Men’s Soccer Captures Midwest Tourney Title

Despite some early season misfortune, the men’s soccer team is 4-1, ranked fourteenth nationally, and just completed a superb showing in the Midwest Junior College Invitational Tournament over Labor Day weekend. The Magic captured the tourney’s blue division championship, besting six other teams. The win was the 50th for fourth year head coach Brian Smugala.

“This tournament, it’s some of the top teams in the country,” said Smugala. “It’s a measuring stick, although it’s early, but it kind of gives you an idea where you need to be if you want to compete on a national level. We’re going to try to take this like Michael Phelps, we’re going to try for eight in a row.”

It was a stormy start to the tourney in the 8:00 pm game on Thursday, Aug. 28 when severe weather and high winds forced the cancellation of the game late in the first half of an aborted 0-0 contest. The following night, perennial Kansas power Barton County beat the Magic 2-0.

“I was frustrated but I knew we had to regroup,” said sophomore captain Ian Porta (Marquette). “We have a great group of guys who won’t put their heads down. We just came out on fire, we were the better team today.”

Meramec certainly proved Porta right 15 hours later by dominating nationally sixth ranked Illinois Central 3-1. After falling behind 1-0, freshman forward Almin Sabotic (Mehlville) evened the score on a head ball. In the second half, forward Ian Porta knocked in the game winner on a feed from Kyle Leifield (Marquette). Ryan Sauncheagraw (Kennedy) added a late goal for the 3-1 final.

“To come out, down 2-0 last night, and then come out here and get a great win,” said Porta. “They were tough. I had the ball laying right at my foot and I just tapped it in- it was a team effort, that’s a big win for us.”

The Magic sealed the deal for the tourney title with a 4-2 win over Neosho on Aug. 31. Sabotic had two goals and an assist, while Steve McMahon (Lafayette) and Porta each had one.

“I just try to read the game before it even happens, picture everything, look around for openings, try to find my teammates, and just play fast, play quick,” said Sabotic.

The squad is down two projected starting players already. Highly regarded transfer Marc Bowron, a native of Scotland, was deemed academically ineligible for the season prior to the Magic’s first game. Sophomore midfielder Scott Gyllenborg (Lindbergh) severely injured his right shoulder landing hard on the ground against Southwestern Illinois College Aug. 26 and may be lost for the season.

“It’ll affect our depth but now we’ll see what we got behind Scott and some of his minutes will be spread around to several players, said coach Smugala. “Scott’s well-liked, he’s a silent
leader, and a kid that you can count on that you’re going to get everything that he’s got, so he’s hard to replace.”

The setbacks don’t seem to have affected the resilient Magic. In the season opener against Lincoln College Aug. 24, Meramec coasted to a 4-1 win over an opponent that has been difficult to beat in past years. Two days later, they edged Southwestern Illinois 1-0, a team that was one of the Magic’s few losses a year ago.

Another challenge awaits the Magic Sept. 5 when they travel to Union, MO for a 4:00 showdown with East Central College. The Rebels will be looking for revenge - a year ago Meramec eliminated them in the Region XVI Tournament via penalty kicks following a 0-0 stalemate through two overtimes.

**Solid Returning Nucleus Powers Women’s Soccer Squad**

Despite lower than desired team numbers in the early going, the women’s soccer team displays a solid returning core of talent. That talent will definitely be tested in the coming week when they face back-to-back challenges on Sunday, Sept. 7 and a day later. Their opponents will be two of the best - perennial powers Illinois Central and Lewis and Clark. The squad has a 13 day hiatus until the game with Illinois Central.

“Our potential is really good, it’s just that our numbers are critical,” said head coach Jeff Karl, now in his twenty sixth season. “We’re not going to be flourishing with 20 or 22 players. We’ll most likely have 16 or 17 players at most. I’ve gone to nationals with 15 players. The nucleus of our players that we have is pretty strong.”

The Magic have played a pair of games thus far, splitting the two. They opened the season Aug. 23 against a tough Parkland program, suffering a 1-0 loss. Due to injuries, the Magic only had 13 total players in uniform, and two substitutes on an extremely hot day. By the second half, when Parkland scored, the Magic were showing visible signs of fatigue.

Two days later, Meramec bounced back at home against the Fontbonne JV team. The Magic emerged with a 2-1 win, with the game-winner coming from returning All-American Meghan Thomas (Kennedy). Courtney Spurr (Mehlville) opened the scoring with her first goal.

“Her experience is just incredible,” said Karl of Thomas. “She’s also a person that gets along well with people and that’s really important, the leadership.

Thomas is part of the returning nucleus that also includes forward Michelle Spencer (Notre Dame.) Spencer missed the majority of last season after suffering a severe knee injury that required surgery. Her return is welcome news to coach Karl.

“She looks really good. Health-wise she’s almost 100%, you could never tell that anything ever happened to her,” said Karl.

In goal, sophomore Michelle Smith (Mehlville) adds height and athleticism. Sophomores, forward Sarah Sanguinet (Lafayette) and Lara Menke (Washington, MO) add much skill.

“It’s nice for us to be strong in goal,” said Karl. “I think we’ll be strong down the middle with Chelsea (Tetrault, Parkway North) and we’ll be using Lara Menke back in the middle. Lara always plays good defense. We’re going to ask her to try and advance and attack more forward with the ball. Attacking from behind, I think she could really be a dangerous weapon in that way. With that, along with Sarah (Sanguinet) and Meghan up front, and having Spence on the wing we could be very dangerous.”
Volleyball Battles For Home Win Over Lewis and Clark

The volleyball team made its home season debut a successful one for new head coach Jenell Franken on Aug. 27, beating Lewis and Clark in a five game thriller. Meramec won the first two games by scores of 25-23, and 25-21 and appeared to be coasting to a quick match victory.

However, the tough Trailblazers battled back to win the next two games, 25-23 and 25-15, to set up a decisive fifth game. In that final game, the Magic prevailed 15-11.

The Magic also competed in the McKendree Tournament over Labor Day weekend. The team came out blazing in the opening day on Friday, Aug. 29, winning all three of its matches. The team disposed of STLCC - Florissant Valley 25-23, 18-25, and 15-13, beat Fort Scott 25-15 and 25-16, and whipped Rend Lake 25-12, 25-22. Results from Saturday’s finals weren’t yet available.

Mirikitani Heads To Central MO State Hall Of Legends

Following eight inductions into various halls of fame, it’s only appropriate that head wrestling coach Ron Mirikitani is now headed into a hall of legends, especially since his 39 year coaching career has been nothing but legendary.

Coach Mirikitani will be inducted into the University of Central Missouri State Hall of Legends in ceremonies in Warrensburg Oct. 24. He wrestled there for three seasons, earning the high point title as a junior, as well as being the first match captain in the history of the school. Mirikitani qualified for the NCAA National Tournament his junior season.

“It’s really an honor,” said Mirikitani, “They have a really long list of great wrestlers there.”

The veteran coach already belongs to eight halls of fame, including the NJCAA and the Meramec Magic, among several others. He is the all-time NJCAA career wins leader with 447 dual meet victories and guided the Magic to a second place national team finish this past season.

David Mirikitani Repeats As Jiu Jitsu World Champ

As if though it was improbable enough a year ago, David Mirikitani has achieved the near impossible for a second year in a row, winning the World Championship of jiu jitsu in the Los Angeles area in August, and at age 38 no less.

Mirikitani, a volunteer wrestling assistant coach to his father, Ron, stepped up from last year’s white belt category to the more advanced blue belt competition in the 149 pound weight class.

Mirikitani won the title match 4-0 over a Brazilian opponent. He is a two-time NJCAA All-American from his grappling days at Meramec, and a three time state champion while at Kirkwood High.