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Gaels on the Attack New Coach focuses on offense

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#16 Jessica Menzhuber leads the Gaels in scoring with 10 goals on the season Photo Tod Fierner

The West Coast Conference has yet another powerful women's soccer program that's on the rise. The WCC has two top 25 teams including No. 2 Portland. Saint Mary's has been in the bottom of the bracket for years but a new head coach is looking to change things. First year Saint Mary's head coach Kai Edwards has stepped in preaching a balanced, offensive mind-set.

The Gaels have racked up six contests against ranked opponents this year, not including a win against an unranked University of Texas team that was ranked as high as No. 16 in the preseason. On Friday, October 16, the Gaels beat the No. 25 San Diego Toreros at home. The Gaels looked to finish off their weekend by knocking off No. 20 Santa Clara on Sunday, October 19, which is something they have never managed to do at home. The Gaels shut out the Santa Clara Broncos in the first half, and were leading 1-0 at the break, but were unable to hold on for the win, losing in overtime, 2-1.

The game against the Broncos got off to an exciting start. First year Gael defenseman Caroline Shevlin stole the ball from a Santa Clara player in the Bronco's half of the field. She then dribbled past two defenders before launching a rolling shot past the Santa Clara goalkeeper for an unassisted goal in the 12th minute of play. All 415 screaming fans were privileged to see Shevlin's first goal as a Gael. Shevlin, a junior, transferred this year from Long Beach State.

With Shevlin chipping in on offense, and senior defenseman Noelle Brown leading the defensive effort, the Gaels were able to shut out the Broncos in the first half of play. Saint Mary's effectively stopped Santa Clara's main threat, Kiki Bosio. Bosio was held scoreless in the game.

The second period was a letdown for the Gaels, as the fans seemed to sense a shift in momentum from the start of the second half. Santa Clara had a string of opportunities to score on corner kicks and inbound plays, and eventually connected on an assisted header off of a free kick. The goal in the 65th minute of play knotted the score at 1-1, where it would remain until overtime.

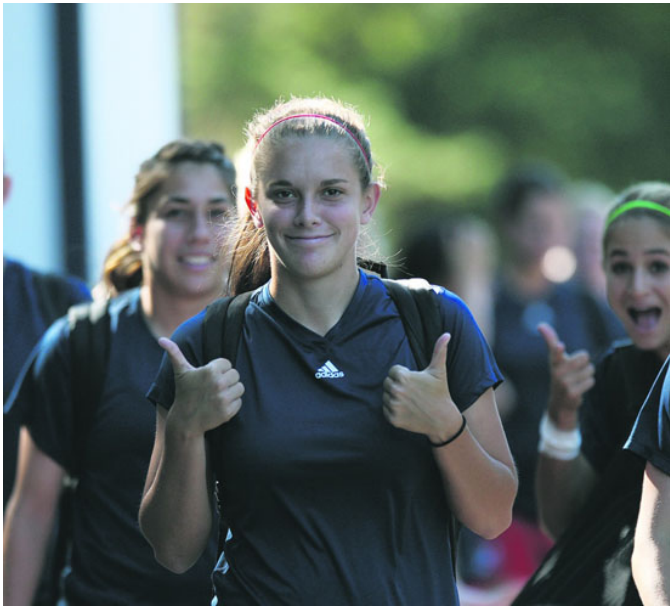
The game could have fallen either way in overtime, but Saint Mary's committed a penalty by tripping in the goal box. Santa Clara scored on a resulting penalty kick in the 97th minute of play. With the loss, the Gaels moved to 9-7 on the season.

The Gaels, 8-10-1 last year, can attribute this season's success to their new coach. Edwards believes in taking the fight to the other team first. If the offense breaks down, then you defend. Last year, it seemed to be turned around. For instance, last year senior forward Jessica Menzhuber played a defensive roll, attacking only when the team was desperate. However, her natural talent lies in her offensive capabilities.

This year, under Edwards, Menzhuber is able to flourish on offense-she leads the Gaels with 10 goals on the season. Menzhuber also has great support. With the additions of freshman forward Christina Tognetti, and redshirt freshman midfielder Daelyn Paul, as well as Shevlin, the Gaels are more balanced and able to give Menzhuber the latitude to thrive on offense.

"I think we've done a very good job of going forward (this year), not waiting for the last ten minutes to win games, but trying to win games in the first halves, and always pressing and always going after teams," said Edwards.

The Gaels had a rough weekend road trip in the Pacific Northwest October 23-25, as they played the No. 2 ranked Portland Pilots on Friday, losing 5-1, and a tough Gonzaga squad on Sunday. The Gaels took an early lead over the Bulldogs when freshman forward Christina Tognetti scored in the 37th minute on an assist from fellow freshman midfielder Daelyn Paul. After Gonzaga scored the game tying goal in the 68th minute, they were able to get the go ahead goal twelve minutes later to beat the Gaels 2-1. With the loss the Gaels move to 1-4 in the WCC, but remain even at 9-9 on the season.



Ashley Nied leads the Gaels in assists Photo Tod Fierner



Tara Lason has 68 saves in the season Photo Tod Fierner

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