

UIS Notebook: It's all new for Gamble's Prairie Stars

By **MARCIA MARTINEZ**

THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

Posted Oct 31, 2009 @ 01:34 AM

Last update Oct 31, 2009 @ 08:21 AM

Not only will the University of Illinois Springfield men's basketball team play in a new division and a new conference this season, but the roster will have a new look.

UIS officially will move up from NAIA to NCAA Division II in 2009-10 and from the American Midwest Conference to the Great Lakes Valley Conference.

Nine of coach Kevin Gamble's 14 players are new to the UIS Prairie Stars program.

"It was a little scary at the beginning, but I like the intensity and the effort that the guys are putting out," Gamble said.

"With so many new guys...I think they've caught on well and picked up the offense and defense pretty quick. Their basketball IQ is probably a little higher than I expected as far as adapting to our offense and defense, so I'm not too concerned with having so many new guys."

Senior guard Richard Oruche is the only returning player who started last season.

He's also the Stars' leading returning scorer with 11.7 points per game.

Other returnees are senior forward Matt Reynolds, junior forward Ryan Thornton, senior guard Zach Lewis and junior forward Carl Hayes.

"Practices have been harder because we have to develop chemistry," Oruche said. "With all the new people on the team, we have to find some bond."

For practice purposes

The Stars will have a chance to gauge their development as a team today in a scrimmage against Millikin University.

UIS will hold a scrimmage that is open to the public and begins at 10 a.m. at The Recreation and Athletic Center.

The Stars hit the road Thursday for a closed-door scrimmage at the University of Iowa, Gamble's alma-mater.

"To play against somebody of that caliber that's exciting," Oruche said. "It gives you a chance to see how good you are when you're put to the test."

Gamble hasn't set foot on campus in years, although he has been back to Iowa City for golf outings.

"It'll be good for the guys," Gamble said. "I still have some friends there in the basketball office, so I inquired about it. I think the following year, we may have a chance to play an actual exhibition game against them. I'm building a relationship with coach (Todd) Lickliter."

Countdown to tip-off

The first game of the season against the University of Illinois at Chicago is two weeks away for the men's basketball team, but the season starts in a week for the UIS women's basketball squad.

The Stars open on the road at 6 p.m. next Saturday with an exhibition against Eastern Illinois.

"Things are going well, but we've had our fair share of sickness early," UIS women's basketball coach Marne Fauser said. "It will be nice once we get enough of our players back, so we can do a little five-on-five."

"There's not a lot of depth, but it gives a lot of people opportunities to get better through repetition."

UIS plays games against Robert Morris, St. Ambrose, Lake Superior State and Oakland City before its GLVC opener against Missouri S&T on Dec. 3.

"The GLVC is a tough league," Fauser said. "It's not a forgiving league. You're going to get pushed and knocked down all the time. It's a tough league."

Not-so-fun fall

Speaking of unforgiving, UIS' fall sports programs have had a rough go of it against GLVC competition.

The women's soccer squad lost all 14 conference matches and was outscored 55-0 by league opponents. The men's soccer team posted a 0-13-1 GLVC record. The Stars' tie was against Maryville, another first-year conference member.

Courtesy of the volleyball team, UIS has one GLVC victory. The Stars, who have a 1-12 conference record, beat Maryville 3-1 earlier this month.

Marcia Martinez can be reached at 788-1547.

Copyright © 2009 GateHouse Media, Inc. Some Rights Reserved.

Original content available for non-commercial use under a [Creative Commons license](#), except where noted.