



Young Kwak/Associated Press

Gonzaga forward Corey Kispert, right, shoots in front of Saint Mary's forward Kyle Bowen during the first half of an NCAA college basketball game in Spokane, Wash., on Thursday, Feb. 18, 2021.

Gonzaga:

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are having a down season made worse by prolonged COVID-19 closures.

Gonzaga has won 18 consecutive games by double digits. That's the longest streak within a season by an Associated Press No. 1 team since UNLV won 19 games in a row by 10 or more in 1990-91.

Gonzaga never trailed, jumping to a 17-6 lead in the opening minutes.

The big blow was a 19-2 run late in the first that pushed their lead to 46-18.

The Zags led 51-24 at half-time, behind 14 points from Kispert and 11 from Ayayi.

The Gaels were hurt by 36% shooting in the first, including 1 of 11 from 3-point range, and 12 turnovers. Gonzaga shot a blistering 61% in the first and committed only four turnovers.

Andrew Nembhard had six points as Gonzaga opened the second half with a 10-0 run for a 61-24 lead to put the game out of reach.

"We were cooking on all cylinders," Kispert said, adding that the Zags are focusing on defense lately.

"Great defensive teams make Final Fours and win national championships," he said. "We knew the offense would take care of itself."

Saint Mary's coach Randy Bennett did not have a video press conference after the game.

Hot shooting

Gonzaga shot 61% from the floor for the game, while Saint Mary's rebounded from a dreadful first half to finish at 45.5%.

Poll implications

An easy win over their longtime rival should help the Zags stay on top of the poll.

Big picture

Saint Mary's: The Gaels lead the WCC in scoring defense at 61.7 points per game. But the Gaels struggle on offense, as this was their 10th straight game below 70 points.

Gonzaga: The Bulldogs came in 11-0 in WCC play for the third straight year. In the first 440 minutes of conference play this season, the Zags have only trailed for 45 minutes and 58 seconds. Gonzaga and No. 2 Baylor are the last remaining unbeaten teams. The Zags' 24-straight, 20-win seasons ranks second for the longest active run in the country behind Kansas' 30. Gonzaga leads the nation in scoring offense (93.1) and field-goal percentage (55.1).

Up next

Saint Mary's: Hosts Pepperdine on Monday, Feb. 22.

Gonzaga: Hosts San Diego on Saturday, Feb. 20. The league also announced that Gonzaga will host Santa Clara next Thursday, Feb. 25, and Loyola Marymount the following Saturday, Feb. 27, to make up for earlier postponements.

BMCC: Practice started on Jan. 19

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in making sure our athletes were as taken care of as possible," Hillmick said.

The NWAC's "Return to Play" protocol included four phases.

The initial two-week quarantine was the gray phase. During the red phase teams were allowed to have small group practices, and in the yellow phase they had larger team practices. During the green phase schools can have full team practices and games.

"Those schools that have chosen to come back in some fashion athletically, to practice or to work out with their teams with the goal of hopefully playing, the student-athletes have to go through this four-phase protocol," Azurdia said.

Blue Mountain athletes started practicing on Jan. 19. The school is in the yellow phase now, which allows team practices outdoors. Indoor practices aren't allowed.

Hillmick said he's been impressed at how Blue Mountain coaches have adapted to the restrictions.

"Our basketball teams, when they weren't allowed indoors in their own gym, they went to one of the public parks and went to practice under covered patios or the local basketball courts," Hillmick said. "Same with our volleyball girls, they had a grass net so they set up a grass court."

Hillmick said he's pleased with the number of athletes who have shown up for spring sports practices as well, a reflection of coaches who continued to recruit during the spring of 2020 despite the challenges of the pandemic.

"Our baseball and softball coaches in the spring right when COVID hit attacked this (recruitment) head on," Hillmick said. "They actually brought in the largest numbers I'd say our baseball team has seen in years."

The condensed schedule



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Jessica Macias sprints during a practice with the Blue Mountain Community College soccer team at the college on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021.



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

Josie Ash practices her ball handling under the eye of Blue Mountain Community College soccer coach Jordan Hillmick during a practice at the college on Friday, Feb. 19, 2021

also poses a challenge for coaches and players, Hillmick said.

"Not having a true preseason, the ability to slowly integrate and introduce the athletes into normal competitive play, I would say that would probably be the same for every one of the coaches," Hillmick said. "We usually have scrimmages and games where we can slowly introduce our athletes to full contact play, they get that plenty in practice, but it's definitely different than a game scenario."

With traditional fall sports, such as soccer, being played during the spring,

athletes in those sports will have an unusual challenge — preparing for a second competitive season in the same calendar year.

Hillmick said he's interested to see how his players handle what will be a roughly six-week gap between the end of the spring season and the start of the usual fall season.

"Are those athletes recovering, rehabbing and resting in order to properly prepare for what is going to be two competitive seasons in the same calendar year, which is crazy," Hillmick said.

During this spring's schedule, each of the NWAC's four divisions —

East, West, North and South — will revise schedules if necessary should athletes test positive or be exposed to someone who tests positive.

"Logistics, when it comes to scheduling, we really left that up to each region," Azurdia said.

Blue Mountain is prepared for any scenario, with the ultimate goal of keeping athletes safe, Hillmick said.

"They are prepped for pretty much everything," he said. "Trying to operate across state lines is tough, but we have found good solutions in order to make sure our athletes get back to the field as safely as possible."

Azurdia asks fans and student-athletes to keep two things in mind moving forward with sports during the pandemic.

"People need to balance their passion with their perspective here, what really is the big picture here?" he said.

Although athletics are set to return in April, fans will not be able to attend. They are encouraged to watch Blue Mountain Community College sporting events available on the college's YouTube page.

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WHAT

FREE Self-Administered COVID-19 testing. No insurance or doctor's order needed

WHEN

Every Monday through March 29th
9am to Noon

WHERE

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1601 Westgate; Pendleton

WHY

The more COVID-19 tests we can administer in our community, the quicker we can help get the pandemic under control

HOW

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