

Prairie Stars roll past Blackburn in opener

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Before Friday's season opener, University of Illinois Springfield men's soccer coach Joe Eck said his team needed to set the tempo for the season in the Prairie Stars' first year in NCAA Division II.

The Prairie Stars scheduled the right opponent to get off on the right foot as they beat Blackburn College 5-1 at Kiwanis Stadium. The victory was against their former coach, Aydin Gonulsen.

"We needed to make a statement with this game," Eck said. "We had to set the tempo for the season. We expected the players to respond accordingly and they did."

UIS didn't take long to score as College of DuPage transfer Mauricio Ramirez grounded a hard shot from about 18 yards to the far post 4 minutes 2 seconds into the game. The Prairie Stars made it 2-0 when striker Drew Rynders finished off a passing play with Brian Doelman and Anthony Longo to score from 8 yards with 29:54 left in the first half.

Tyler Rampey provided the Prairie Stars' last first-half goal with 27:17 left when he banged off Carlinville's Bryan Lambdin, a Springfield High School graduate, maintained possession and slotted a pretty shot from 20 yards to the far post.

"We played a very good first 30 minutes," Eck said. "Then we had a drop-off and didn't play with any urgency. I attribute that to game fitness, which we're not there yet."

The Beavers scored their goal when Aaron Guzman served a corner kick with 40:45 remaining and Carlinville's Chris Walker headed the shot past Prairie Stars goalie Jeremy Carnes.

"I'll take three more like (Guzman and Walker)," said Gonulsen, who finished 8-7 in his first year with Blackburn last year. "They're good players. We have hard-working kids from small communities like Litchfield, Nokomis and Carlinville. They're learning the game, and this was good for us to play up here."

The Prairie Stars added goals by Michael Waldo with 37:36 left and another by Ramirez, who faked a defender and flew a 22-yard shot to the far post with 29:43 left.

"Ramirez helped solidify our midfield," Eck said. "He brought much needed skill to that position. Rampey played well, starting in the backfield and moving up to the midfield. Our back line also played well. (Ryne) Torricelli, (Dustin) Curtis and (Scott) Blumberg had very good games tonight."

UIS outshot the Beavers 20-10 and each team had four corner kicks.

UIS women win

In the women's game, Casey Thorpe scored three goals and the Prairie Stars beat Blackburn 6-0. Kaitlyn Ebarb scored the first goal 6:29 into the game, and Jessica Jamie and Lincoln's Beth Rayman added goals. Kelli Kubar was in goal for UIS.

"I think tactically and technically we did OK," said second-year UIS coach Pete Kowall. "We're a little low on numbers right now because of injuries, and when we get everybody back we'll have a nice mix of kids. We have about 10 new players, four or five are freshmen and the others are transfers. When we get our team together we'll be fine."

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