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## UIS learns the going is tough in Division II

Team sports finish with sub-.500 records, but there's hope for future

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The final pitch has crossed the plate. The volleyballs, soccer balls and tennis balls are put away. Coaches have set their whistles aside. The last putt has dropped in the cup.

The University of Illinois Springfield Prairie Stars' first year competing in NCAA Division II and the Great Lakes Valley Conference is in the books. UIS made the leap last August from the less-difficult National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and American Midwest Conference.

The sports year is complete, but the athletic department administration is still hard at work. The school's athletic program is on the verge of shedding its provisional status and gaining full membership in the NCAA. It must submit what should be its final report to the NCAA by June 1.

UIS athletic director Rodger Jehlicka expects to receive the news the school has received full membership in July.

"By all indications, we've made good progress each year and being an active member of the GLVC is a real plus for us," he said. "As of Aug. 1, we could become an active member. We'll be eligible for all the postseason championships and all the benefits and perks of being an NCAA member."

There are other changes to come.

UIS' athletic website is getting a facelift. The school expects to launch a redesigned site in the coming months. A batting cage is going in near the Stars' home diamond at the Land of Lincoln Junior Olympic Softball Complex. A new scoreboard already has been installed at the soccer teams' Kiwanis Stadium. A place for the new baseball program to play its home games is still in the works, according to Jehlicka. There's time to make plans for the inaugural baseball season that starts in spring 2011.

### **Tough transition**

When it comes to competition, UIS had a rough time during the 2009-10 academic year. All six of the school's team sports finished below .500 overall and in the GLVC.

"Anytime you make a change and move to a higher division, there is some real transition time involved," Jehlicka said. "Did we win a lot of games? No. But our people and teams were much better at the end of the year and much more competitive at the end of the year."

"Of our 10 sports, if we were eligible for postseason play, five of our teams would have participated (men's basketball, men's tennis, women's tennis, men's golf and women's golf)," he said. "Half being able to play in the postseason if we were eligible . . . I think that's a pretty good number the first year."

The men's basketball squad had the best season of UIS' 10 sports teams.

It upset nationally ranked Quincy University 69-64 in February. The Stars kicked off GLVC play with a bang by beating Missouri S&T 115-114 in double overtime. Their solid debut culminated with an 11-13 overall record and a 7-11 GLVC mark.

"We played as hard as anyone in the conference," men's basketball coach Kevin Gamble said. "I was surprised about the way we played night in and night out against some of the top teams. We held our own against some of the good teams in the conference. I can think of only one game when we weren't competitive and that was against (second-ranked) Southern Indiana."

The soccer teams and women's basketball team didn't fare as well.

The women's soccer team finished with a 2-14 overall record after failing to score a goal in a conference match. The men's soccer team compiled a 2-14-1 overall record and didn't win a conference game. Women's basketball coach Marne Fauser didn't renew the scholarships of six of the team's nine players after the Stars finished with a 3-24 overall record and 0-18 mark in the conference.

### **Strides in softball**

In softball, UIS made progress. The Stars went 14-32 overall after winning only four games in 2009.

"With 14 wins and six conference wins, we were surprised at how we were able to do," softball coach Mat Mundell said. "The girls were surprised with the success we had coming off last season when we only won four games and two were against Division III teams."

"The first year we saw how tough and how solid the GLVC is. In the AMC, we had a few teams at the top. In Division II, we really didn't have an easy day. Every day was a battle. Quincy, Lewis and the University of Indianapolis have been nationally ranked in the top 25. It was pretty competitive."

The women's golf team placed eighth out of 12 teams at the GLVC championships. At the men's GLVC championships, the Stars finished 11th. UIS was allowed to participate in postseason conference play because the tourney champion doesn't receive an

automatic bid to the national tournament.

The volleyball team became the first UIS program to get a GLVC win with a 3-1 victory over conference newcomer Maryville on Oct. 10, 2009. The Stars also won their season finale against Kentucky Wesleyan to finish 14-32 overall and 6-22 in the conference.

"A highlight for us was picking up the first GLVC win," volleyball coach Angie Riggle said. "We ended the season on a winning note by picking up that second GLVC win. We couldn't go to the conference tourney, but we continued to grow and get stronger as the season went on. When the season finished, we felt we were going in the right direction.

"We just finished up our spring season at the end of April and they did very well. The recruiting class coming in is excited. They email as they're preparing for graduation and they can't wait for August to come."

This season's finish in men's basketball should help draw in recruits for Gamble.

"We're getting phone calls from players we usually didn't get," he said. "The quality of the players has gone up. It shows the respect of the GLVC as far as the conference's reputation. It helps to have the NCAA name behind you."

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#### **MEN'S**

Basketball: 11-13 overall, 7-11 in the Great Lakes Valley Conference

Soccer: 2-14-1, 0-13-1

#### **WOMEN'S**

Basketball: 3-24, 0-18

Soccer: 2-14, 0-14

Softball: 14-32, 6-22

Volleyball: 11-20, 2-12