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Saint Mary's Men's Soccer Looks for Relief in WCC Play

Alex Kozela



Photo Tod Fierner

The Saint Mary's men's soccer team wrapped up a difficult preseason schedule last weekend and now looks for improved fortunes in West Coast Conference play. The Gaels (1-3-3) travel to San Diego on Friday, September 30th to open the regular season.

The road to conference has been less than forgiving, with a schedule that included games against two nationally-ranked teams, #17 UCLA and #3 Creighton.

"We definitely want our non-conference schedule to prepare us for conference, and it's been a very challenging non-conference schedule," said Gaels' head coach Adam Cooper.

After defeating UC Davis 1-0 in the team's first game on August 27, the Gaels went 0-3-3, culminating in a 0-1 loss to powerhouse #3 Creighton Saturday, September 24.

Despite Gaels' senior keeper Doug Herrick's best efforts in registering seven saves, Creighton (8-0-0) capitalized in the 37th minute on a penalty kick that preserved the Bluejays' perfect record. Creighton also outshot the Gaels 17-9 overall, while slightly edging Saint Mary's on shots on goal, 7-6.

In addition to the games against difficult teams, the team's congested schedule hasn't done the Gaels any favors.

"It's not easy to play an overtime game on Friday, get in a bus for five hours Saturday, and play another overtime game on Sunday, both against very good teams," said Cooper, referring to the team's consecutive draws against Sacramento State and CSU Bakersfield, 1-1 and 0-0, respectively.

The Saint Mary's offense hasn't been successful thus far. The Gaels have only found the net three times this season: sophomore forward Justin Howard scored off a header in the lone win over UC Davis; freshman defender Bobby Connor scored against #17 UCLA in a 2-1 loss in Los Angeles; and senior midfielder Justin Grider nabbed an 89th minute equalizer in a 1-1 draw against Sacramento State.

The team's defense, however, has been solid, allowing only five goals in seven games. Much of the statistic can be attributed to the play of Herrick, who has 19 career wins and is only three wins shy of the school record, currently held by Kellan Wilson (1999-03) with 22 wins.

The Gaels haven't won in San Diego since 2008 and will look to reverse that trend Friday. Saint Mary's finished fifth in the seven-team West Coast Conference last season 10-8-1 overall and 6-6-0 in WCC play.

The team will remain in Southern California for a Sunday meeting with Loyola Marymount. The Lions defeated the Gaels in both of the teams' meetings last season. Saint Mary's will make its 2011 WCC home debut on Friday, October 7 at 4:00 p.m. against Bay Area rivals Santa Clara at Saint Mary's Stadium.



Photo Tod Fierner

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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