

Published May 8th, 2024

Gaels Rugby victorious over Navy in National Championship

By Jon Kingdon



St. Mary's Championship Rugby Team Photo
Christine Hutchins

would like to come back here and really play the way we can but, in the end, we did win against a really exceptional Navy team."

St. Mary's scored quickly at the start of the second half with a try by Sosaia Pongi off a great pass by Besag to make the score 26-5, but that would be the end of St. Mary's scoring. Navy would go on to score two tries and a drop goal to end the scoring.

After that, both teams had several opportunities to score, but turnovers and a strong defense by both sides kept the game scoreless the rest of the way. With Navy close to the try zone past the 80-minute mark, a big hit jarred the ball into the hands of Besag and he kicked it dead to clinch the victory.

The Gaels line play was led by Battle Wilson and lock Lleyton Delzell. O'Brien's quote after the BYU game about all of his linemen was equally valid against Navy: "They guard those fringes with their lives. Even though they lack size, they dominate in the contact area."

For graduate students, Erich Storti and Kaipono Kayoshi, playing in their last game for St. Mary's, the championship game was a great capstone to their careers at St. Mary's.

"This team and this program are really, really special and it starts with our leadership with Tim O'Brien and (assistant coaches) Andrew Cook and Mark Bass and all the coaches and then it gets passed down team by team," Storti said. "We're just a bunch of misfits, guys from all over, and it's a testament to our leadership to be able to get sixty guys going in one direction, pursuing our one goal, which was to win the national championship."

Kayoshi shared that same sentiment. "It's sad to say this is my last year but it's really a paradise from the coaching staff and the trainers to the bottom guy on a team," Kayoshi said "Coach O'Brien gives us the recipe and then we tweak it to the players and it's heaven on earth. The two consistent things with all of my teams has been the will to play for others. We really trust our guys on our left and right and we all have fun here."

O'Brien's formula for success over the years has been simple: "We take anybody that comes out as long as they can put up with my idiocy. I just think the team's leadership has been good and the way that the kids on the top have embraced the guys on the bottom has been awesome."

In what would prove to be a tale of two halves, St. Mary's upended the first seeded Midshipmen by a score of 26-22, with Head Coach Tim O'Brien's winning his fifth national championship in seven final matches, in a game on May 4 that was not decided until the final seconds.

With the wind at their back in the first half, St. Mary's jumped out to a 21-0 lead with tries by Schultz nominees Dominic Besag and Erich Storti (who was named Player of the Game) along with a try by John Battle Wilson before Navy, using their maul offense, was able to score late in the first half making the score at halftime 21-5.

Playing in the Houston heat and humidity led to some sloppy ball handling on both sides. At the end of the first half, Coach O'Brien addressed the obvious: "We need to be more efficient with the ball in our hands" and at the end of the game, O'Brien told the Goff Rugby Report: "I



Kaipono Kayoshi running through Navy Photo Rebecca Harper

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