



MEN'S TRACK & FIELD

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Track And Field Campaign Begins On Saturday Morning

Men's and women's squads to participate in the University of Chicago Open

Jan. 7, 2005

University of Illinois at Chicago Head Track and Field Coach Jim Knoedel doesn't have a good poker face.

The track and field season begins on Saturday, and he's already showing his hand.

For the 2005 campaign, Knoedel has recruited several talented freshmen and will welcome an influx of outstanding transfers to his already strong men's and women's teams.

"We're going to have a much improved team for both the men and the women," Knoedel said. "I honestly think we'll cover the events very well and come away with as many individual titles as any other conference member."

Leading the pace for the women's squad will be junior sprinter [Jessica Fouche](#). Fouche turned in an outstanding rookie campaign for the Flames, advancing to the NCAA Regional Championships by virtue of her victories in the 200 and 400-meter dash at the Horizon League Outdoor Championships.

For the season, Fouche broke school records in the 55-meter indoor dash (7.26), 60-meter indoor dash (7.78), 200-meter dash (25.48), 400-meter dash (57.71), 100-meter outdoor dash (12.16) and as a member of both the 4x100 outdoor relay (47.31) and 4x400 outdoor relay (3:55.89).

While Fouche will handle the sprints, senior [Jenni Goebel](#) will take care of the distance races.

Goebel, who has had a storied career at UIC, currently holds five school records, including the 1-mile indoor run (5:16.0), 3,000-meter indoor run (10:16.98), 5,000-meter indoor run (17:41.98), 5,000-meter outdoor run (17:27.70) and 10,000-meter run (35:57.18).

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Senior thrower Nick Gazis holds the school-record in the discus with a heave of 164'9".

Knoedel also expects 2004 Horizon League Outdoor Newcomer of the Year, [Rowsha LaBranche](#), to make some noise. LaBranche ran a leg of the school-record 4x100 outdoor relay and 4x400 outdoor relay teams as a freshman.

Boosting UIC's chances will be the addition of Thornwood's finest in Liz Jean-Pierre and Jasmin Sutton. Jean-Pierre and Sutton played a key role in the Thunderbirds' third-place finish in the IHSA Class AA Track and Field Championships in 2004.

Jean-Pierre will make an immediate impact in the jumping events, as she has notched a 38-foot triple jump, which would have shattered the current school record by over two feet.

Knoedel sees Sutton contributing in both the 400-meter dash as well as the 4x100 and 4x400 relay teams.

Throws will play a prominent role for the Flames at the conference championships as returning standouts [Sara O'Mara](#), [Candace Jackson](#) and [Meghan Connelly](#) will be expected to produce points.

Someone who has already played a prominent role in the Horizon League championships is transfer [Brandon Cook](#).

Cook, who competed for Butler last season, claimed both the 100 and 200-meter dash titles for the Bulldogs.

"I don't want to say that he's a gimme," Knoedel said. "But no one is going to beat him."

Another transfer who will make his presence immediately known is hurdler [Marcus Lesley](#).

Knoedel believes that Lesley, who transferred from Rend Lake, will be a force to be reckoned with in the hurdle events.

"[Marcus Lesley](#) can beat anyone (in the hurdles)," Knoedel said. "He's far superior to anyone else in the conference."

An established cornerstone in the Flames' repertoire is senior thrower [Nick Gazis](#). Gazis was the lone qualifier in the NCAA Outdoor Regional Championships after capturing the Horizon League championship in the discus.

Earlier in the season, Gazis broke a 24-year old school discus record with a heave of 164'9".

Middle-distance events should be another strength for the Flames, with newcomers [Trent Thompson](#), [Travis Hawkes](#) and [Mike Grossman](#).

Knoedel has brought in a pair of Kenyan distance runners in [Antonio Kipkorir](#) and [Joseph Mbari](#).

"Kipkorir has run a time that is as fast as anyone in the conference with a 3:48 in the 1,500-meter run," Knoedel said. "While Mbari has run faster than anyone else in the conference in the 10,000-meter run."

Knoedel also lauded the performance of his veteran runners work ethic.

"[Sam Watson](#), [Jim Sulzberger](#) and [Mikhail Davidyan](#) have shown tremendous improvement and they have worked very hard over the summer," Knoedel said.

This will also be the first season that the decathlon will be recognized and Knoedel believes that [Mike Savegnago](#) will make an immediate impact.

"We've got a high jumper that's going to be a very good decathlete in [Mike Savegnago](#)," Knoedel said. "He'll place in the pole vault, high jump and hurdles."

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"I would be surprised if anyone can beat him," Knoedel continued. "He does everything very, very well."

All in all, Knoedel thinks that other school's expectations of his squads will be low, and that's okay. Knoedel knows what his teams are capable of.

"I think when they start to see results, other teams will be surprised at our performance," Knoedel said. "I think we're finally getting to that level that I expected we would get five years ago when we started the program."

If other team's expectations of UIC are low, Knoedel's are the polar opposite.

"Honestly, on both the men and women's side, we should have as many conference champions as anyone else," Knoedel said. "My goal, no ifs ands or buts, is to be in the top three at the conference championships."

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