

Ave Maria Tops St. Thomas in NAIA's Game of the Week

Ave Maria, Fla. - In Saturday's NAIA Women's Basketball Game of the Week, #19 Ave Maria University defeated visiting #14 St. Thomas University 72-51 to earn the top seed in The Sun Conference Tournament. The Lady Gyrenes finished 13-1 in the league, having lost only to St. Thomas on January 20th (80-71 OT), to win their first regular season crown in just their third year of TSC postseason eligibility.

The Bobcats, who rank among the NAIA's top 10 in a handful of categories, nearly upset No. 1 Indiana Wesleyan on December 30th losing 39-45. They entered Saturday's contest at 22-5 overall and in a tie with AMU at 12-1 in the conference. They will represent the no. 2 seed in this week's opening round of The Sun Conference Tournament when they host Johnson & Wales University on Tuesday at 6 p.m. inside the Fernandez Family Center located in Miami Gardens, Fla.

The 26-4 overall Lady Gyrenes take the no. 1 seed with a league-best 13-1 record, and will host no. 8 seed Webber International University at the Tom Golisano Field House located in Ave Maria, Fla. on Tuesday at a time to be determined. AMU enters the tournament on a ten-game win streak having beaten their previous two opponents by a scoring margin of over 20 points.

Spectators at the Golisano Field House on Saturday witnessed a close game in the first half as both teams shot over 50% from the field. STU's Maddie Cummings (Sr. Guard, Orlando, Fla.) led all players at the half with 14 points on 6-of-12 from the field. AMU managed to edge out the Bobcats 37-35 after the first 20 minutes, as Ave Maria's Amy Myler (Jr. Forward, Melbourne, Fla.) kept the Lady Gyrenes in contention with seven first-half rebounds and nine points.

Ave Maria began the second half with a devastating 19-2 run, increasing their lead to 19 points when Myler made a layup from a Cassie Kreiger (So. Guard, Fort Wayne, Ind.) assist with 12:28 remaining. The Lady Gyrenes continued to maintain at least a 16-point lead for the remainder of the game en route to a 72-51 home victory.

St. Thomas was led by Cummings who registered a team-high 15 points on 6-of-16 from the field, 2-of-5 behind the arc, and 1-of-4 at the line. Dannisha Pierce (So. Forward, New Haven, Conn.) notched 13 points on 4-of-10 from the field and a 5-of-6 effort at the free throw line. Two-time Sun Conference Player of the Week Nickerline Montana (Sr. Forward, Miami, Fla.) finished with eight points, three rebounds, two assists, and a steal.

Three-time TSC Player of the Week, Sandy Jenkins (Sr. Forward, Holly Hill, Fla.) led Ave Maria and all scorers with 25 points on 9-of-14 from the field and a perfect 7-of-7 at the line. Jenkins, who reached career point 1,000 earlier in the week versus Southeastern University, averaged double-double figures on the week with the regular season title on the line. Fellow forward, Amy Myler, recorded 19 points on 8-of-10 shooting and a 3-of-3 effort at the line. She led all players with 13 rebounds and a trio of blocked shots. Emily Huber (Jr. Guard, Indianapolis, Ind.) who also reached 1,000 points earlier in the season, scored 14 points with three rebounds and three assists.

Other notable performances came from Ave Maria starters Cassie Kreiger and Erika Derks. Kreiger finished with eight points, five rebounds, three steals, and a game-high six assists. Derks, who missed all of last season with a torn ACL, has made a solid return this season and finished Saturday's game with six points, six rebounds, and four assists.

The Bobcats struggled offensively in the second half. They shot 18.2% (4-of-22) from the field in the latter half, which was unlike them, as they have averaged over 62% shooting over the course of the season. Ave Maria won the battle off the glass with 35 total rebounds opposed to St. Thomas' 16.

Stay tuned as TSC tournament quarterfinal round action begins at various locations across the conference on Tuesday, February 21st. Semi-Final and Final rounds will take place in Miami Gardens, Florida at tournament host St. Thomas University on Friday and Saturday, February 24th-25th.





