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SMC women's soccer open with strong start, crushing loss at WCC

By John T. Miller



AnnaMaria DiGeronimo Photos Tod Fierner
winning year for SMC in over a decade.

After a successful preseason in which the Saint Mary's women's college team posted a 6-1-2 record, the Gaels opened the West Coast Conference with a 2-0 victory over USF Oct. 2 and a crushing 7-0 loss to No. 22-ranked BYU on Oct. 6.

In the league season opener, the Gaels scored two goals in the second half to get the win. Annamaria DiGeronimo scored the first goal with an assist by Emily Jensen. Jensen added the second goal, assisted by Suzuna Shibukawa.

The Gaels returned home to face Pacific on Oct. 9, ending in a tie (1-1) with double overtime.

New head coach Theresa Romagnolo is in her first fulltime season with the program, after posting a 4-3-2 record in the abbreviated WCC last year. It was the first

Romagnolo is no stranger to success. After graduating from the University of Washington, she played professionally for two years with the San Jose CyberRays, winning a championship her first year as their center midfielder before beginning her coaching career.

She served stints as assistant coach at University of San Diego and Stanford - where she helped turn the Cardinal program around - and then took over the head coaching job at Dartmouth, which she called "another fun turnaround." Romagnolo took the team from a 4-12 season to 13-4. From there she went to Notre Dame where she became the first female head coach to win the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Her assistant coaches include Samantha Witteman and Sarah Stanczk. Witteman was a standout player for UC Berkeley who also played professional soccer. She is currently still on the USA national beach soccer team. Stanczk played for the University of Michigan before taking the job at SMC.

"These coaches bring a high level of soccer experience to the program," said Romagnolo. "It's great to have these people who have played at elite levels. Their high level of expectations translates to their being great mentors for the young women."

Key players for the Gaels this year include Maya Alcantra, a senior who was named to the all-WCC team as a defender, and Taylor Poland, who as a freshman last year earned second team all-WCC honors as a goalkeeper, while also being named to the all-freshmen team.

Leading the Gaels in the preseason in scoring is junior Shibukawa, a transfer from Western Michigan originally from Japan. She had six goals.

Romagnolo mentioned DiGeronimo as a team leader. "She's a very competitive defender and playmaker in the midfield," she says. DiGeronimo joins Malia Allison and Vanessa Gaitan as the Gaels three senior captains.

The team returned everyone off last year's roster except for one graduating senior while adding 10 freshmen and 3 transfers. This has led to what Romagnolo calls their biggest challenge. "With so much depth on the team, not everyone gets to play. We have players who don't get a lot of minutes but who bring a lot to the program. I am proud of what these players contribute to the team with their different roles. They've been ready to step up and help us be successful."

The team will graduate 12-14 seniors at the end of the season from their roster of 35 players.

The Gaels next match will be against Portland at home on Saturday, Oct. 15, starting at 1 p.m.



Kimaya Cole Photos Tod Fierner

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