St. Louis Community College – Meramec Men’s Soccer Team Bows Out To Forest Park, 1-0

The men’s soccer team ended its fine season abruptly, bowing out to Forest Park in a 1-0 upset in the semi-final game of the Region XVI Tournament Oct. 24. The Magic, who end the year 14-4-1, dominated the game with the Highlanders but simply couldn’t get the ball in the net despite several strong shots that rattled off the crossbar and posts.

The Magic, under second year head coach Brian Smugala, enjoyed a strong season while making program history. After a sluggish 0-3-1 start, the team caught fire, winning its next 14 consecutive games - a school record. The Magic went from Sept. 3 to Oct. 24 without a loss or tie.

Three sophomore players landed on the All-Region XVI first team: leading scorer Joe Brennan (CBC) with his 11 goals and 6 assists; defender Grant Landon (Marquette) who played tenacious defense in leading Meramec to 6 straight shutouts within their win streak, as well as being named NJCAA National Player Of The Week; and midfielder Sam Stremlau (St. Mary’s), who made big play after big play all season.

Meramec also takes home a conference (MCCAC) championship, going a perfect 10-0.

Goalies Jim Mace (Seckman) and Tyler Italiano (St. Mary’s) were a big part of the success. Italiano recorded four shutouts, allowing only .70 goals per game. Mace, a NJCAA National Player Of The Week during the season, notched three shutouts while averaging only .875 goals against per game.

Several sophomores also ended fine seasons: defender Charlie Reitz (CBC), a skilled journeyman transfer; Brady Graham (DeSmet), who missed much of the first half of the season after being injured in the opener, but made a substantial impact during his latter half play; Midfielder Nick Bigogno (Lindbergh) who made most players think twice about challenging him for 50-50 balls - Bigogno missed the first few weeks to a broken foot but toughed out most of the season; defender Jimmy Koch (St. Charles West) who used his speed and size to defend the goal; Colin Kuster (DeSmet), whose hustle and skill won many a ball; and Sam Hackett (Lindbergh), a speedy midfielder who gave opponents fits with his never-give-up approach to going for the ball.

Several freshmen stood out including defender Eric Fuchs (Vianney), a smart, quick back who has the size and speed to cut off opponents’ runs to the goal, early-season pick-up Jon Myers (Ft. Zumwalt S.) who was a constant scoring threat with a powerful leg, and forward Zach Costello (Kennedy) who showed much promise and grit.

Smugala, who has a two-year record of 29-7-4, was assisted by Mike Cucchi and goalie coach John Kargacin.

N. Oklahoma Ends Magic Season, Holds Karl At 299 Victories

The women’s soccer team and top seed was eliminated in the Region XVI Tourney semi-final game 3-1 by Northern Oklahoma on Oct. 28. The match was played at Florissant Valley following heavy downpours
of rain all night, and a hard rain during the entire match. The loss signified a milestone of the negative kind - it marked the team's first losing year (5-9-3) since 1984 and only the second losing season in the program's existence.

Head coach Jeff Karl, who needed just six wins for an historic 300 - unmatched by any junior college women's soccer coach, achieved just five w’s and will stay at a tantalizing 299 victories until next fall.

The team struggled with numbers and injuries throughout the year as one compounded the other. However, sophomore forward Kelly Koshak (Marquette) stepped up her game as the Magic’s lead scorer, netting 11 goals and two assists. Midfielder freshman Angie Rich (DuBourg) was a pleasant addition with her three goals and six assists. Sophomore Tara Baechle (St. Pius X) also provided scoring punch with four goals and three assists.

Although she was under heavy fire at times, freshman goalie Haley Fox (Lindbergh) made spectacular save after save. "What she does and the abilities that she has are very good,” said coach Karl. “It just doesn’t show in the stats.”

Her fine work in the nets did show in the voting for All-Conference as Fox was voted to the MCCAC First team along with freshman defender Alex Klapp (DuBourg.) On the second team sophomores Emily Schultz (Parkway North) and Kelly Koshak were selected.

**Volleyball Readies For Region XVI/District Tourney**

After winning three berths on the All-Conference team as well as the MCCAC Team Sportsmanship Award, the volleyball squad is eying this weekend’s Region XVI/District tournament. The squad is 20-20 following a late-season slide of a six match losing streak (perhaps they can emulate the Cardinals swoon followed by a championship?) but have been plagued by injuries much of the season.

The Magic also tied for a second place conference finish (with Mineral Area) with a 5-2 MCCAC mark. Meramec is the fourth seed of the regional tourney and will host a play-in match Thursday (Nov. 2) at 7:00 against fifth seed Florissant Valley. The winner will travel to Cottey College (Nevada, MO) on Saturday (Nov. 4) to play top-seeded Longview at 10:00 am. The winner of that match then advances to the championship showdown at 2:00 against the winner of Northeast Oklahoma vs. Cottey College.

Several players continue to stand out for ninth year head coach Lee Clauss. Among the nation’s stats leaders is middle hitter Sarah Herbert (Belleville West). She is sixth nationally in blocks per game with 2.318. Freshman setter Laura Kitchen ranks seventh in the nation in digs per game with 6.604.

Named to the MCCAC All-Conference first team is the aforementioned Sarah Herbert, a sophomore, along with sophomore setter Kandice Berkel (St. Clair). Selected to the Honorable Mention squad is freshman outside hitter Jessica Greaves (St. Joseph’s Academy.) Greaves led the team with 37 aces and was second to Kitchen in digs with 3.927 per game.

Herbert also leads the team in kills with 302 total, or 2.745. Berkel racked up an astounding 791 assists for a 7.126 average per game.

**Albrecht Looks To Newcomers For Early Season Hoops Help**

There’s good news and bad news for the men’s basketball team, ranked sixteenth in the nation, before the season even starts Wednesday, Nov. 1. The good news is that returning starter and last year’s leading scorer Jake Hackerson (Seckman) has been selected a NJCAA pre-season All-American.

The bad news - Hackerson suffered a torn meniscus in his knee when Missouri Baptist's Darvin Whitley dove into the back of Hackerson’s leg during a scrimmage Oct. 25. The injury will sideline the Magic’s top
player 4-6 weeks, causing head coach Randy Albrecht to scramble to change a line-up that was created around Hackerson as the anchor.

“I’m not sure what our style will end up to be,” said Albrecht. “I think our team’s probably more in flux at this time of the year than in a long time. We’ll have to count on a lot of newcomers at this time.”

Making line-up decisions even tougher is the fact that no player has stood out as a lock at a position.

“No one has jumped up and grasped a position and said ‘This is mine - I’m by far the best player’ - this may be one of those teams where the starting line up is who played the best in practice the day before,” said Albrecht.

If there’s one mentor who can decipher this puzzle, it’s the veteran Albrecht who starts his thirtieth season as Meramec head coach. Albrecht brings over 600 college wins along with 21 consecutive winning seasons to the table for the Magic. He is an inductee of three halls of fame (NJCAA, MO Basketball Coaches, Meramec Magic.)

However, a solid slate of newcomers and transfer players makes the Magic a formidable squad, especially at the guard position. University of MO - Rolla transfer Marcus Seidel (CBC) brings proven skills to the floor for Meramec.

“He’s a nice shooter,” said Albrecht. “Hopefully we can get him some shots during the game - that’s primarly what he offers you, a good outside shooter, not a bad free throw and three point shooter, and a good penetrator. If he can get to the foul line that would be good.”

Also vying for time at the guard spot is Jake Prosser, a six footer out of Francis Howell North, Stanley Crawford (Hazelwood Central), and Richard Williams (Lindbergh), who played briefly for Kaskaskia last year. However, the smallest of the new guards just may turn out to be the “David Eckstein” of the team - 5’9” Drew Lansford, a 3A All-State player from Belle High, MO.

“He’s a quick little kid, he’s got a lot of hustle, and pushes the ball,” said Albrecht. “He’s a factor when he’s on the court. He’s alert and he adds some things defensively because he can get out and pressure the ball.”

Returning to the guard position is Eric Paradoski (Vianney) and Tyler Tiemann (Steeleville, IL). Both received substantial experience last season.

Several forwards will likewise battle for their floor time. Cameron Hicks (Clayton) at 6’4”, Clay Zerr (St. Charles) at 6’6”, Ryan Wojtowicz (Kennedy) at 6’6”, and Jesse Fortner (Jennings) at 6’3” all bring height to the forward position. Alex Jackson (Ladue), who played first semester last season for Meramec, is a 6’6” court dynamo.

“He’s probably our best athlete up front, and our most explosive jumper,” said Albrecht. “He’s got some inside game and some outside game. He can finish on the break, he can offensive rebound some. He can also step outside occasionally and make a three pointer - he’s got a lot of versatility.”

Jackson may also rotate into the center position, sharing time with returning sophomore Adam Kaatman (Hazelwood West), a 6’9” crafty player who will shock the opposition with an occasional three pointer. Returning redshirt Kevin Newsome (Windsor), a 6’8” force in the middle, also steps in to help out at center.

The team, 18-14 a year ago, opens at home at 7:30 against Missouri Baptist’s JV squad Nov. 1, and then hosts Southwestern Illinois Saturday, Nov. 4 at 3:00.
**Women's Basketball Team Defends Crown With New Faces**

The men’s team won’t be the only squad feeling its way early in the season for a line-up - the women’s basketball squad, defending Region XVI champions, returns just three players from an outstanding 21-12 record last year.

Back for the Magic are six foot center **Samantha Turner** (Oakville), guard **Ceara Brown** (University City), and forward/center **Lauren Soukup** (Seckman.)

“With so many new faces, we’re still trying to develop our style,” said fifth year head coach **Steve Jarvis**. “We’re hoping that Ceara (Brown) will give us that ability to get the ball to the basket. Sam Turner’s looked pretty strong this pre-season too. We’re hoping that those two will step up.”

And, several new players are also ready to step up and keep this rejuvenated program on a winning track. The Magic will sport an 11 player roster, including one latecomer, **Kandice Berkel** (St. Clair), who is still competing for the volleyball team. “She’s a good athlete and will be able to help.”

Berkel, a guard, will be joined by guards **Jonica Booth** (Ft. Zumwalt S.), **Ann Parson** (Farmington), and point guard **Porscha Smith** (O’Fallon Township, IL) Coach Jarvis is hoping that Porscha can get the Magic’s motor running.

“She is really starting to come around,” said Jarvis of Smith. “She eventually will be really strong. She’s learning to get in our offense and pushing the ball down the floor.”

Among forwards, **Michelle Senf** (Mehlville), **Melinda Fischer** (Ft. Zumwalt W.), **Lizz Tudor** (Northwest), and **Kathleen Spisak** (Parkway South) all look to contribute immediately.

“We need to rely on Kathleen (Spisak) or Liz (Tudor),” said Jarvis. “Both of those guys can shoot a little bit. We’re hoping to have success shooting on the perimeter.”

Jarvis is also high on the 6’3” Fischer. “She’s made huge strides from when she first came in,” said Jarvis. “She’s got a way’s to go but she’s been able to come a long way and if she continues to improve like she has been, she looks like she’s going to be able to contribute.”

Further adding optimism is the team’s win over the Lindenwood University varsity squad in a recent scrimmage. The team opens the year Wednesday, Nov. 1 at 5:30 - hosting the Missouri Baptist JV team, and then will grind out six games in two weeks.

“If we can stay healthy, that’s the key,” said Jarvis.

**Wrestling Squad Finds Balanced Line-Up As Strength**

It’s difficult in a college wrestling line-up to achieve depth in the lower weights, middle weights, and upper weights. But, this appears to be the year the Magic have pulled off the hat trick with versatility at every weight class despite only four returning grapplers.

“They’re really good athletes and they’re working hard,” said head coach **Ron Mirikitani**, who begins his thirty-seventh year at the helm, “We’ve had some good practices.”

Not only will the Magic have more good practices, they hold the promise to have even better meets with their talent up and down the line-up. At 125 pounds, Meramec has a dynamic wrestler in **Darren Green** (Oakville). Green twice took a third place prep medal at state. At the tough 133 class, **Robert Smith** looks to hold down the position with his two Kentucky state medals.
Local grappler Kurt McCulloch (Marquette) and Louisiana native Justin Goodwin will vie for the 141 pound spot, along with returner Peter Koelinger (Webster Groves.) A pair of local standouts highlight the 149 pound class in St. Charles West’ Justin Keeney and Oakville’s Kyle Foley. Foley was named to the prestigious St. Louis Post-Dispatch All-Metro First Team in 2006.

“He’s going to be really good,” praised Mirikitani of Foley. “He’s a lot better than a fifth placer at the state tournament (Foley’s finish as a senior in ’06). He’s very coachable and really wants to win. I think he’s going to do real well for us.”

The Magic are even deeper at 157 pounds with a trio of talent in Nick Hanify (Washington, MO), Silvino Gomez IV (Louisiana.), and Chris Dopp (St. Charles West). Dopp was an undefeated state champion last spring and is looking for a return to the mat in the next few weeks following a back injury.

“He’s (Dopp) a very good competitor with explosive power, and good strength for his weight class,” said Mirikitani.

Returner Jason Akers (Parkway South) drops a class from last year to 165. “He has a year of experience and confidence and is really wrestling well right now,” said Mirikitani.

Two talented wrestlers fill out the 184 pound class in Mitch Barnett (Liberty, MO) and Morris Thomas (Edwardsville), a three time state qualifier.

However, the real sleeper may be at the 197 class in Ryan Sutton (Oakville), a two time state placer who can overpower the strongest of opponents.

“He’s going to be really good,” said Mirikitani. “He’s a real student of the sport. He’s as strong as he looks, and very quick. He conditions very hard and wrestles very hard.”

At the heavyweight (285) spot, Cedric Powell (Duncan, OK) returns from Arizona State where he redshirted a year ago after a phenomenal freshman campaign with the Magic in 2004-’05. Powell is considered a contender for a national title.

The Magic compete in the Central Missouri State Open Tourney on Sunday, Nov. 12 before moving onto the Missouri U. Open in Columbia a week later.