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## St. Mary's comes up short in NCAA opener vs. Grand Canyon

By Jon Kingdon



Aidan Mahaney (20) and Mitchell Saxen Photo  
Tod Fierner

With a below average shooting night (39%) and an out of characteristic number of turnovers (13), fifth seeded St. Mary's lost 75-66 to the twelfth seeded Grand Canyon University.

Though obviously disappointed with the loss, at the post-game press conference, St. Mary's Head Coach Randy Bennett still spoke proudly about the team. "I don't think we played very well tonight, but it doesn't diminish what we did for the overall year. Our guys did a phenomenal job to do what they did to turn it around after starting 3-5 and then winning 23 of our next 25 games. I'm very proud of this team and our kids hanging together and accomplishing what they did."

With a record of 26-8, having won the regular season conference title and the Conference Title championship, this year's team has had a plethora of awards and recognition come their way and elevated this team to one of the top teams in Coach Bennett's 23 seasons at St Mary's.

There were four players chosen to the all-West Coast Conference teams - junior Augustas Marciulionis - first team and the WCC Player of the Year, Most Outstanding Player in the WCC tournament and second team all-district by the National Association of Basketball Coaches (NABC), sophomore Aidan Mahaney - first team, second team all-district by the NABC and a finalist for the Lou Henson National Player of the Year Award, presented to the top player in mid-major college basketball, Mitchell Saxen - first team and WCC Defensive Player of the Year, Alex Ducas - second team for the second consecutive year, and sophomore Josh Jefferson - honorable mention.

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With his 16th consecutive 20-win season (besides the COVID shortened 2020-21 season), Head Coach? Randy Bennett?has been named the WCC Coach of the Year for the third consecutive year and sixth time overall. Bennett was also named the District Nine Coach of the Year by the NBC, is one of the 20 finalists for the 2024 Hugh Durham National Coach of the Year Award, and one of the 20 finalists for the 2024 Jim Phelan National Coach of the Year Award.?

Junior Luke Barrett and sophomore Chris Howell were both named to the WCC All-Academic Team, the first time both have been recognized with this award and the third consecutive year that St. Mary's had had multiple student-athletics so named.

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