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Saint Mary's women's soccer brings new attitude to the game

By Jon Kingdon



Isabella Banuelos Photos Tod Fierner

do that."

With only eight seniors and juniors on the roster, there are 29 freshmen and sophomores that Romagnolo has recruited, a task that was not difficult for her: "We're selling a great education and for me, it's the best place to live in the world. You've got everything near you, the city, mountains, and beaches. We compete in a top five conference so it's an opportunity for players to come in and really measure themselves."

Romagnolo has been a head coach at Dartmouth and Notre Dame and an assistant coach at Stanford and the University of San Diego along with having been an all-American and scholar-athlete all-American at the University of Washington and has been exposed to a number of top coaches like Ada Greenwood at San Diego, Paul Ratcliffe at Stanford and Albertin Montoya, the current Bay FC head coach.

"I've learned something from every coach I've worked with," Romagnolo said. "When you think about the people who impact you along the way, it could be short stints with people that just say things or motivate you and you like the way they do certain things and you put those things away. I loved Albertin's style and passion for the game that he conveyed so he was someone I modeled part of my coaching game after."

After a 5-6-7 record last year, this year's team has improved to 6-4-2 so far. "Last year, we were super young, starting five freshmen which was exciting," Romagnolo said. "We then had three ACL injuries with some of our most experienced players and we had a lot of tired legs at the end of the season. This year, we still are a young team in that we have a number of freshmen who have been coming off the bench getting starts and doing well."

So far, the offense has scored 19 goals by eight different players, led by sophomore Briana Salvetti (8 goals, 4 assists) who only had one goal last year, Savannah Schwarze, Tessa Salvestrin (2 goals, 1 assist) who is currently out with a knee injury and junior Emily Jensen (2 goals, 3 assists).

"I've challenged the group to get a minimum of 30 goals on the season, Romagnolo said. "What Bri has done has been really fun to watch. She has great instincts and can score in a lot of different ways. She is a great crosser and can finish from outside the box. She's been paired with freshmen Micaela Romo, Sydney Middaugh and Samantha Fenske and has helped bring the most out of them."

The leading defenders have been senior captain Marissa Garcia along with Amari Hicks, Makena Carr, a transfer from the University of Washington and Alessandra Towle. "Our backline has been tremendous; Marissa brings the vocal energy, leadership and great toughness," Romagnolo said. "Amri is new to the defender position and has been doing great and Makena has been a fantastic left defender. Alessandra, our right defender has been more consistent this year."

Senior Taylor Poland (2 shutouts) and sophomore Isabella Banuelos (3 shutouts) have been competing for playing time in the goal. "It's been a real battle between Taylor and Isabella. It's been a toss-up as to who's sharp going into a week because they're both really good. Taylor has the advantage of experience, aerial dominance, and a good range on her distribution with a good vocal presence. Isa brings an ability to play higher off her line so it's almost like playing with another field player on the field and she sees the game really well."

In the four years prior to head coach Theresa Romagnolo's arrival, the Saint Mary's women's soccer team had a combined record of 25-45-6. Since being hired in January 2021, Romagnolo's composite record (including the COVID shortened 2020 season) is 25-18-15.

Romagnolo's initial efforts was to have the players bring a new attitude to the game. "What I tried to bring when I got here was a higher level of competitiveness along with what we did every day in training and raising the bar in terms of the standard that we were trying to achieve," Romagnolo said. "Along with bringing that every day, we figured out a system that was going to be effective with the personnel that we had and getting really good at what we do. Our players are driven and want to be successful. When I got here, it was just continuing to push and give them the tools to be able to

With such a young team, leadership on the team has been important and Salvestrin at the center back, Jensen in the midfield and Poland in the back have filled those roles.

Romagnolo is looking for the team to keep improving as the season is winding down. "I want my team to be ultimate competitors," Romagnolo said. "With every game and every practice, we're wanting to improve who we are so when we step on the field, we're bringing a great energy and organization to what we're trying to achieve. You might not execute everything that you're trying to do but you can always control the effort. We're also looking to be aggressive in scoring and to be able to adjust to teams on the fly. As a younger team, we're trying to get them to read space in defensive pressure and figure out how they can break the game open and trying to get them to be dangerous in different ways and to see space on the field."



Briana Salvetti header Photos Tod Fierner

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