

S'craft soccer teams prep for nationals

By C.J. Rieak
staff writer

The approaches taken by Schoerlcraft College's soccer coaches as the two teams — for the first time in school history — both head to their respective National Junior College Athletic Association Tournament are quite different.

Women's coach Nick O'Shea had a two-page scouting report on his first-round opponent, Anne Arundel CC (from Arnold, Md.), by Monday. He had talked with several coaches familiar with his foe and had already prepared a game plan.

Men's coach Van Dimitriou had no such information at his disposal as his team prepared for the 12-hour bus trip to Trenton, N.J., Tuesday. Dimitriou figured it wouldn't take long to figure out which players on his first-round opponent — Passaic County CC (Paterson, N.J.) — would need special attention once the game started.

"We plan on shutting them out," said Dimitriou of his strategy. "We got three (shut-outs) in a row going, and we've got the same people playing. No reason to expect it to change."

SOUNDS A BIT too confident, perhaps.

But after all, this is the first trip to the NJCAA Tournament SC's men's team has made in a decade. Indeed, O'Shea — the women's coach — played for the first SC men's team to make it this far, in 1980.

And Dimitriou's approach might work. His plan seems simple: Make the opponent play SC's game. Force the play, make them adjust.

"Assuming we have the same lineup, I think we'll be right in there," said Dimitriou of his team's chances. The Ocelots, 12-1-1 against NJCAA competition, enter the national tournament ranked eighth in the nation. Passaic (16-2) is fourth.

Should SC beat Passaic — their match is at 1 p.m. today — it would advance to the NJCAA semifinals Friday. Another win, and the Ocelots would be playing for the national championship Sunday.

For SC to get that far, it will have to at least match its level of performance at the Inter-regional Tournament. The Ocelots blanked both the College of DuPage (1-0) and Lewis and Clark CC (4-0). Their play against Lewis and Clark, in particular, was outstanding.

But the trail won't get easier, that's cer-

tain. Khaled Zeldan, who scored three goals against Lewis and Clark, together with Jeff Vandemergel and Chris Crawford will have to apply pressure offensively. Dave Dingle and Jeff Saylor will have to provide steady defense, and keeper Scott Hauman will again have to be unbeatable.

THE WEARISOME three games-in-four-days schedule is nothing new to O'Shea. Besides his own playing experience in the tournament, he coached SC's women's team to the NJCAA title in 1987. His current squad has the abundance of talent and, with just 11 team members, there is no depth.

But don't count the Lady Ocelots out. Anne Arundel has been beaten soundly by teams SC tied. Which would seem to put the Lady Ocelots in the favorite's position, at least for their opener. O'Shea is taking nothing for granted, however.

"I know they have two decent forwards, a good sweeper and a good stopper," he said in analyzing Anne Arundel. "Their midfielders are real average. They don't play a lot of possession. They look to attack quickly."

His own team, ranked fourth in the NJCAA with a 7-3-4 overall record (Anne Arundel was ranked eighth), will have some

changes to deal with. Cindy Bowman, the Lady Ocelots' high-scoring striker, will be in goal throughout the tournament. That leaves the scoring burden with Nikki Johnson, Sara Hayes and Bonnie Boyle.

O'SHEA EXPECTS the game, which is also at 1 p.m. today, to be decided in the midfield, patrolled by Boyle, Donna O'Brien, Lindy Tatale and Jennifer Whitfield.

"If my midfield can dominate theirs, we'll win," predicted O'Shea. "We have to contain their two forwards and put enough pressure on them to keep their sweeper and stopper back. If we can put enough pressure on them, they won't be able to attack."

Should the Lady Ocelots survive their first-round test, they'll play the winner of the Brevard (N.C.) College-Florissant Valley CC (St. Louis) match Friday.

That should be their biggest test in what has shaped up as a less-than-powerful field. Flo Valley is ranked No. 1 and has beaten and tied SC, while Brevard, ranked second nationally, edged the Lady Ocelots 3-2 in overtime in Brevard.

"Even though we lost to Brevard, I thought we played them evenly," said

O'Shea. "We'll play them the same way, but we'll put Bev (DeJohn, SC's best marking defender) on their No. 21 (striker Jennifer McMaster)."

SHOULD FLO VALLEY beat Brevard, O'Shea would make other changes in his lineup. "We'd have to make changes against Flo Valley," he said. The reason? "They have an amazing center midfielder in Laura Goecke," answered O'Shea. "She's not fast, but she's real skilled with the ball."

"We'll have to mark her man-for-man. And we'll bring Bev into the midfield to mark her. Their team goes through (Goecke). If we can mark her well, we can shut down a lot of them."

Although Bowman has looked good in her short stints in goal, there's no doubt that SC's defenders — Jennifer Marshall, sweeper Angie Stiglmair, DeJohn and either Whitfield or Tatale — will be tested. So will the team's durability and stamina.

If the Lady Ocelots do win their first two matches, they'll get a day to rest up for the final. And if they do get that far, their prospects for a second NJCAA championship will be very good.

OU gets soccer wish: rematch with Gannon

By C.J. Rieak
staff writer

The rematch is here, the one Oakland University's soccer players have been aiming at for the last month. But the importance of the game itself, the championship of the Central Region with a berth in the NCAA Division II final four at stake, should keep the rematch from becoming a grudge match.

When last these two teams met, OU suffered a 2-0 homefield loss to Gannon University. As the game ended, a multi-player scuffle broke out; red cards were given to players on each team.

OU coach Gary Parsons de-emphasized the hard feelings that might still linger from that game. "As far as I'm concerned, it's a dead issue," he said. "I just think that's the best thing we can do with it — leave it lie and concentrate on the game."

Which will require enough of an effort on the Pioneers' part, considering that in the first meeting they had a man advantage for most of the second half due to a red card issued against Gannon's Troy Bingham and still couldn't score. OU's John Gentile also missed a penalty kick during the match.

"I DIDN'T think we handled that situation well," said Parsons of the man-advantage in the first game. "We didn't do a lot with the ball in that game. We played a little foolishly, especially when they had 10 men." Parsons knows he'll have to change some things to be successful this time. "We're going to have to give them parts of the field," he conceded. "I know we can't dominate in the midfield, so we'll have to adjust to what they do. We'll have to keep things tight defensively."

The Pioneers' effort through much of the first meeting was strong. Where they faltered was on set plays, and that has bothered Parsons. "With Gannon, over the last three-four years, we've been killed on set plays," he said. "I think that's been the key to their wins — we haven't executed defensively against their set plays."

"We know what they're going to do, we're just not getting it done defensively. Either they're out-executing us or they're just beating us on the play. That has got to stop."

OU'S TEAM is young, with just three seniors and two juniors, so inconsistency can be anticipated. What hasn't been lacking — indeed, the Pioneers' most consistent element — is effort.

"The good thing is, they don't stop working," said Parsons. "I know we'll get the effort. I just don't want us to be spinning our wheels in time."

"Effort has been a consistent part of our team all year. Whether or not that translates into a good game is the question."

The leadership has come from all classes, including a surprisingly strong freshman group that includes keeper Mike Sheehy (from Farmington HS), midfielder Gentile (Livonia Churchill), forwards Mike Thornton and Lee Davison, and redshirt freshman defender Jim Harrison. All either start or get considerable playing time.

OU's concentrated effort in neutralizing Gannon forwards Bingham and Michel Heeneman and midfielders Michel Ellenbrook, John Treshchel and Marco Koolman will spell the difference, and could help the Pioneers — currently 17-2-2 overall — extend their season for at least one more game.

Sheehy stars in goal for Pioneers

By C.J. Rieak
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Logic had long since been discarded — tossed to the wind, if you'll pardon a pun on the dreadful playing conditions (30 mph winds, snow and near-freezing temperatures) — by the time the shootout started.

Oakland University and Northeast Missouri State had survived 90 minutes of regulation and 30 minutes of overtime, and were still locked in a 1-1 tie in their first NJCAA Division II soccer tournament battle Sunday at OU. Which necessitated the penalty-kick shootout.

An abhorrence, these shootout things are; they share little in common with the game. Five players from each team take turns rocketing penalty kicks at the opposing keepers. The team with the most goals after the round of five is declared the winner and advances to the final eight of the NCAA II tournament.

"I normally never want to see it go to penalty kicks," said OU coach Gary Parsons. "But to be honest, I thought if it went to penalty kicks we'd win."

WHY? BECAUSE — in keeping with the departure from logic that was the norm for the day — OU had a freshman goalkeeper. Again, most coaches would turn white at the prospect of the team's fate riding with a freshman in the net.

But Mike Sheehy is no ordinary freshman.

He proved it by making a diving stop on the Bulldogs' second kicker, Jason Hicks. Sheehy got just enough of the ball to deflect it off the right post. OU's first four shooters — John Gentile (from Livonia Churchill), Lee Davison, Paul Phillips and Mike Thornton — all converted.

After NEMS' third shooter, Kevin Huper, sent his try over the crossbar, Thornton's kick made it 4-1 and clinched the win for the Pioneers. They will now host the Central Region final against Gannon University at 1 p.m. Sunday.

"I felt confident," was how Sheehy, a Farmington HS grad, felt going into the shootout. "Every day

OU sports

before practice a few of the guys and I go down early and work on penalty kicks."

The Dogs' first kicker, Dave Roberts, planted his penalty shot neatly into the upper right corner, well out of Sheehy's reach. But against Hicks, Sheehy said, "I just watched the way he approached the ball, and I kind of assumed (which way he'd go)."

HIS ASSUMPTION was correct. And it also proved to Parsons that sometimes feelings are more important than logic. Like his lineup for the shootout — one might figure experience would be a determining factor. Not so, Gentile, Davison and Thornton are all freshmen. Only Phillips is a senior.

"I didn't even think about that," said Parsons when asked about his freshman shooters. "But we don't have a lot of experience on this team."

They had enough to get by, but barely. Although OU owned the first half, it failed to put the ball into the net until just 16 seconds remained in the half. Emmanuel Charles, who performed superbly the entire game, crossed the ball into the box from the corner and Phillips headed it past Stefan Wall to make it 1-0.

EARLY in the second half, NEMS altered its strategy and it made a difference. Said Parsons: "In the second half, they went straight forward more, were more direct, and that gave us a lot of problems. I thought they were much more effective."

OU's counterattacking worked better when NEMS stuck to its methodical passing style. When the Dogs started pressing more, their

scoring chances increased. They finally put one past Sheehy at the 73-minute mark on a free kick just outside OU's penalty area, awarded after a foul against Jeff Forshey.

Pat Rhode took the kick and netted it, tying the score at 1-1.

NEMS coach Dave Poggi dismissed his team's slow start in the match as a case of jitters. "It's the first time the team's been in the (NCAA II) tournament," he said. "I think it was a bit of stage fright, maybe. Once they realized it was

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— Gary Parsons
OU soccer coach

just another game, they started playing better."

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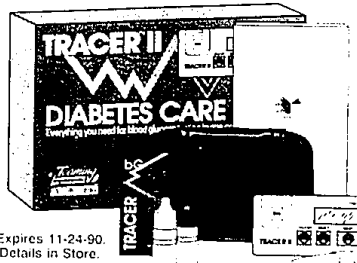
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