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Challenging start awaits Prairie Stars men's basketball team

UIS battles GLIAC twice this weekend

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THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER

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University of Illinois Springfield men's basketball fans can catch their first glimpse of the 2010-11 Prairie Stars at 7:45 p.m. today in the regular-season opener against Lake Superior State at The Recreation and Athletic Center.

UIS first-year coach Ben Wierzba already has had the opportunity to see his team in action. The Stars lost 80-53 to Illinois-Chicago last week and fell 111-66 Sunday at Iowa.

"We had good and bad moments," he said. "When we executed like we were supposed to, good things happened for us. There were some strong points defensively. We took a couple charges and dove on the floor for loose balls."

The NCAA Division II Stars didn't score an upset of a Division I team. However, other GLVC members pulled off victories over Division I opponents in exhibition games on the road.

Indianapolis upset No. 23 Tennessee 79-64 Monday. Lewis defeated DePaul 70-68 Sunday. Bellarmine escaped with a 63-61 win over Xavier, a Sweet 16 qualifier the past three seasons. Quincy beat Bradley 86-80 Saturday at the newly constructed Renaissance Coliseum located on Bradley's campus.

Wierzba hopes to see more of the spirited play he saw against Iowa when UIS opens in the GLVC/GLIAC Challenge. The challenge kicks off at TRAC with a game today between Missouri-St. Louis and Northwood at 5 p.m.

UMSL and Lake Superior return to the UIS campus Saturday for a 1 p.m. meeting, and then the Prairie Stars play the Northwood Timberwolves at approximately 3:15.

Wierzba most likely will put a different starting lineup on the floor for the season opener after using the same five starters in the exhibitions. Guards Brandon Farmer, Jermaine Love-Roberts and Steffen Spinks and forwards Chigozie Umeadi and Cliff Meece started against UIC and Iowa. Junior guard Lester Hart came off the bench and scored a team-high 17 points against Iowa. Spinks, a redshirt senior, led the Stars with 15 points in the exhibition opener against UIC.

"We take a lot away from the exhibition games, including the experience of playing at UIC and playing in front of 9,000 or 10,000 fans at Iowa," Wierzba said. "Now, it's getting to work and tightening some things up. We've come back this week and had two pretty good practices."

Senior forward Ryan Thornton was banged up and sat out both exhibitions. He has practiced this week and possibly will play tonight.

A leg injury continues to keep out junior forward Michael Fakuade. Freshman guard Emeka Umeadi, Chigozie's younger brother, remains out of the lineup due to injury.

Marcia Martinez can be reached at 788-1547.

LAKE SUPERIOR STATE AT UIS

WHAT: Regular-season men's basketball opener

WHEN: 7:45 p.m. Friday

WHERE: The Recreation and Athletic Center

COACHES: Ben Wierzba (1st season at the University of Illinois Springfield); Steve Hettinga (4th season at Lake Superior State, 48-39)

NOTABLE: The Stars open the regular season by taking part in the Great Lakes Valley Conference/Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference Challenge with games against the Lake Superior State Lakers on Friday and the Northwood Timberwolves on Saturday at 3:15 p.m. at the TRAC. . . . UIS dropped exhibition games to Illinois-Chicago 80-53 and Iowa 111-66. . . . The Lakers fell 101-61 to Detroit on Saturday in their only exhibition game. . . . Lake Superior is picked to finish fourth in the GLIAC after compiling a 14-14 overall record for the 2009-10 season. . . . UIS was voted to finish fifth in the North Division of the GLVC after producing an 11-13 overall record and a 7-11 league mark last season. . . . The Lakers' returning full-time starters are junior guard Kyle Hunt (12.1 points, 5.9 rebounds, 4.5 assists, 42 3-pointers), senior center Justin Williams (5.8 points, 3 rebounds) and senior forward Andrew Charlesworth (5.1 points). Hunt is a preseason All-GLIAC first-team pick.

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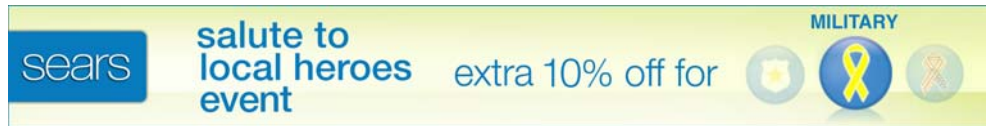
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