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## Saint Mary's seeded 5th in NCAA Tournament

By Jon Kingdon



SMC coach Randy Bennett and the team hear seeding on March 12. Photo Ben Enos

For the 15th straight season, and the 16th time, Saint Mary's will be playing in the post season under Coach Randy Bennett. This is the ninth time Saint Mary's will be playing in the NCAA tournament, along with seven appearances in the National Invitational Tournament.

At the Saint Mary's University Credit Union Pavilion, in front of the team, family and fans, the Gaels learned by watching the video board, carrying the CBS broadcast, they were named the fifth seed in the West bracket and will be playing the 12th seeded Virginia Commonwealth in Albany, New York this Friday. With a win, Saint Mary's will be playing the winner of the fourth seeded University of Connecticut and 13th seeded Iona College (New York). The only time Saint Mary's and VCU have met was in the first round of the 2017 NCAA tournament with Saint Mary's winning 85-77.

For head coach Randy Bennett, despite knowing that the team was in the tournament, he still needed to hear it officially. "It's an unbelievable feeling," Bennett said. "You know that you're in, but before your name is called you're a little nervous and there's some anxiety. However, when your name is called, there's nothing like it and you don't even care what happens with the rest of the event."

Bennett made it a point to share the credit all around. "First I want to thank our fans," Bennett said. "We've been 32 and 2 at home the last two years and that's what has gotten us our five seeds the last two years. I also want to thank our administration, our players and especially our seniors, Logan Johnson, Kyle Bowen and Alex Ducas. They've been awesome and we couldn't have a better group of guys leading our program. They just care about winning and being a tight team."

Johnson believes that the experience in the tournament last year will really help the team this year. "This year we know what it's all about," Johnson said. "We know that there's a lot of stuff that comes with it and we're ready to buckle down, put our seat belts on and go do what we do best."

Assistant Coach Mickey McConnell knows how different things are from the regular season to the NCAA tournament and will be passing that on to new players. "It requires a lot of attention," McConnell said. "The players may think that during the season we've had success and gotten a lot of attention and a lot of hype, but once you get into the tournament, it goes up a notch. You got media stuff and just a cool atmosphere and this is why you come to college, getting into games like this. The players need to compartmentalize and just treat it like we're going to play a four-team tournament, taking it one game at a time and going on from there."

Dick Moore, a Saint Mary's alumnus, who has never missed a Saint Mary's NCAA playoff game, was as excited as the players in hearing the Gaels name called out. "I have a great feeling of pride and excitement," Moore said. "Just walking into the Pavilion, I get goosebumps seeing the players and their families and the fans."

Before he left the building, Moore and his wife, Linda, had already purchased their tickets, made their room arrangements and set up their flights to Albany.

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