



Fauser's vision for UIS women starts to take shape

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When University of Illinois Springfield women's basketball coach Marne Fauser signed nine new players last offseason, she had an idea of what she wanted.

Her vision is taking shape.

The Prairie Stars got their first Great Lakes Valley Conference victory in January, then they won a road league game on Valentine's Day. The season culminated with UIS beating Lewis 72-69 in its season finale Saturday.

The Stars finished with an 8-18 overall record and a 3-15 GLVC mark, an improvement on last year's 3-24 and 0-17 records.

"Some of my colleagues said we would be playing better at the end of the year," Fauser said.

A youth movement helped spark the Stars' growth.

"The last month, we had four or five people who scored in double figures in games," UIS freshman guard Megan Bergerud said. "We shared the ball really well."

Two of the Stars' top scorers were freshmen, with guard Alyssa Palmer leading the way. The only key senior on this year's roster was Paulina Pogorzelski, who averaged 9.9 points and 7 rebounds per game.

Fresh(man) faces

Palmer moved into the starting lineup in January. She averaged a team-high 11.2 points per game and led the team in assists with 72. Palmer and Drury's Bethanie Funderburk are the sole freshmen among the GLVC's top 22 scorers.

Bergerud was third in scoring at 10 points and second in rebounding with 10.8 rebounds per game.

Junior transfer Bailey Beale's 64 3-pointers rank No. 3 in the GLVC. She was the team's second-leading scorer with an average of 10.8 points.

"Palmer really came on around the beginning of January," Fauser said. "You really saw the light click with her.

"Megan had some really good days, then she had some days that weren't her best games. Amanda Hainlen started to play a lot better toward the middle of January. Mallory Beck was like Megan. She had some really good games and she had some days that weren't so good."

As the freshmen were acclimating to the college game, the young team was searching for its identity. Poor shooting plagued the Stars in many games. However, UIS managed to win three of its final five.

"We definitely had better chemistry toward the end of the season," Beck said. "We lost to Quincy by (35) the first time we played them.

"We were right there the second time we played Quincy (in a 86-74 loss) and able to hang with a team that was nationally ranked. That says a lot and shows how far we came since the beginning of the season."

Lighting the fire

A late rally in an 82-74 loss to Missouri-St. Louis in January seemed to jump start UIS. The Stars snapped a nine-game losing streak the next game and won four of the final nine.

"When we were playing UMSL, we were down 18 with just a few minutes left and the next thing you know it's a six-point game with 34 seconds left," Fauser said. "They never gave up, and that's really important."

With just one returning player taller than 6 feet, a priority on Fauser's to-do list is adding size to the roster with new recruits. She has already signed Culver (Ind.) Community High School senior Gwen Zehner, a 6-foot-1 true post player.

"There are other pieces to this puzzle we need to add to, but I am excited about the future," Fauser said.

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