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## Saint Mary's Breaks into Top 25 Gaels Secure 2nd Place in WCC

By Michael Sakoda



Matthew Dellavedova Photos Tod Fierner

Saint Mary's men's basketball may not have gotten the upset it was hoping for against Gonzaga, but the Gaels were able to bounce back and win three straight to secure a second place finish in the WCC and a No. 23 ranking in the USA Today poll.

On Feb. 14, St. Mary's (24-5) hosted the No. 3 ranked Bulldogs of Gonzaga-first place in the WCC on the line. Gonzaga had an answer for everything St. Mary's threw at them, and the Gaels fell 77-60.

Gaels senior guard Matthew Dellavedova had an outstanding first half in the Gonzaga game, scoring 19 of his game high 22 points. "The shots didn't fall," Dellavedova said about struggles in the second half.

A late first half foul by senior forward Mitchell Young sent the Zags to the free throw line which cut the Gael's lead to 33-32 at the half.

"We weren't making smart plays," said head coach Randy Bennett in regards to the first half play.

Gonzaga rattled off seven straight points to open the half, building a 39-33 lead in the first 1:04 of play and the Bulldog's lead just continued to grow.

"We weren't ready in the second half," said junior guard Stephen Holt remarked. "They were more physical, and they were hungrier." Holt had 17 in the loss.

Bennett's mantra through the season and his key to the remainder of the year are the same. "We need to keep getting better," he said.

Even after the tough loss, the Gaels got better. SMC locked up second place in the WCC, winning three straight games. They traveled to beat Loyola Marymount (61-50), and hosted BYU (64-57) and Creighton (74-66) in the Bracket Buster on Feb. 23.

Dellavedova led Saint Mary's with 19 points against Creighton while sophomore forward Brad Waldow had his first double-double of the season with 12 points and 12 rebounds.

The win over Creighton was huge for the Gaels' post-season chances since SMC lacks solid non-conference wins. With a No. 23 ranking, the Gaels are in good position for a NCAA tournament bid.

Saint Mary's finishes the regular season with a home game against Santa Clara on March 2 before heading to the WCC tourney in Las Vegas for a March 9 semifinal game.

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