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Meramec Men’s Soccer Team Expects Strength to Be Offense in 2007

Coach Brian Smugala forecasts the 2007 edition of the St. Louis Community College at Meramec men’s soccer team as “equal in goal” to last year’s squad, but “our strength will be offense.” The Magic, who went undefeated in the tough Midwest Community College Athletic Conference, finished with a 14-4-1 record in 2006 pushing Smugala’s career record to 29-7-3 at Meramec.

On the attack will be sophomore midfielder 6-2 Jon Myers (Ft. Zumwalt South), who was last year’s second leading scorer with six goals and three assists with his powerful leg. Myers doubles as a Magic baseball player, too. The potentially dangerous forward/midfielder, sophomore Steve Jeon (Parkway South) returns; he has “speed to kill,” Smugala stated. But the “big guy on top” will literally be 6-2 sophomore transfer Ben Hamilton. He was the 2nd leading scorer with five goals and 2 assists for the 15-1 Barton County Cougars in 2006. Freshman forward Ian Porta (Marquette) brings scoring punch up top, also. Porta notched 20 goals and eight assists for the Mustangs last fall. As a junior, he led Marquette to the state final four; Porta was a three-year all-conference selectee and a 3rd team All-Metro pick as a senior. Also, returning are forwards Zach Costello (Kennedy), who showed promise with a goal and an assist, and Mike Riti (Webster Groves) who tallied two goals and an assist for the Magic in 2006.

Attempting to duplicate or better last year’s squad, that allowed only 15 goals in 19 games, is a trio of goalies fighting for the top netminder’s job. They are freshman Chris Miller (CBC), who recorded nine shutouts for the Cadets last fall. He is being challenged by freshmen Demir Dedic (Bayless), who had 14-5-1 record with a 1.23 goals against average for the Bronchos, and Dan Kotsis (Kennedy).

Defense wins soccer games, and the Magic will rely heavily on sophomore defender Jimmy McDonnell (CBC), a transfer from Quincy University who played on CBC’s state championship team of 2005. Sophomore Eric Fuchs (Vianney) is a smart, quick back with size and speed; he and former Vianney teammate, sophomore back Billy Feicht are counted on to be mainstays in the Magic defense. Chris Martin (Parkway South), a sophomore, is another returning defender.

Sophomore Kyle Gamache (Francis Howell Central), with three goals last year, is expected to start at center midfielder; he may be joined by center midfielder Corey Kossman, another Quincy U. transfer and a teammate of McDonnell at CBC. TJ Neusel (CBC), who played sparingly in 2006, returns for his sophomore season at midfield. In addition, freshmen Stephen Carenza (Marquette) and Matt Mantia (Webster Groves) are in the mix at center midfielder. Both were all-conference selections, and Mantia was MVP for the Statesmen last year.

When asked what goals he had for the season, coach Smugala stated his team “needs to be more consistent,” that is, “not to look past opponents.” Perhaps, Smugala was referring to the Magic’s 0-3-1 start last season before running off a streak of 14 consecutive wins breaking the school record. Smugala said his roster is in flux, but he expects to carry about 25 players on the roster as pre-season practices are about ready to start.

Meramec hopes to start another streak when the season opens at 1 p.m., Saturday, August 25th against Lincoln Land at SLCC at Florissant Valley in Ferguson, Missouri. The Magic will also be seeking to avenge last year’s upset loss to Forest Park in the semi-finals of the Region XVI tourney. The Magic plays the Highlanders 1 p.m., Saturday, September 8th at home. Another key contest in 2007 will be a 4 p.m., Wednesday, Sept. 26th game against always-tough Jefferson College in Hillsboro, MO.