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South Dakota Soccer Sets Sights On 2015



FILE PHOTO

Left: Corey Strang in a game for the University of South Dakota during the 2014 season. Strang will be returning for her junior year at USD as one of the top goal scorers for the Coyotes in the forward position.

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The University of South Dakota women's soccer team is looking to build off last season's 9-8-2 record in 2015, the team's best finish since 2006.

"We, again, made significant progress with this program," said head coach Mandy Green. "If you're talking win-loss, we had nine wins and we actually finished the season over .500, which that is the first time we've been able to do that."

The team graduated 11 seniors from last year's roster, including goalkeeper MacKenzie Viktor, who recorded 62 saves during the season and had an impressive 1.44 goals against average in 2014. Sophomore Sydney Hardin saw some game time last season and is expected to be the starting goalkeeper.

"Always replacing a goalkeeper is going to be huge, but Sydney Hardin, who is a sophomore this year, she got some minutes in the fall and then got all of the minutes in the spring because she was our only goalkeeper, so we are looking for her to step up where Mackenzie left off," Green said.

Green will have some depth to work with in the forward position as all starting forwards will be returning in 2015, as well as returning impact players off the bench.

The team's leading goal scorer last season, Taylor Nivala, will be back for her senior year. Nivala scored eight goals and had one assist in 19 games and ranked fifth in the league for goals scored. A significant improvement over 2013 when she netted zero goals and had one assist in 19 games.

Starting forward Corey Strang put away five goals in 2014 during her sophomore year and earned Second Team All Summit League honors. She will be returning up top coming off a season as a team's second leading scorer.

Midfielder MaKenzie Burmeister is a new face to look for this season. Coming out of Gretna, Nebraska, Burmeister played in 18 games last fall for Gretna High school with seven goals and eight assists for the Dragons who went 16-5 in the season. She also took home the high school state tournament MVP award.

USD graduated two defensemen in Lauren Bennett and Sam

Harvey, but Green is expecting two incoming defenders to compete for the positions.

"In the back, Tayler Karas, who is from Omaha, and Maddie Butterfield is a Kansas City girl," Green said. "I think those two will come in and fight for playing time right away."

"I hope all of them are ready to play and they're healthy and can come in and make an impact right away."

Green has seen a new leadership style during spring practices in the senior class and thinks the new atmosphere will be along a new attitude.

"Our now senior class is a completely different group than the senior group from last year," she said. "They are a very positive group and very high energy and enthusiastic group whereas our senior class from last year, they were more hard-nose, demanding, high intense kind of group, so different personality so we'll see how they step up."

Women's soccer began practices on Wednesday and has just two and a half weeks to prepare for the first game.

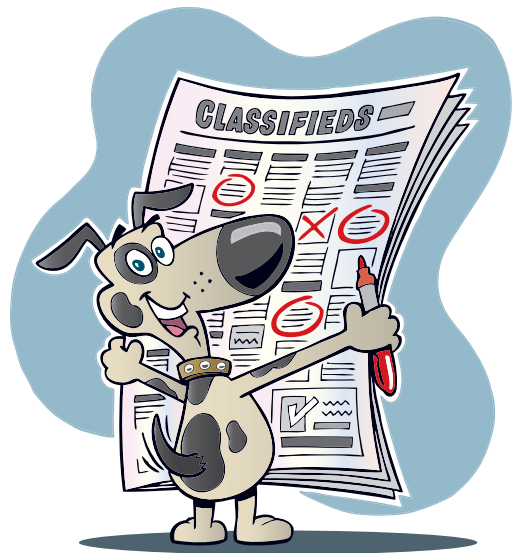
"It's pretty crazy time at the beginning of the year and I think we've got good leadership and girls that are pretty hungry and motivated to play," Green said. "We have a tougher fall schedule than we've had the previous couple years, so it will be interesting to see how the girls react to it and how we can rise to the occasion."

USD faces the University of Nebraska in an exhibition game on Aug. 14 in Lincoln then open the season at Creighton on Aug 21. This will be the team's first match up since 2013 that saw a 4-0 score in favor of the Bluejays. USD's first home game is against Iowa State on Aug. 23.

"I would say that the quality of our schedule is tougher than it has been in previous years hoping that tougher pre-season and non-conference games will prepare us better for the conference season this year," Green said.

USD ended the season 2-4-2 in league play. The team's two wins came off Fort Wayne and Oral Roberts, who the Coyotes face off against in a home game on Oct. 2 at 4 p.m. to begin Summit League action.

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Post 1 Represented In All-Star Game

Three members of the Vermillion Post 1 Legion baseball team were selected to play in the American Legion All-Star Games hosted by the South Dakota Amateur Baseball Coaches' Association.

Jake Odens, Ethan James and Jack Brown traveled to Lake Norden on Monday night to play in the games.

The night was a double-header putting the Red team against the Black team and all three Vermillion players played for Red. Each selected All-Star played in just one of the two games.

In the first game, Red topped Black 13-5.

Odens was 1-for-4 with an RBI and pitched two innings. He recorded four strikeouts and gave up one hit.

Game two saw black over Red 6-3.

James went 1-for-2 with an RBI and Brown was 0-for-3. James also pitched one inning and recorded two of the seven strikeouts between four different pitchers.

Along with Vermillion, Red was made up of players from Brookings, Sisseton, Alexandria, Watertown, Volga and Warner.

Black was made up of players from Sioux Falls, Winner-Colome, McCook-Miner, Clark-Willow Lake, Castlewood-Clear Lake and Madison.

Coaches for the Red team were Todd Williams from Madison and Joel Stattelmann from Big Stone City and Dan Haug from Castlewood-Clear Lake and Brock Greenfield from Clark-Willow Lake coached the Black team.