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St. Mary's Basketball Teams Looking for Late-Season Burst

By Dean Boerner



Sophomore Emmett Naar has played a big role in the Gaels' success this winter. for the top spot in the conference standings.

With a win over LMU earlier in the month, Saint Mary's reached the 20-win mark for the ninth consecutive season. With four players averaging in double figures and two more sitting at nine points per game, the Gaels feature a balanced attack that many teams struggle with.

"We just enjoy playing together," said forward Dane Pineau. "I think that's why it's such a balanced spread. We have pretty good guard play which helps move the ball as well."

The Saint Mary's starting backcourt, consisting of Emmett Naar and Joe Rahon, accounts for about 12 of the team's 18 assists per game. Such adept guard-play leads to endless open looks for a team where almost everyone is a three-point threat.

In addition to rejuvenating their offense as the season winds to a close, the Gaels will work on playing a full game and avoiding in-game lulls. "One of the big things we've been harping on in the locker room is that we haven't been able to play through an entire game like we were before Portland," said Landale.

The Portland game Landale refers to is an 89-74 late January win over the Pilots in which the Gaels registered 19 assists and shot 62 percent. If there is a model game that typifies the Saint Mary's offense, that Portland game is it.

With narrow wins on the road over Portland and Gonzaga this past week, the Gaels are now in driver's seat for the WCC's top spot. Saturday marked the Gaels' first regular season sweep over the Zags in 21 years.

Like the men's team, the women's team (21-6 overall, 12-4 WCC) is positioned nicely in the regular season's closing weeks. While the top spot held by BYU is out of reach, second place is attainable.

"I think we can still definitely get the second seed," said sophomore guard Stella Beck. "We just

Despite their respective successes this season, neither Saint Mary's basketball team is completely satisfied with their progress to this point. With just a few weeks left before the WCC tournament, both squads recognize the importance of finishing the season strong.

For the men's team (22-4 overall, 13-3 WCC), it's all about reviving a conference-leading offense that's been somewhat dormant lately.

"Our offense has been a little bit stagnant as opposed to what it was earlier in the season," said sophomore center Jock Landale.

In many games in the second half of the season, the Gaels have had trouble reaching their team averages of 76 points and 18 assists per game. Nevertheless, the Gaels are still vying with Gonzaga

have to end really strong."

Beck has had to assume more of a scoring role lately in the absence of injured leading scorer Lauren Nicholson, and she has responded with impressive totals. On the road against LMU earlier in the month, Beck scored a career-high 27 points on 10-11 shooting.

To head into the WCC tournament as the second seed, Saint Mary's will have to maintain their rebounding advantage while limiting turnovers, a weakness all season. They'll also have to work on playing a full game.

"We need to play great from the first half to the second half," said junior guard Devyn Galland.

"We can't just try to pull it out in the fourth quarter." Both Beck and Galland point to a February 11 loss against Pepperdine as a bit of a wakeup call. "We were feeling really good up until we lost to Pepperdine," said Beck.

In that 62-58 loss to the Waves, the Gaels fell behind early and couldn't overcome a second half deficit. "We had a ton of turnovers that game," said Galland. "We came out too relaxed and then tried to come out in the fourth quarter, but it was too late."

The Gaels seem unlikely to revert to that type of play with their remaining games, as they're focused on positioning themselves nicely for the postseason tournament. On Saturday, the Gaels dismantled Portland by 42 points, its largest margin of victory in 17 seasons.

The men finish their regular season with a home game against Grand Canyon University at 7 p.m. Tuesday, March 1, while the women end regular season play against USF at 1 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 27.



Devyn Galland Photos Tod Fierner

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