Farmington's Giese achieves NCAA tournament goal

BY RICHARD L. SHOOK
STAFF WRITER

SOCCER

The University of Detroit Mercy's men's soccer team is going to the NCAA tournament - but it had to go through Observerland to get there.

The Titans took a 14-3-4 record and the Midwestern Collegiate Conference tournament championship into their NCAA tournament opener at 1 p.m. Saturday at Bowling Green.

"This is absolutely incredible," said one of Detroit's key players, sweeper Jeff Thomas. "This is a goal that we had when we all came in as frosh. There were 10 of us.

"Our freshman year we lost in the conference finals. Then we lost again (in the finals) last year. So this year was pretty much do or die for us."

"We've played them before," Titans' coach Morris Lupenec said of the Bowling Green contest, "so it's not like they're a team we're not aware of.

"And they are the 14th-ranked team in the nation. You've got to be pretty good to be ranked that high."

Detroit defeated Bowling Green in that earlier meeting, 3-1, in overtime on the Titans' turf.

"We scored with 24 seconds left," he said, "on a goal by Michael Giese. Then we scored two goals in the overtime to beat them."

Which, of course, won't mean jack when they play Saturday -- and might even work against the Titans since they are just 3-2-2 in road games.

"We've played there before," Thomas said. "But this is a different case. Going into the tournament, we knew for sure if we got in that we wouldn't host a game.

"I don't think anybody is concerned about playing on the road. That was pretty much expected. We're peaking at the right time. We've got an eight-game unbeaten streak."

UDM will start six Observerland players against the Falcons with another two coming off the bench. In addition, a ninth Observerland player is being redshirted as a freshman.

Starting in goal for the Titans is senior Kal Kaliszewski (Livonia Churchill). His successor, freshman Jim Grewe (Livonia Stevenson) is being redshirted.

Senior Thomas (Stevenson) is Detroit's sweeper while the midfielders in front of him include senior Dario Rauker (Churchill) and senior John Truskowski (Plymouth Salem).

Freshman Matt Quinter (Stevenson) plays fullback or midfield and senior Dominic Vella (Churchill) starts at forward.

Key reserves for Lupenec's team include senior forward Giese (Farmington) and senior midfielder Adam Pichler (Stevenson).

The Titans are laden with seniors plus a core of sophomores and freshmen who will take over next season, Lupenec's sixth as the team's coach.

"When I first took the job," he said, "I was given the job in December, around Christmas time. The recruiting process was almost shot by then. But we did the best we could.

"We really kick-started it with the seniors on the team right now, led by Kal and Thomas. Of course we got Truskowski and Rauker the year before that."

"I knew who I was coming in with," Thomas said of why he chose the Titans. "And I knew the coach. It was also close to home, which was important to me.

"Morris had a lot to do with it. I knew what type of coach he was.

"I went to high school with Pichler and we played on the same club team. Along with Kal.

"And I knew Dario, who was a year older than me. We all just decided. We talked a few days a week during the high school season, to see what everybody was doing, which schools had called, things like that. In the end, we all decided to stay together."

Detroit won seven times in Lupenec's first season, reached 16, 8, 13 and now 14 victories in successive campaigns. This, though, is the first for UDM in the NCAA tournament for Lupenec.

The Titans came close last year, losing to Butler, 5-2 in overtime, in the MCC tournament championship match.

"That was the toughest loss I'd ever experienced as a coach," Lupenec said, "just because I thought we had a very good chance of winning last season.

"We had to win in overtime with 10 players in the semifinals. Then in the final we felt we weren't on an even slate -- but that's not taking anything away from Butler.

"We knew we had a quality team coming back," Lupenec said. "The thing about this season is there were 4-6 teams that could have won that tournament. We've seen a lot of parity within the league."

Detroit was picked to win the MCC, but finished third, losing to Butler and Wright State.

Lupenec has the bigger picture in mind, too.

"We've got 10 seniors on this year's team," he said, "and all of them are graduating.

"It's a tribute to the university and the professers. This is a game; there's more to it than that."

So even if Detroit loses, it wins.

OBSERVERLAND TALENT

OBSERVERLAND CONTRIBUTORS TO U-DETROIT'S SOCCER TEAM

•**Kal Kaliszewski** – Titans' goalie has six shutouts and 0.99 goals-against average. Career total of 19 shutouts. Twice All-MCC second team pick and member of 1996 MCC All-Tournament team. Helped Livonia Churchill reach state title game in 1990.

Coach Morris Lupenec's comments: "Kal was a Parade All-America coming out of high school. He felt that if someone could get this program turned around, get it into the NCAA tournament, that I could do that – and I was just as confident in him. He was a big part of our recruiting. You've got to build from the back."

•**Jeff Thomas** – Sweeper named MCC tournament MVP. One of the best in the Midwest at his position. Three-time All-MCC second team pick, twice All-Mideast Region selection. Had three assists this season. Led Stevenson to 1991 Class A tournament title.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "He's the core of our back line. He's been a steady sweeper from Day One. If there's one word that defines Jeff Thomas, it's steady."

•**Matt Quinter** – Freshman started in 18 of a possible 21 games. Earned MCC All-Newcomer status with his play. Missed his senior season at Stevenson due to a broken leg but led Spartans to conference title as a junior. Made All-District as a sophomore in Virginia before moving to Michigan.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "In my view, there were two players I believe were the top two players in the state of Michigan. One was Stevie Williford, who had a very good season for Michigan State. The other was Matt Quinter. Those two can play in any program in the country.

"Matt was very instrumental in the final (MCC tournament) game in shutting down Butler's top offensive threat."

•**John Truskowski** – Fifth-year senior started all 19 games he played, netting a goal and two assists. Had four goals and three assists as a junior. As a prep, led Plymouth Salem to a district title.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "In John's first year he suffered a broken leg and did not play. He's working on his Masters and is taking a very heavy schedule while playing soccer. Definitely has been our defensive leader for the last four years. A super individual."

•**Dominic Vella** – Second-team All-MCC this year. MCC Tournament MVP in 1995. Started all 21 games, scoring seven goals and adding two assists, the 16 points placing him tied for ninth among MCC scorers. Played at Churchill, went to Schoolcraft before transferring to UDM.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "He's the big man for us up front. He's scored a lot of important goals in the last two years. I hope he's a key for us in Saturday's game."

•**Adam Pichler** – Scored the last goal of a shootout which enabled UDM to defeat Wisconsin-Milwaukee in overtime in MCC tournament semifinals. Appeared in seven games, starting one. Key Stevenson player in 1991 state championship season.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "He came in with Thomas and Kaliszewski as a freshman. He plays midfield for us and come off the bench this year. He's given us value there, especially against Wisconsin-Milwaukee."

•**Michael Giese** – Tied for 10th in MCC scoring derby with 15 points. Ended with 17 points on six goals, five assists. Farmington product transferred to UDM after a year ago Wisconsin-Green Bay.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "He came in with Thomas and Kaliszewski as a freshman. He plays midfield for us and come off the bench this year. He's given us value there, especially against Wisconsin-Milwaukee."

•**Dario Rauker** – Twice honored as second-team All-MCC selection. Was second-team All-State at Churchill.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "He took a year off for personal reasons, but decided to come back. And what a valuable part of the team he's been. He's a steady outside midfielder for us. He's steady with the ball and can see the field very well."

•**Jim Grewe** – Red-shirt freshman from Stevenson, where he recorded 22 shutouts. Led Spartans to 1993 state finals.

Coach Lupenec's comments: "When we looked at the core of our recruiting, we looked at the goalkeeping situation in the state. There was a kid now at Eastern Michigan who is from Canton, a boy from DeLaSalle who went to Michigan State – and Grewe from Stevenson.

"We knew we needed to get one of those three to take care of our goalkeeping for the next four years. He was fortunate, too, to be able to play under Kaliszewski for a year.

"We think he's going to turn some heads next year. He's a lot better than some people give him credit for."

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