

August 31, 2007

FALL FORECAST



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Sophomore midfielder Alexis Chiani (#17) is going to be a key component to Head Coach Noreen Herlihy's squad. The Rock, returning seven starters, is looking for its fourth NCAA regional berth in six years. The success of the team is going to depend on a young and inexperienced defense, where Chiani, as a sophomore, is the most game-tested.

Women's soccer looks to rain on PSAC foes, make run at regionals

By Brandon Fox

Rocket Sports Editor

The Rock women's soccer team enters the 2007 season looking to continue a successful five-year run, including two Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference titles ('03 and '05) and five consecutive conference semifinal appearances.

Head Coach Noreen Herlihy's squad, which went 12-7-1 overall and 8-2-0 in the PSAC in 2006, returns seven starters from a team which earned its third NCAA regional tournament berth since 2001, before a semifinal loss to national final-four participant and PSAC-East foe West Chester.

The Rock attack will be led by senior midfielder Megan McGrath, a three-time first-team all-region and All-PSAC West performer, and junior forward Danielle Cooper, the team's leading scorer from a year ago (nine goals, six assists), who also earned All-PSAC West honors. Also returning to anchor the Rock offense will be junior midfielder Mallory Neubert, the team's third-leading scorer. The Rock will also look for junior forward Courtney Hoover and freshmen Juliana Howell and Alison

Hindley to provide scoring depth.

"We don't have a true 20-goal scorer on this team, so it is important that our three forwards and two attacking midfielders step up and put the ball in the net," Herlihy said. "We would love to have a few players with six or seven goals."

"Ashley Paganie, who we have playing out of position right now, gives us that scoring mentality from the back which is something that I think every team would love to have," Herlihy said.

Offensively, the Rock should have no problems scoring goals. The big question coming into 2007 is on the other side of the ball, where only sophomore Alexis Chiani returns from the PSAC's second-ranked defensive unit.

"Everyone except Lexi is new back there, and she is only a sophomore," Herlihy said. "We haven't solidified our final defensive unit yet, but we have solid players who I feel can come in and step into the roles we need them to fill."

The young and inexperienced defense will be aided by one of the best goaltending tandems in the PSAC in sophomore Lauren McManus, who finished second in goals against average (1.11), and

third in save percentage (83.5) and junior Jen McCormick, who led the nation in save percentage in 2005.

"We have three really great keepers, which is a good problem to have as a coach," Herlihy said. "It has been a great competition between all of them and (I), as well as the rest of the team, know that any of them can come in and get the job done when asked."

Coach Herlihy will also look to seniors Kristin Mikolajczyk, Jaimi Wilson and Megan McGrath to lead a relatively young Rock squad.

"Megan is a natural leader, and you can see that every time she steps out on the field. She is always talking and always motivating," said Herlihy. "Jaimi isn't as vocal as Megan, but she gets it done on the field day in and day out. Miko is one who works hard and just makes everyone around her work harder."

Chiani, the Rock's most experienced defender, has also begun to come into her own as a leader on defense.

"Alexis is becoming more vocal and is really becoming our defensive leader, which is going to benefit our inexperienced back-row players," Herlihy said.

SEE SOCCER PAGE C-4

Pieces fall into place for cross country

By Erin Fisher
Rocket Contributor

After being ranked among the top three teams in the region, the Slippery Rock men's and women's cross country teams are doing nothing small this season. The No. 1 ranked men's team and the No. 3 ranked women's team will compete in Anchorage, Alaska this Saturday.

"Our expectations for the season are high," said Head Coach John Papa. "We are a very highly regarded team. We have quite a few very good runners, and I think that other teams feel some of our runners are going to be difficult to beat."

The men's team alone has four elite runners, one of which is ranked nationally.

"Jeff Weiss is one of the top distance runners in the country," Papa added.

Weiss, a physical education major, has twice received All-America honors and was also named Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference 2005 Rookie of the Year and Athlete of the Year.

As a freshman, Weiss finished third in the Division II National Competition.

Also expected to come up big this season are junior Pat Reagan, senior Matt Bluman and senior Chris Geddis.

"These men are some of the top runners in the conference," Papa said. "We have four runners that are considered elite, and that is going to make us tough competition."

The No. 3 ranked women's team is also coming into the season with big hopes, returning several key runners from last season. The 2006 women's team placed third in the eastern region.

SEE WEISS, PAGE C-4

Men's soccer needs to weather early season storm

By Brandon Fox
Rocket Sports Editor

In 2005, the Rock men's soccer team captured its first Pennsylvania State Athletic Conference title in 31 years thanks to the play of some young and untested sophomores.

Those same sophomores are now game-hardened seniors trying to lead a veteran-laden group to its third-consecutive PSAC playoff appearance.

With eight seniors on the roster, the Rock finished with an 11-8-1 overall record in 2006 (10-5-1 in the PSAC) plenty of experience to rely on. Experience however, doesn't always lead to success and there are many questions that need to be addressed if they are going to make a run at the playoffs.

One of the questions Head Coach Matt Thompson needs to answer is on the defensive

side of the ball, where the Rock lost three of its top defenders from a year ago. Anchoring the backfield is senior Jeff Hamley, the only returning starter from last year.

"It has been tough on the defensive side, due in part to one of our top recruits deciding to stay close to home, but we have a solid group that can step in and play," Thompson said. "Derek Angus, although listed as a freshman, has a lot of experience playing overseas and I expect him to come in and become one of our more dependable players."

Along with Angus and Hamley, seniors Joe Ross, Mike Monte and freshman Toby Bowser are all expected to see significant playing time in the defensive backfield.

"Toby has been playing a lot back there and has done a good job, and I fully expect Joe and

Mike to step up and become leaders in the back," Thompson said.

Not only must Thompson break in a new core of defenders, but he also must do it with his third new goalie in three years, true freshman Greg Blum.

"Greg is a great shot stopper and is going to be a good fit in the back," Thompson said. "He has been pushed hard by Brett Lelko and Chris Cook, and I think that has made all three of them better keepers. I have full confidence in putting any of them between the pipes."

The SRU offensive attack, which returns three of its top five scorers, will be anchored by sophomore forward Jeremy Deighton. He led the team in scoring with five goals and two assists last fall. The Rock will also benefit from the return of seniors Ed Mocarisky, who tallied four goals and one assist, and captain Steve Perri, the team's fifth-leading scorer with one goal and four assists. Thompson will also look for sophomore Ian Langstone to provide a boost at the forward position.

"Ian and Jeremy are going to have to step up and simply put the ball in the back of the net. Eddie is a great finisher and hopefully he will get us going up front," Thompson said.

"Nick Christy is also going to be a key for us. He struggled last year with a back injury and is slowly

working his way back. Once we get him in there, I know he will be a big contributor."

Leadership is going to play a key role in the success of the team and how far they can go. Senior captains Steve Perri and Patrick Cormac are going to be important in keeping the younger players focused, but Thompson is also going to rely heavily on the six other seniors on the roster.

"Steve and Pat are my captains, so they need to be at the front, but I also expect that all my seniors will be leaders for us," Thompson said. "I need all of them to help get us through the tough times."

Mocarisky, a forward, pointed to the seniors on the team as the ones who have to step up if the team is going to be successful.

"We are going to have to work hard as a team," he said. "Especially us as seniors, we helped turn the program around and know what it's like to win it all, and we want to go out with a bang our senior year."

The Rock (0-2-1) has come out of the gate slow, thanks in part to an extremely tough schedule. Two of their first three games were against Division II national champion Dowling and defending PSAC champ East Stroudsburg.

"Our schedule is tough, but we get to play each team in the PSAC twice, and I think if we play a physical game the first time out and then make adjustments the second time, we will be alright," Thompson said.

The Rock played to a 0-0 tie against PSAC rival California on Wednesday night at N. Kerr Thompson Stadium.



ARCHIVED PHOTO
Senior captain Patrick Cormac dribbles out of trouble during first-half action against California. The Rock and Cal fought to a 0-0 draw Wednesday night at N. Kerr Thompson Stadium.