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Thorpe helps 0-6 UIS make painful progress

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Patience is a virtue, and University of Illinois Springfield women's soccer player Casey Thorpe has learned it is worth it in the end.

Although at times it has been a bumpy ride, she has been with the program since Day 1 three years ago when UIS played its first match.

Had the center midfielder/forward from Collinsville not redshirted that first season, she wouldn't be on hand right now to witness the gradual improvements the Stars are currently making.

"It was kind of a waiting game," Thorpe said. "It just takes time for things to fall into place. It takes patience. It has been well worth the wait."

UIS is showing signs of improvement after a 2-14 season in 2009 that included a stretch of 14 straight games without a goal.

The Stars are 0-6 overall but have avoided being blown out in their first six games. Their last four matches have been decided by a single goal.

"We've gone from giving up 24 goals to 13 goals (in the first six conference games) because we have defended better as a team," UIS coach Pete Kowall said. "Sometimes that requires us to drop Casey back to center mid."

Thorpe, a communications major, is the sole senior on the Stars' roster.

"She walked in and said, 'I'm transferring here (from Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville) and I want to play,'" Kowall said. "It was a blessing when she walked in. She gave me a DVD. I kind of watched it, but I called the (St. Louis Scott Gallagher Metro club coaches) and they said, 'Wow, that's a great pickup for you.'"

Injury setback

Thorpe underwent back surgery for a herniated disc three months before UIS began its inaugural season in 2008. She played in two preseason games before she redshirted the rest of the year.

"I was disappointed because there were some great players on the team that I wanted to play with," Thorpe said. "I tried to play, but my recovery just wasn't there. They said, 'Five to six months and I was trying to play three to four months after surgery. I stopped because I could have re-injured myself."

"I don't regret it whatsoever, and now being able to be part of something great now is a great experience."

Thorpe has been instrumental in the program's growth. She established herself as an offensive leader last year and that has continued through this season.

"One thing Pete wanted my goal to be this summer was to focus on putting the ball where I want to in the net," she said. "I've really fixed my accuracy where I want to place the ball."

Last weekend, Thorpe scored a pair of goals in a 4-3 loss to Missouri-St. Louis, then dished out an assist in a 2-1 overtime loss to Maryville.

"It was an offensive breakthrough for us," Thorpe said of the Missouri-St. Louis match. "We had only scored one goal in four games in the conference, and we came in and we scored three goals. Two were within one half."

"We didn't score one goal in the conference last year. Having three goals in one game was a big breakthrough for us."

Thorpe expects the Stars' match against Missouri-St. Louis to have an impact on the remainder of the season.

"I think it was a make-or-break for our team," Thorpe said. "Mentally everybody was just exhausted because we weren't scoring goals. Defensively, we weren't letting in a lot, but you can't win a game without scoring. Our team really needed those goals to pick up our spirits."

UIS, which has a 0-5 GLVC record, will have played half of its conference schedule following home matches against Kentucky Wesleyan tonight and Southern Indiana on Sunday.

Seeing results has given the Stars' confidence.

"We lost to Drury 8-0 last year," Thorpe said. "This year we only lost 2-1. Coaches from other schools have called Pete and said, 'You're so much better.'"

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Thorpe's statistics

2010 — 2 goals, 16 shots, 1 assist

2009 — 4 goals, 35 shots, 1 assist

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