

Men's soccer ready for opener against Connecticut

By Shaw Lentz
Old Gold and Black Reporter

After one of the most successful regular seasons in men's soccer history, the second round exit from the NCAA tournament was unexpected and disappointing for the Demon Deacons. Now the 11th-ranked Deacons are looking to build upon their success of last year and continue to improve both their play and results and also move further into the national scene in 2000.

The Deacons return seven starters from last year's team including six of their top seven scorers. With the addition of eight highly regarded recruits, the Deacons should be able to fulfill the demands of a tough schedule.

The season opens with a visit to Storrs, Conn., this weekend as the Deacs take on the fourth ranked Connecticut Huskies and the 15th ranked St. John's Red Storm for the first two games of the season, which should be a good way to measure the team. This is in addition to the Atlantic Coast Conference schedule, which boasts six teams currently ranked in the top 25.

"We're an extremely young team," head coach Jay Vidovich said. "We feel this will be a tremendous test and we can find out where we stand. We hope to improve our performance game to game throughout the season. I expect the team to come to play each game."

Exciting newcomers like freshman Jeremiah White and sophomore Kevin Wick-

art, returning from an injury which kept him out the entire year last year, will help make up for the departure of four starters lost to graduation.

White in particular looks to be an especially enticing prospect with electrifying pace and a willingness to take players on one-on-one.

"All the newcomers have looked very good as a group this year and have collectively improved the performance of the team and the level of the play," Vidovich said.

However, Wickart's dilemma last year and the health of other key performers is one of Vidovich's main concerns.

"The key to this team is the health of the team. Whether it be Bobby Gehring, Kevin Wickart, or Jamal Seale, (all of whom) have missed a lot of last season or this preseason."

Seale's health could be especially important to the Deacons. The team leader in assists a season ago, Seale has exploded at the beginning of the season each of the past two years, but injuries last year limited his influence at the close of season.

Also key to the Deacons' hopes are last year's team leader in points, junior Chris Lonteen (7goals, 6assists) and leading goal scorer senior Ben Stafford (8goals, 3assists).

While the trio should provide offense, the Deacons must improve defensively after losing three all-ACC performers in defense and goal if they are to succeed.

Senior Brock Hilpert returns at sweeper, second year man Matt Thompson as

more of an attacking option at a left midfield/wingback position, and sophomore Aaron Thomas as a defensive midfielder.

"Brock is playing well fulfilling his role this year, Matt Thompson is playing with much more responsibility, and Aaron Thomas is really the heart and soul of the team right now," Vidovich said.

A question that still lingers is who will emerge for the Deacs in the net, replacing three-year starter Sean Conner.

Freshman Will Hesmer, Senior Rob Vartughian, and sophomore Brad McEachern are all competing for the job.

The Deacons expect to continue to play a possession oriented attack but with more decisive and quick moves towards the net. "Collectively the team must continue to be a better passing team, play a lot faster and become better at going to goal. This team has great mobility and versatility," Vidovich said.

So far, the team has performed well winning all three of its preseason games. The Deacons defeated Greensboro College 1-0 on a goal from White. Goals from White, Lonteen, and Stafford gave the Deacons a 3-0 win against Coastal Carolina, and a first half penalty from Lonteen, combined with a calm finish from Stafford, helped the deacons defeat USC-Spartanburg in their last tune up match.

The Deacons' first match at home is Friday the 8th of September against UNC-Greensboro at Spry Stadium. Game time is 7:00 PM.

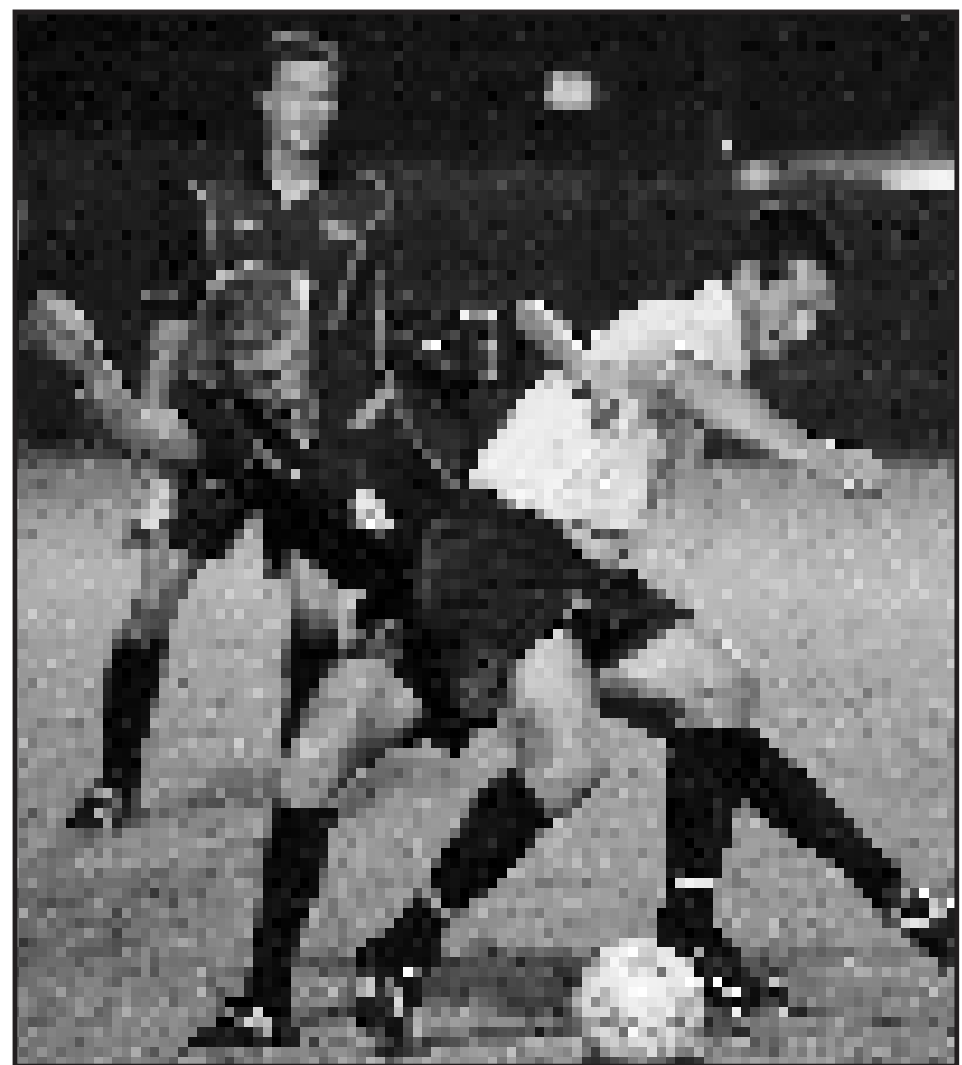


Photo by Ricky Van Veen/Old Gold and Black

Senior Ben Stafford looks to have his work cut out for him as he looks to keep control of the ball against two USC-Spartanburg defenders. Stafford led the Deacs in goals scored a season ago.



Photo by Ricky Van Veen/Old Gold and Black

Junior Jamal Seale looks to control a ball with his knee. The Demon Deacon men's soccer team will open their season Sept. 1-2 against the Connecticut Huskies and the St. John's Red Storm. The Deacs were one of the top teams in the ACC a season ago and look to improve on the success of last season in 2000.

2000 Mens' Soccer Schedule

Sept. 1	Connecticut*	TBA
Sept. 2	St. Johns*	TBA
Sept. 8	UNC Greensboro	7:30
Sept. 12	@ Liberty	5:00
Sept. 16	Virginia	7:00
Sept. 20	at UNC Wilmington	7:00
Sept. 23	South Carolina	7:00
Sept. 27	@ Davidson	6:15
Sept. 30	Maryland	7:00
Oct. 8	@ N.C. State	2:00
Oct. 10	UNC Asheville	7:00
Oct. 15	@ UNC Charlotte	3:30
Oct. 18	George Mason	7:00
Oct. 21	Clemson	7:00
Oct. 25	@ High Point	7:00
Oct. 28	@ North Carolina	7:00
Nov. 3	@ Duke	7:00
Nov. 9-11	ACC Tournament@Spry Soccer Stadium	

* = Nike-Huskie Classic @ Storrs, Connecticut
home games in bold

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