



MEN'S SOCCER

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Flames Soccer Opens Up 2000 Campaign Against Nationally-Ranked North Carolina

UIC takes on 24th-ranked Tar Heels tonight at 6:00 p.m.

Sept. 1, 2000

Chicago, Ill. - Coming off of its most successful season ever, which included its first-ever trip to the NCAA Tournament, the UIC soccer team is ready to open up the 2000 campaign tonight at the UAB/Nike Classic in Birmingham, Ala. The Flames will face, perhaps, their biggest test of the season this evening at 6:00 p.m. as they take on North Carolina, ranked 24th in the NSCAA/adidas Men's NCAA Division I preseason poll.

What makes the task at hand tonight an even bigger one is that UIC will be without the services of senior All-American [Eric Lukin](#), who is required to sit out the game with the Tar Heels after receiving a red card in the Flames' season finale last fall against Saint Louis. The forward out of Orland Park, Ill., finished second in the country in scoring last season with totals of 21 goals, 14 assists and 56 points, while also collecting MCC Player of the Year accolades.

But the Flames, who will wrap up the UAB/Nike Classic against the College of Charleston at noon on Sunday, certainly aren't a one-man show as they welcome back seven starters and a total of 15 letterwinners.

A big key for UIC is the return of All-MCC goalie [Chris Jamal](#), who is expected to start between the posts tonight. In '99, Jamal enjoyed a tremendous season as he compiled a 0.85 goals against average, which was 24th-best in the country, while earning 16 of UIC's 17 victories, including the Flames' 1-0 win over Fairfield in NCAA Play-In action. Over the final seven outings of the year, the senior out of Palatine, Ill., was rock solid in goal as he posted a stingy 0.57 GAA .

On defense, which Head Coach [Sasha Begovic](#) feels to be the Flames' strongest position, UIC returns starters [Kevin Brady](#), [Jay DeMerit](#) and [Joe Morelli](#). Last season, the trio combined to register nine shutouts and surrender just over one goal a game. That talented threesome and the addition of freshman [Pablo Melgar](#), who played the last two years on the Guatemalan National Team, should create quite a solid line of defense for the Flames.

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Goalie Chris Jamal, who finished 24th in the country last season with a 0.85 GAA, is expected to start for the Flames tonight against North



"Our defense will be really solid," Begovic said. "Joe did a great job for us last year as a freshman and has gained so much confidence in his position as sweeper. Jay and Kevin were also starters last year and the addition of Pablo as a stopper will make us very strong back there."

Key returnees to the Flames' midfield are three-year starters [Greg Chrisman](#) and [Nick Dudziak](#). The athletic Chrisman, who gets the most out of his 5-foot-7 frame, finished as UIC's third-leading scorer last fall with six goals and eight assists while Dudziak contributed one goal and a trio of assists.

"Last year, our midfield scored lots of goals for us and I think that will continue," Begovic said. "Greg and Nick have both had great preseasons and we've got several other players that should be able to step right in and fill the openings."

In addition to the return of Lukin up front, a pair of newcomers, [Jakob Stasko](#) and [Nathan Day](#), will also see a great deal of playing time at forward. Stasko, who is expected to start along with Lukin, comes to UIC after beginning his collegiate career at Drake University. In his rookie campaign last fall, the speedy Stasko played in 17 games and finished up with two goals and one assist. Day, a product of local soccer powerhouse St. Charles High School, enjoyed an all-conference season last year as he tallied 16 goals and 13 assists to finish second on the team in scoring.

"I look for similar production from Eric again this season," Begovic said. "With the addition of Jake up front, it's very much possible. Jake is going to create lots of problems with his speed, so defenses are going to have to watch him too and that is going to free up Eric. Jake, likewise, could put up some big numbers. He doesn't complicate things, he's good in the air and he knows how to finish."

UIC has certainly shown it also knows how to finish as it wrapped up 1999 by capturing its first-ever MCC regular-season and conference titles last fall. This season, the Flames have been predicted to repeat as champions in the preseason poll of the league's coaches while they were also ranked 30th in the country in Mad Dog Soccer's preseason predictions.

Carolina.

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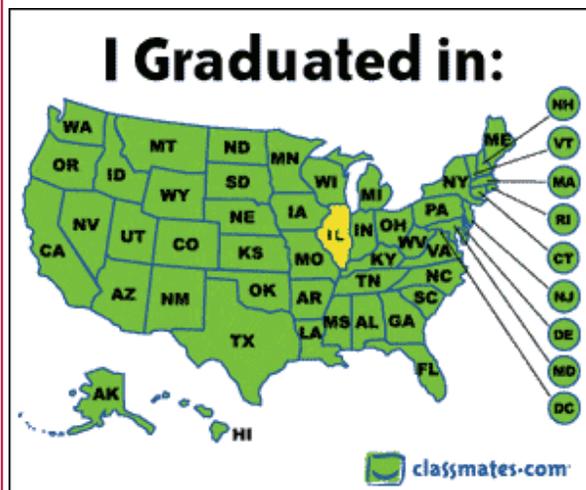
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