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UIS women's basketball team returns brightest star

Pogorzelski one of just three back from 3-24 campaign

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Following knee surgery in May, Paulina Pogorzelski took a been-there, done-that approach to her recovery.

"I did my rehab on my own because I've done rehab before and I pretty much know all the basics," said Pogorzelski, a senior forward on the University of Illinois Springfield women's basketball team.

The 6-foot-1 Pogorzelski played while injured for nearly the entire 2009-10 season. The Chicago native tore the meniscus in her left knee while going for a rebound in practice last December.

Pogorzelski, who also was bothered by a tear in hip joint cartilage, didn't let the injuries stop her. She kept playing and ended the season as the Prairie Stars' top scorer and rebounder at 14.1 points and 8.0 rebounds per game.

She underwent surgery in the spring on the same knee that she injured playing soccer in high school. That time she tore the anterior cruciate ligament.

"The doctor told me I only have one third of the meniscus of a regular person because this is the second time I've had it trimmed," Pogorzelski said. "It doesn't feel right, but it's enough to where I can play. Before it was unbearable."

Playing through pain

Judging by her output last season, it was impossible to tell Pogorzelski was suffering. The criminal justice major didn't miss a game; in fact, she started in all 27 contests.

"I have a high tolerance for pain," she said. "I learned to fight through the pain. I feel stronger working through that."

Pogorzelski, a transfer from Wright College and Kankakee Community College, was desperately needed by the Prairie Stars last season. Someone had to step up for the program, which was transitioning from the National Athletic Intercollegiate Association to NCAA Division II. Pogorzelski was that player.

She not only led the Stars in scoring and rebounding, she was first in steals (37) and blocked shots (27).

"Paulina is a workhorse," UIS coach Marne Fauser said. "She gives you everything she has. She gives you 100 percent all the time. She kind of can set the tone for you by her intensity and leadership."

New cast

Pogorzelski will play her final college season with different players around her. Fauser retained just three members from last season's 3-24 team.

The past is behind Pogorzelski. She's focused on a new year and a new team and believes the Stars have a promising offense.

"Our shooters are very impressive," she said. "It seems like everybody can shoot, honestly. There's no weak point from shooting. Our offense is a lot more balanced."

She will join up with her new teammates for the first time this season in a game today. The Stars travel to Normal for an exhibition against Illinois State at 7 p.m.

"The chemistry is a lot better, but it's a learning process because everybody is new and a lot of them are young," Pogorzelski said.

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UIS WOMEN'S BASKETBALL DATA

COACH: Marne Fauser, 2nd season

2009-10 RECORD: 3-24 (0-18 in the Great Lakes Valley Conference)

KEY LOSSES: Kelly Thompson (10 points per game, 5.1 rebounds per game, 46 3-pointers); Erin Glogovsky (8.4 ppg, 6.3 rpg)

2010-11 GLVC PREDICTION: 5th in North Division, according to coaches' poll

OVERALL OUTLOOK: The Stars' roster features nine new players. Fauser kept just three players from last season's team after she opted not to renew the athletic scholarships of six players. "We're young, energetic and quicker," Fauser said. "We can run up and down the floor a lot better this year, which I'm excited about because an up-tempo, fast-paced game is more my style." UIS welcomes back its top player from a year ago, 6-foot-1 senior forward Paulina Pogorzelski. She led the Stars in points (14.1), rebounds (8), steals (37) and blocks (27). Five incoming players are transfers. They are junior guards Cristina Nevins (Parkland), Bailey Beale (Cottey) and Sadie Gann (Kankakee) and sophomore guards Alexis Alvarez (Michigan Tech) and Jessica McConnell (Stephens).

FRONTCOURT: Pogorzelski is a go-to player. Freshman forwards Mallory Beck and Amanda Hainlen also will help out in the post. Beck, one of two Sacred Heart-Griffin High School graduates on the roster, averaged 17.6 points last season. Hainlen is a versatile player who can play either with her back to the basket or facing it.

BACKCOURT: UIS has an abundance of guards. Nine of its 12 players are guards and that suits the Stars' style. "We can put four guards out on the floor and have just one forward in there," Fauser said. "We have some guards who have the ability to score on the inside." Junior Alex Blair and senior Emmarie Snyder are the Stars' other returnees. Blair averaged 9.1 points and 2.3 rebounds in 21 games last season. Snyder was UIS' point guard last season. "We're stronger at the point guard position this year with (SHG product) Cristina Nevins and Alyssa Palmer," Fauser said. "Their styles are different, but they both have some quickness. They will help us defensively in slowing other teams down." Beale can shoot and play defense. Fauser is expecting contributions from freshman Megan Bergerud, who was a standout for the Virginia/A-C Central team last season.

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