



MEN'S SOCCER

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Soccer Kicks Off 2004 Season At Denver

Flames ready to face Pioneers in season opener this Friday at 4:00 p.m.

Sept. 2, 2004

Denver, Colo.- The University of Illinois at Chicago soccer program will begin the 23rd season of NCAA Division I action in school history this Friday as the Flames prepare to take on the University of Denver at Pioneer Field in Denver, Colo., beginning at 4 p.m. The Flames will look to post their eighth consecutive winning season under head coach Sasha Begovic. Begovic, the school's all-time wins leader with 131 victories in his 14 seasons at the helm, hopes to start his 15th campaign at UIC off on the right foot. This year's squad will be drastically different than last season's 10-7-2 team. Gone are 10 letterwinners from last season, including second all-time leading scorer Dennis King, defenders Josh Robinson and Chris Berena, and forwards Nate Day, Ross Felten, Chris Pipis and Pete Kelley. Fresh faces will be the theme on the offensive front, where newcomers Tonci Skroce, Stipan Vedric, and Jose Guardian headline at forward. Adding scoring punch will be returning midfielder/forward and All-Horizon League Newcomer Team selection Eric Cervantes, along with returning forward Brodey Simkins. Kenneth Nightingale will also make his collegiate debut after sitting out last season. The midfield position will be taken care of by a mix of versatile returnees and talented fresh faces. Combo defender/midfielders Derek Kosek, Sam Reindl and Jon Townsend return to team with Russ Pleskunas and newcomers Nick Sutter, Tim Bernard, Drew Aebischer, Bleri Bregu, Pavle Dundjer, Timothy Tamale, and the two Pawels in the center, junior Pawel Otachel and freshman Pawel Ligas. As for the defense, it should be business as usual for the Flames. Despite the losses of Robinson and Berena, captain Adam Jones is back for his fourth season along with fellow senior Ryan Singer. The two have anchored a defense that has posted nine shutouts and held 20 opponents to a goal or less in the past two seasons. Joining Jones and Singer in the back are newcomers Matt McBride, Owen Huisenga, and Danny Dragicevic. The goalkeeper spot should provide some interesting competition throughout the season. Ross Cain returns after another standout season in 2003, where he made a Horizon League-best 97 saves while ranking 14th in the nation in stops. Roman Tulis, who showed flashes of brilliance in limited duty last year, will battle redshirt freshman Jeff Engelbrecht, who set the Illinois prep all-time shutout mark while at Peoria Notre Dame, and Cain for playing time between the posts. The young Flames, who were picked third in the annual Horizon League Preseason Poll, kick off the season against the Pioneers, who finished last season at 7-9-2. Leading the way for Denver will be junior keeper Lami Harmon, who went 7-6-2 as a starter while allowing a 1.22 goals against average. After the Denver matchup the Flames will make their way to USAFA, Colo., to take on the Air Force Falcons at Cadet Soccer Stadium on Sunday. The Falcons went 10-9-1 in 2003 and are led by senior midfielder Marcus Sagastume, who was the Mountain Pacific Sports Federation's Co-Player of the

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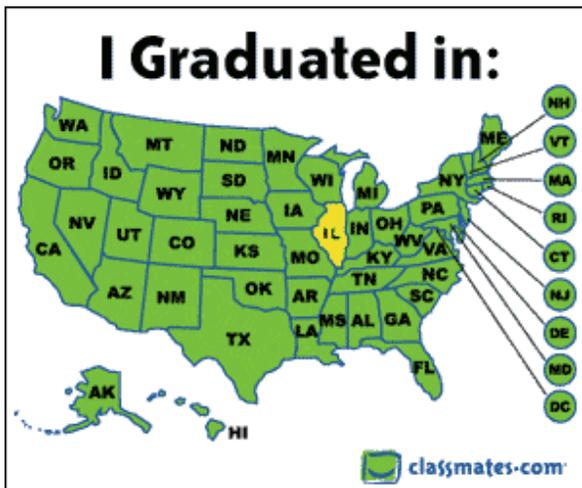


Senior Adam Jones and the Flames are set to begin the



Year last season after accumulating 29 points, highlighted by 13 helpers. Begovic knows his Flames are young in terms of age, but he knows that with his team's youthful exuberance, diverse and extensive playing backgrounds and the veteran leadership of Jones, Singer and Cain, anything is possible in 2004. "We're going to have a very young squad, and sometimes it's hard to predict how they're going to fit together," said Begovic. "We are young, but very talented." "We are really looking forward to the new season." **Notes:** Friday's game at Denver marks the debut of UIC Assistant Coach Seth Mason on the sidelines with Begovic...Friday's opener also marks the beginning of a five-game road trip for the Flames, who start the season with seven of their first eight contests on the road...UIC is 1-0 all-time against Denver...the Flames last faced the Pioneers on September 6, 2002 at Pioneer Field in a 2-0 UIC win...UIC has never faced Air Force prior to this season.

2004 season in Denver this Friday.



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