teams are going to have to guard us on the perimeter and we're a better passing team than we have been in year past."

If there has been an Achilles' heel for the Gaels

these past few years, it has been the large number of turnovers by the offense. Last season, Saint Mary's surpassed their opponents in every statistical category except one - turnovers - committing 210 more turnovers than the other teams.

For the team to be successful, it's simple, according to Thomas: "The key is to minimize our turnovers which has gotten us in trouble at times and we have to be able to get and convert offensive rebounds. I'm not sure if this team has that trait in them at the moment. I told the team to do their research to see where our program has ranked in the past 10 years in rebounding and let them know they're not going to be the team that does not uphold that tradition."

Thomas has put together a very interesting schedule

for the Gaels, focusing on their opponents' RPI (rating percentage index) which is a way to measure a team's strength relative to other teams, based large on the strength of their schedules. "We are very proud of our schedule for the 2019-20 basketball season," said Thomas. "Each contest will challenge us to bring our best effort as coaches and student-athletes."

Saint Mary's will be hosting the Thanksgiving Classic welcoming Marquette, Western Kentucky and Tulsa. Prior to league games, the Gaels will also be traveling to the University of Wyoming, the University of Kansas and to the UCF tournament in Orlando, Florida prior to Christmas to compete against the University of Central Florida and St. Bonaventure.

Campolindo, Acalanes and Miramonte in football playoffs

By Jon Kingdon

Last year, there was a three week-delay in football playoff games due to the fires. With the fires this year, there has only been a one-week delay in the NCS playoffs.

Campolindo (8-2), playing in Division 2, is the No. 3 seed and will be playing a home game this Friday against No. 6 Livermore who was 6-4 this season.

Acalanes (8-2) will be playing in Division 4 as a No. 3 seed and is also playing at home this Friday against No. 6 Newark Memorial who was 4-6 this season.

Miramonte (5-5) will be playing in Division 5 as the 6th seed and will be playing on the road against No. 3 Moreau Catholic (Heyward) who was 7-3 this season.

All of the games are scheduled to be played at 7 p.m.

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