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# St. Mary's prepared for WNIT

■ The Gaels should prove to be a tough opponent for the Ducks in the first round of the WNIT

By Hank Hager  
 Oregon Daily Emerald

Entering tonight's Women's National Invitation Tournament game between the Ducks and St. Mary's (Calif.), all the talk seems to be centered on Oregon's nine straight postseason appearances.

The Gaels are seen as an afterthought because they play in the supposedly weaker conference (West Coast), and do not have as outstanding of backcourt, or even as strong of a tradition, as the Ducks do.

Lost in the discussion is the fact that St. Mary's has a four-year postseason streak of its own, highlighted by two NCAA Tournament selections. The team's WNIT berth this season is their second in three years.

St. Mary's record of 16-12 overall and 9-5 in conference play is not that impressive considering the Gaels went 25-5 last year. But it is also a record that is not indicative of the team's ability.

"We had a tough schedule," St. Mary's head coach Michelle Jacoby told the Contra Costa Times. "Out of all the teams in our conference, we had one of the toughest schedules. One of the reasons we did get in was our schedule. Even though we didn't get a lot of wins, we tried to play those tough teams and came close."

Of those teams, St. Mary's took on two Pacific-10 Conference

squads this season, beating California by three but losing to Washington, 62-55.

After finishing second in the WCC Tournament with a loss to Santa Clara in the championship, the Gaels were almost assured of being left out of the Big Dance. Getting an invitation to the WNIT was supposed to be tough considering conference foe San Francisco finished with two more wins and one less regular season loss.

However, the WNIT selection committee thought two WCC teams were worthy, and the Gaels now find themselves in Eugene.

"This is huge for the team," Jacoby said. "It's good for recruiting and it's also good for tradition. It's a great opportunity. I don't think we care where we play. We just wanted to play."

While the Ducks have 6-foot-3 standouts in sophomore Cathrine Kraayeveld freshman Andrea Bills, St. Mary's has its own twin towers.

And they really are twins. Jerkisha Dosty is the WCC Player of the Year, stands 6-foot-2, and averaged 17.6 points per game. She is a force on the boards, having pulled down an average of 8.4 per game.

Her sister, Jermisha, stands 6-foot-3, averages 14.4 points per game, 11.9 rebounds per game, and earned the West Coast Conference's top honor last season.

If the Ducks want to stop the St. Mary's attack, they will have to focus on the twins in the post.

That may be a tough proposition, though. St. Mary's had nearly 200 more rebounds than its opponents this season, and averages 43

per game. The Ducks, on the other hand, average just more than 36 per game.

"We watched some film and the one thing that the coaches said is that they're a good rebounding team," Kraayeveld said. "And that's been one of our focuses all year, and we need to take that into consideration."

The Gaels are also a strong defensive team, almost the polar opposite of Oregon's run-and-gun style offense.

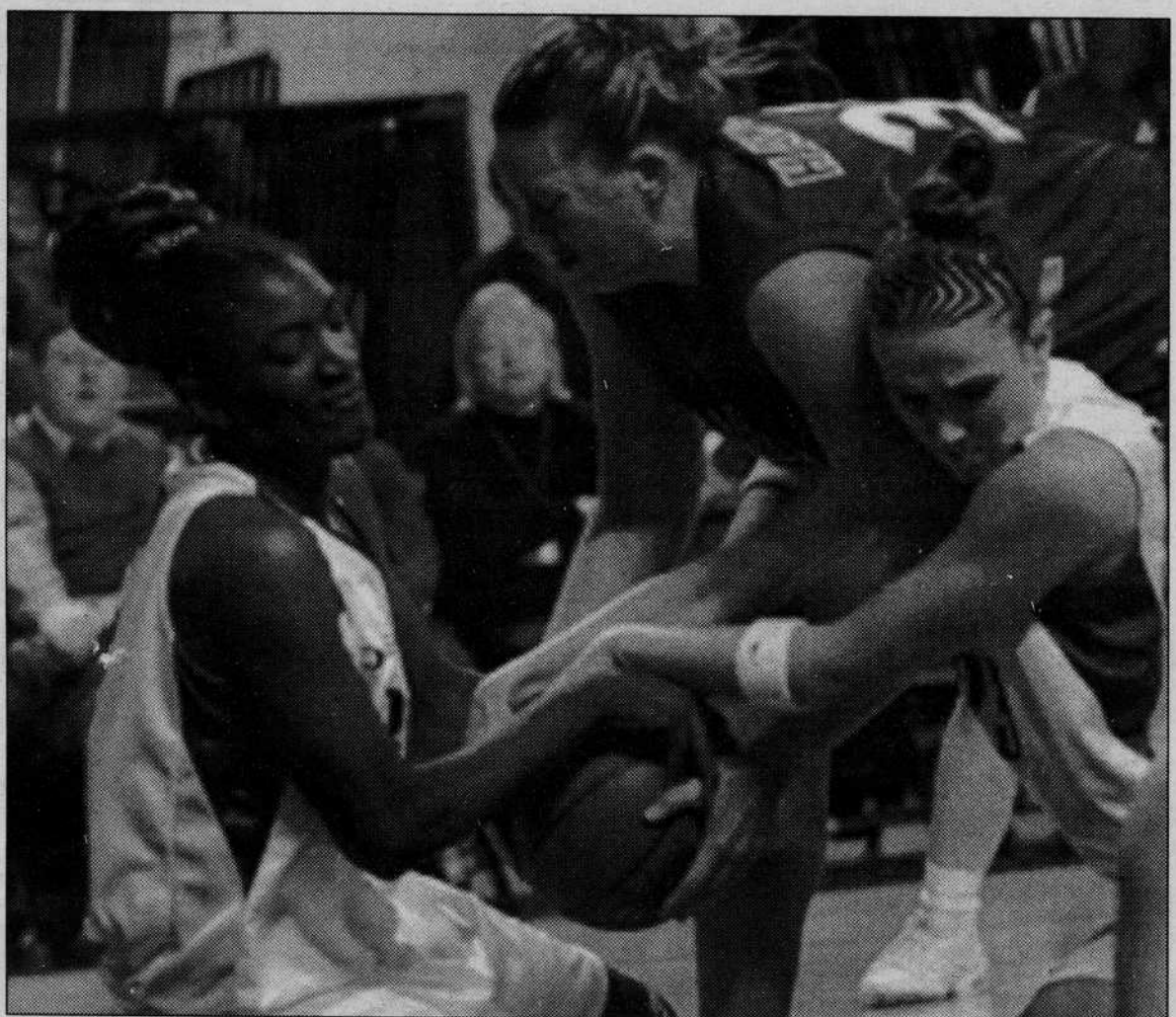
Averaging 71.6 points per game on the offensive side of the ball, St. Mary's counteracts that low number by allowing just 67.6 points per game. Six times this season the Gaels held an opponent to 60 points or less in a game, which included three times where their opponent failed to score at least 50.

"It's going to be a big, physical game," Oregon senior Jamie Craighead said. "The key is going to be rebounding. We have to keep people off the boards, and our guards are going to have to pick up the slack and get some rebounds."

As if the Gaels aren't matched up with the Ducks well enough, there is one thing on St. Mary's side. The Gaels just want to prove their doubters wrong.

"This team really wants to step up and prove that our wins and losses don't really show how good it is," Jacoby said. "We just want to play well. We still haven't gelled yet and I think we can do that in the WNIT."

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Adam Amato Emerald

Oregon's Alyssa Fredrick (right) and Kedzie Gunderson (left) battle for a loose ball with Washington State's Britney Hawks in the Pac-10 Tournament at Mac Court on March 1. The Ducks host St. Mary's tonight in the first round of the NCAA Tournament at Mac Court.

## Women's

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tendance for the third straight year. "It's a great thing for us to be at Mac Court. There's no better way to start a tournament," Smith said. "If we are successful in the first game, we'll get a chance to host the second round, so that's really great motivation to keep on winning."

If the Ducks do get past St. Mary's — a physical team known for its re-

bouncing — they will face the winner of the Hawaii-Oregon State game in Corvallis on Thursday.

"If you're a competitor, you get up for every game," Oregon guard Shaquala Williams said. "I know everyone wants to win, and we're looking forward to the chance to play three or four more games."

Despite not reaching the NCAA Tournament for the first time since 1992, the Ducks are confident heading into the WNIT. The experi-

ence will also be good for the team's four freshman, who are taking their first postseason exam.

"We're just going to try to make the most of the situation," Smith said.

"It's not the NCAA, but it's the postseason and there's still games to play," sophomore forward Cathrine Kraayeveld said. "We still have to play hard and show that we're a good team."

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