

Intro

Fresh off a season in which they went 15-17 and 6-8 in the WCC, for fifth place, the Saint Mary's Gaels were selected to finish fourth in the conference as voted on by the head coaches in the conference. The Gaels return three total starters, two of which are from last year's team and the other one having sat out last season due to injury. Senior Jontelle Smith and sophomore Louella Tomlinson both started every game last year, with Smith earning All-WCC first team honors and Tomlinson earning a spot on the all-freshmen squad. Senior Maija Lahde is coming off a knee injury after she started the first seven games last year.

Saint Mary's is led by Paul Thomas, who enters his third year with the team, after spending the previous 12 seasons as head coach with Cal Poly Pomona, where he compiled an impressive 235-108 record. He guided the Broncos to two Division II national championships (2000-01 and 2001-02), earning DII National Coach of the Year in 2002.

The Gaels will field a relatively young team, with Smith and Lahde being the only two seniors on the team, and have brought in six freshmen and one transfer to complete the roster. Coach Thomas will be depending on his returning starters to lead the way for the Gaels, as all three made the preseason all-conference team, also voted on by the head coaches within the conference.

Saint Mary's Backcourt

The Gaels' backcourt will return veteran guard Smith, 5-5, who is coming off a stellar season in which she led the team in scoring (16.8 ppg) and three-pointers (84), setting a Saint Mary's all-time single season best for threes. Her 190 career three-pointers is also a Gaels' record as well as seventh on the WCC career list. Joining Smith in the backcourt will be junior Sierra Chambers, 5-10, who played in all 32 games last year, starting five. Chambers averaged 8.1 points per game in 21.2 minutes of action per contest, and will enter as the third leading scorer on the team.

Coach Thomas will be depending on his underclassmen to help handle the load as is evident by the amount of playing time freshmen Katie Batlin and Alex Carbonel received in the Gaels' first exhibition game against San Francisco State. Batlin, 5-11, is a local born player from Miramonte HS, where she averaged 15 ppg, six apg, and five spg. In her preseason debut for the Gaels, she played 14 minutes and had four assists to go along with three steals. Carbonel, 5-6, played for American HS in Fremont, CA, and averaged 20.2 ppg, five rpg, and seven apg in her four year career. In her first game in a Gaels uniform, she had five points to go along with a team-high six assists.

Saint Mary's Frontcourt

The Gaels will look to be dominant in the paint defensively once again, coming off a year in which they led the league in blocked shots, averaging 6.12 bpg. They will be no doubt led again by Tomlinson, 6-4, who had a phenomenal freshman campaign, where she led the country in blocks (156), setting both NCAA and Saint Mary's

records for blocks in a season. Her blocks total from that one year were also enough to set a Gaels' record for blocks in a career, and she had two games where she had double-digit block totals. Looking to bounce back from a season ended by injury is Lahde, 6-1, who Coach Thomas refers to as the best all-around player on the team. Before being injured, she started all seven games and averaged 11.3 ppg, 6.6 rpg, and 2.1 apg. In her previous season, Lahde started 28 games and averaged 10.3 ppg and 7.1 rpg en route to an All-WCC honorable mention.

Rounding out the rotation in the frontcourt will be sophomore Leanna Richey and freshman Ashlee Smith. Richey, 6-3, got the start in the Gaels' first exhibition game against San Francisco State, playing seven minutes and scoring two points. Smith, 6-1, got a healthy dose of playing time with 22 minutes and amassed seven points, six rebounds, and four steals.