



Summer 8-31-1999

IWU Men's Soccer Looks to Veteran Leadership

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Recommended Citation

Salowitz, Stew, "IWU Men's Soccer Looks to Veteran Leadership" (1999). *News and Events*. 845.

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31 August 1999

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IWU Men's Soccer Looks to Veteran Leadership

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. The Illinois Wesleyan University men's soccer team has eight starters among the 11 lettermen returning from a team that finished with a 10-6-2 record last fall.

The Titans open their season with a 4 p.m. home match Wednesday (Sept. 1) against Blackburn.

"We're excited about seeing what has been a young team for the past couple of seasons coming of age," said IWU head coach Tony Bankston. "Despite having only one senior on the team, we have a lot of veterans who have matured in the program, which should lead to more consistency in our play."

Leading the returnees are last season's "Most Valuable Players" Chris Wirsing (**Grayslake HS**) and Adam Wachholtz (**Newburgh, Ind., Castle HS**). Wirsing, a junior forward, was a second team all-College Conference of Illinois and Wisconsin selection and the Titans' offensive MVP as he scored a team-high eight goals and added two assists. In his career, Wirsing is seventh in school history with 14 goals and two assists for 30 points.

Wachholtz, a sophomore goalkeeper and IWU's defensive MVP, allowed an average of 1.49 goals per game and had 6 1/2 shutouts with 57 saves.

Bankston is also high on the play of freshman goalkeeper Ryan McCleary (**Glen Ellyn, Glenbard West HS**). "Ryan is a very exciting player who gives us outstanding depth and flexibility with a newcomer as well as a veteran returning with goalkeeping skills," Bankston said.

Also returning is first team all-conference junior sweeper Josh Shipley (**Grayslake HS**), who led the Titans in scoring with seven goals while assisting on six more for 20 total points.

The five other starters returning include sophomore forward Larry Kociolek (**Oak Forest HS**), sophomore midfielder Clay Scott (**Gurnee, Warren HS**), sophomore stopper Yomi Ademola (**Lagos, Nigeria, Hillcrest HS**), senior defensive midfielder Chad Guimond (**Manteno HS**), and junior midfielder Nick Hubbuch (**Oak Park, Oak Park-River Forest HS**).

Juniors Bob Habel (**Lockport HS**) and Terry Chapman (**Normal, Community HS**) are Bankston's starters as fullbacks, while sophomore letterman Paul Zidron (**Barrington, Lake Zurich HS**) and sophomore Matt Loomis (**Centralia HS**) are also competing for playing time on the Titan defensive end.

Another letterman, Mitul Patel (**Hoffman Estates, Schaumburg HS**), is a veteran at forward and midfield positions.

"We have a lot more team speed than before on the offensive end," Bankston said. "The top five in our formation all run the 40 between 4.6 and 4.9 seconds."

Freshman Dan Lau (**River Forest, Oak Park-River Forest HS**) has played his way into the starting offensive midfield position. "In our offense, that position is the most important one," Bankston says. "The fact that Lau is starting there as a freshman says a lot about his ability."

Freshmen Chris Couri (**East Peoria HS**) and David Eklin (**Oak Lawn, Richards HS**) have also shown promise at the forward position, while Szymon Krzyzanowski (**Park Ridge, Maine South HS**) and Chris Bobowski (**Darien, Benet Academy**) will see time on the defense.

After playing off-campus at the Sale Barn Fields in south Bloomington last season, the Titans return to their completely renovated and newly-lighted on-campus field, just north of Jack Horenberger baseball field on Franklin Avenue. Seven night games are scheduled, including a 7 p.m. match on Sept. 15 against Wheaton, the 1997 NCAA Division III champions and a final 16 team last season.