

Ocelot kickers seek NJCAA tourney berth

By C.J. Rieck
staff writer

Vengeance serves some as a reason for living. For Schoolcraft College's men's soccer team, it's been the motive for playing.

All season long, the Ocelots have pushed and prodded themselves and each other, with one goal in mind: the inter-regional tournament and a rematch with Lewis and Clark CC.

It was a year ago that SC met L&C in the inter-regional finals at Dupage College in Glen Ellyn, Ill. The Ocelots qualified for the tournament by going unbeaten in the Eastern Conference. In their first inter-re-

gional game, they blasted Bethany Lutheran (Bismarck, Minn.), 2-0. But L&C, from Godfrey, Ill., gave them a rude jolt. SC fell behind quickly by a 2-0 count, then battled back to tie it 2-2 at the half.

BUT IT was just before halftime that coach Van Dimitriou realized that his team lacked. Defender Scott Steiner was the victim of a vicious slide tackle. He continued to play, but his effectiveness was minimized. SC lost 4-2.

"Last year in my final notes I wrote, 'We've got to play more physical,'" recalled Dimitriou. "The Ocelots have strived to do just that. It showed in Saturday's 1-0

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playoff win over Macomb CC, a victory that earned them their third-straight conference title and a berth in the inter-regional. Two MCC players were red-carded (ejected), and another got a yellow card (warning). "We don't have a small team," said Dimitriou. "We can play physical, no question about it."

If there is a question mark concerning the Ocelots, it's goal-scoring.

In their last three conference games, they scored just two goals. And to make matters worse, top forward John Gelmis suffered a broken ankle in the opening minutes of Saturday's game and is out.

To try and make up for Gelmis's considerable talents, Dimitriou will put Rick Hamers, normally a half-back, at forward. And that isn't the only change he is planning.

DESPITE their problems scoring goals, Dimitriou is more concerned with defense. SC will use a sweeperback (Steiner), two fullbacks (Todd Ericson and Anwar Yaffai) and two stoppers (D.J. Ward and

Kevin Kurakowski). Jeff Vakraits will be in goal.

Mike Murphy, who is just returning from a knee injury, Joe Mase, Jim Moreau and possibly Bobby Neumann will share the halfbacks. Neumann will also play left wing, with Billy "White Shoes" Trombley at right wing. Brett Murphy and Gene Pulice will also get in plenty of playing time at forward.

SC will have to be clicking on all cylinders to get by L&C. The two teams meet in a first-round game at 1 p.m. (Central Standard Time) Saturday at Dupage. The winner plays in the championship match at 11 a.m. (CST) Sunday, against the Bethany Lutheran-Trilon (Ill.) victor.

"I would say that's the best thing that could have happened," Dimitriou said of playing L&C in the first round. "I'd rather play them while we're in good physical condition. Then we have no excuses."

L&C is ranked seventh in the NJCAA. SC is 15th. The inter-regional champion qualifies for the eight-team NJCAA tournament Nov. 26-29 at Mercer CC in Trenton, N.J.

"THIS IS the type of opposition

where you have to play defense," said Dimitriou. "If we get a lead, Rick (Hamers) will come back to halfback and we'll go with our defensive lineup."

Last year SC depended more on speed and finesse. This year the Ocelots can adjust to any type of game, Dimitriou believes.

But over the final few weeks of the season SC didn't play any type of game too well. The Ocelots struggled.

"What was happening was the wins were coming too easily for us," said Dimitriou. "There was a lack of intensity — until we lost."

That loss — 1-0 to Cuyahoga Metro CC — "made us realize we're human and we'd better put out a little more," said Dimitriou. "It caused us to re-evaluate our total goal."

That didn't take much review. Winning the inter-regional has been the No. 1 object since pre-season practice.

"We have a number (nine of 18) of second year players out there," said Dimitriou. "That's what's been driving them all season."

And where will that determination drive them? The Ocelots are hoping the trip won't end until Nov. 29.

Pioneers gain Division II spot

By C.J. Rieck
staff writer

Without question, Oakland University's soccer team struggled often this season. Their goalkeeper quit before the first game and they had to refit that and six other starting positions.

The magnitude of the task was apparent as the Pioneers struggled to a 5-4-2 record with two-thirds of the season completed. Finishing with a winning record would be a challenge. As for the NCAA Division II playoffs — forget it.

"A month ago, our chances seemed pretty slim," said OU coach Gary Parsons. "But we finished strong."

That brief description of the Pioneers' stretch run doesn't do it justice. In their final eight games, they went 6-1-1, with their only loss coming at Akron University, a nationally ranked Division I team.

WHEN OU BATTLED back with two second-half goals by Ender Jui-sogu to edge Central Michigan 2-1 in its regular-season finale Friday, the team got its reward: a chance to

play again.

The Pioneers were chosen as the No. 3 seed in the Central Region for the Division II tournament. They will host No. 2 seed Lock Haven (Penn.) at 1 p.m. Saturday.

The winner of Saturday's contest will go against the region's No. 1 team, Gannon University. GU was ranked No. 1 nationally until losing to Davis and Elkins Sunday. The Knights are now ranked fourth. LIU is eighth in the Division II rankings and OU is 10th.

"I know they're a quality team," was Parsons' description of LIU, which won the Pennsylvania Athletic Conference championship with a 2-1 win over East Stroudsburg Sunday and finished the season at 14-2-3. There was little else Parsons could add, not having seen the team play this season.

BUT HE DID know why OU was given a berth in the playoffs after posting an 11-5-3 record.

"I think there were two things," the Pioneer coach said. "First was the fact that our schedule was one of the strongest in the nation, and it

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certainly was the toughest in this region. And second was the way we finished, going 6-1-1 through one of the most difficult parts of our season."

The key weekend for OU was a road trip Nov. 1-2 to Davis and Elkins and Alderson-Broaddus. There was little hope the Pioneers could succeed against two of the top teams in their respective divisions, but they collected a win and a tie. Over their last five games they were 4-0-1.

"We needed to finish the season without a loss after we were beaten by Akron and we did," said Parsons. "We proved to a lot of people we were one of the toughest teams in the country."

SO OU HAS proved it deserved a spot in the playoffs. The question now is, how far can the Pioneers stretch their season?

Two problems confront them for

the LIU match: First, forward Simon Mayo is out with a broken foot. The injury is actually an old one, a stress fracture that wasn't diagnosed properly.

Second, midfielder Erik Enyedy got a red card in the CMU game, which means he must sit out this match. Parsons wanted to shift Enyedy to the front line to fill in for Mayo. Now Dale Hinckson, just returning from a broken foot, will shore up the midfield and Tom Duff will substitute at forward.

Such problems make OU's assignment that much tougher. But there are two factors in the Pioneers' favor: They've never lost an NCAA playoff game at home (they're 2-0), and they have never lost to LIU (in three games). They're hopeful those streaks remain intact.

"We're very young and we have some injuries," said Parsons. "But the guys are playing well right now and they have a lot of faith in themselves. To the players' credit, they came together and turned the season around."

This will be OU's fourth trip to the playoffs in five years.

Former area star lighting up the Ivy League

Craig Morton continues to set the Dartmouth College athletic community on its ear.

The Plymouth Salem graduate and former Plymouth-Canton Observer Athlete of the Year is rewriting the football record books at Dartmouth in his first season of varsity play.

In Dartmouth's 41-0 win against Columbia, Morton caught three passes for 158 yards. One of the receptions was for 88 yards and a touch-

down — that broke a 51-year school record for longest pass catch.

It was Morton's eighth TD catch of the season, which ties a school record. On the season, he has caught 33 passes for 881 yards. That's an average of 26.7 yards per catch.

In just eight games, Morton is seventh among Dartmouth's career leaders in reception yardage. And the 881 yards in a season is third best in the school's history. He needs 154 more to break the single-season record.

Morton hasn't let gridiron success damage his academic record, either. He carries a 3.22 grade point average at the Ivy League school. He has won a spot on the District I academ-

ic all-America team and is a leading candidate for national academic all-America honors.

Dartmouth is 2-6 this season.

— Chris McCosky

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