

UIS soccer team will face former rivals in GLVC

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Aug 27, 2009 @ 11:22 PM

Last update Aug 28, 2009 @ 07:21 AM

This men's soccer season will be a reunion of sorts for the University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars.

After 31 years in the NAIA — capped by a horrific penalty-kick loss to Harris-Stowe in the American Midwest Conference Tournament to end a 10-5-3 season last year — the Prairie Stars will reunite with old rivals Rockhurst, Wisconsin-Parkside, Lewis and Quincy in the NCAA Division II Great Lakes Valley Conference.

The Prairie Stars were ranked 13th out of the 15 GLVC teams in the preseason coaches' poll.

"I don't think we should be 13th, but if I were in the other coaches' shoes, I'm not sure I'd vote any differently, either," said UIS coach Joe Eck, who has guided the Prairie Stars since 2002.

"This is a big jump for us, but it's the right time for the school to make the leap.

"This is a physical conference, and we'll be playing solid teams every game. Our team this year is blue collar, so we'll be in there scrapping."

More than just the NAIA era ended for UIS last season. It also marked the end of Jakub Piotrowski's college career. He was the school's leading scorer during Eck's tenure as head coach: The transfer from College of DuPage scored 18 goals as a junior and 19 last year.

Moreover, the Prairie Stars are without seniors Eddie Sayon, Michael Filipiak and Frankie Rodriguez, whom Eck said were sitting out this season so they might have the opportunity to play in the NCAA postseason next year when the Prairie Stars are eligible.

If UIS can finish in the conference's top eight in 2010, it will be eligible for the GLVC tournament because the league champion doesn't get an automatic berth into the NCAA tournament. But as a first-year member of the NCAA, all UIS teams must sit out NCAA tournaments.

"It's a compliance issue," Eck said. "Those three want at least the chance to finish their career in an NCAA tournament."

Stepping up

Junior Tyler Rampey and seniors Brian Doellman, Anthony Longo and Drew Rynders, who all began their careers as freshmen at UIS, have shown flashes of brilliance. All are expected to play bigger roles this year, according to Eck, who has been associated with the Prairie Stars since 1979.

"It's time for them to deliver on a consistent basis," he said. "They've looked good in the preseason."

They'll be joined by new recruits Mauricio Ramirez from College of DuPage, Springfield College in Illinois' Ryne Torricelli, Chatham Glenwood's Dustin Curtis (Parkland transfer) and Naperville freshman Jonathan Hamer.

The quartet won't replace, but will follow in the graduated steps, of Piotrowski, goalie Chance Walker and the versatile Adam Findley as well as Scott Bringuet, who had one year of eligibility remaining after beginning his freshman season at Southern Illinois-Edwardsville. Eck said the Lutheran graduate got engaged and decided to enter the family business.

"Our new kids are solid, they'll be tested immediately and they'll have to respond," Eck said. "This is a new game now. You don't replace Piotrowski's scoring.

"Jeremy Carnes and Brandon Lex will share goalkeeping duties to begin the season. Every game in the conference is a dogfight. But it'll be fun to play Quincy, Rockhurst and Parkside again. Those were great rivalries and should develop again."

GLVC games will be played Friday nights and Sunday afternoons, which leaves only three days of training during the week, since the NCAA mandates a day off a week.

"That will be an adjustment, since we were used to playing a game during the middle of the week and another on Saturday," Eck said. "Now our games

revolve around the weekend.”

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