

Fall Sports Preview

An inside view of trends and people to watch

Compiled by Todd Kennedy

MEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

For the first time in years, men's cross country coach Willy Wood cannot look at his team and identify a potential individual Ivy League champion. But even if a void exists at the front of the pack, it seems likely the team will win a second straight Ivy League title.

"I'm confident that we can be as good as we've ever been," Wood says. "There's not a kid on this team who doesn't think we'll be significantly better."

Junior Mark Olivier, who finished 14th in the Heptagonal Ivy League Championships, made second team All-Ivy last fall.

WOMEN'S CROSS COUNTRY

The LaVern Gibson cross country course may be just a series of hills in the Indiana countryside, but there isn't a college runner in the nation who doesn't ache to run at the home of the NCAA Championships.

Seniors Caroline Bierbaum, Tenke Zoltani, Lisa Stublic, and Hilary Bontz, along with junior Laura Meyers and sophomore Carmen Ballard, all return from last year's team, which placed 13th of 31 at the NCAA Championships.

Bierbaum won the Heptagonal Ivy League Championships (the first Columbia woman to do so) and outdistanced all but two runners to finish third of 248 in the NCAA Championships.

FIELD HOCKEY

In just one year with head coach Katie Beach at the helm, the Lions are poised to advance in competitive Ivy League field hockey.

Beach installed a team defense that resulted in the Lions giving up 36 fewer goals; goalkeeper Kristina George sliced her goals-against-average in half from 2003.

The Lions had holes to fill in the midfield, and Beach did just that by recruiting four midfielders to complement senior co-captain Courtney Robinson and honorable

mention All-Ivy midfielder Liz Reeve.

In 2004, the Lions more than doubled their goal total from the previous season, and all three forwards will return to action in 2005. Diana Day and Ramie Merrill will lead the Lions' attack. Day led the team with five goals last season.

FOOTBALL

The Lions lost five All-Ivy players to graduation including NFL signees Wade Fletcher and Michael Quarshie. However, a closely-knit group remains for 2005. "I like the quiet confidence that is developing in this group," said head coach Bob Shoop. "This is the most team-oriented bunch we've had since I've been here."

The Lions' defensive backs may be the highlight of the squad. Strong safety Keenan Shaw and cornerback Prosper Nwokocha were honorable mention All-Ivy in 2004, while free safety Tad Crawford made 94 tackles to lead the team.

Senior Joe Winters and sophomore Craig Hormann are in healthy competition for the role of starting quarterback. They will throw to a seasoned group of receivers led by Brandon Bowser, Pete Chromiak and Adrian Demko.

MEN'S SOCCER

Coming off just the third losing season during head coach Dieter Ficken's 26-year career at Columbia, men's soccer had shown a renewed commitment to success. Led by a strong senior class and featuring some of the best young talent in the league, Columbia is a dark horse candidate for the league title.

The backline will have the experience of more than 130 collegiate matches. Senior co-captain Blake Lindberg earned second team All-Ivy honors and will anchor the defense.

On the other side of the ball, sophomore Tom Davison is the team's leading returning scorer. Also returning is junior John Mulhern, who earned an



Above: Women's cross country, three-time defending Ivy League champion

All-Ivy honorable mention.

If history is any indicator, the Lions are destined for success in 2005; the three Ficken teams that finished with a losing record averaged 11 wins the following season, and won two Ivy League championships.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

The women's soccer team is much younger than last year's, with just one senior—but should be no less talented than the 2004 team, which won the Eastern Collegiate Athletic Conference Championship.

The offense is led by second team All-Ivy and third team All-Region forward Shannon Munoz. The junior scored the third-most points in Columbia history by recording 29 on ten goals and nine assists last season. Fellow captain Courtney Nasshorn has twice been an honorable mention All-Ivy performer.

Meanwhile, the Lions' defense set a school record in 2004 with five consecutive shutouts and allowing one goal (or less) 12 times. Meghan Hurlbut, a junior tri-captain this season, earned an honorable mention All-Ivy for her performance in the backfield, as did sophomore defender Cathleen Cimino,

after an outstanding first year.

VOLLEYBALL

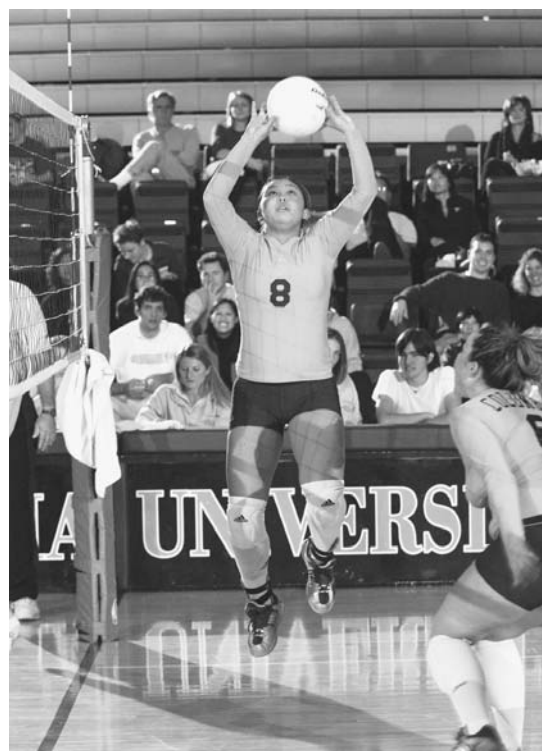
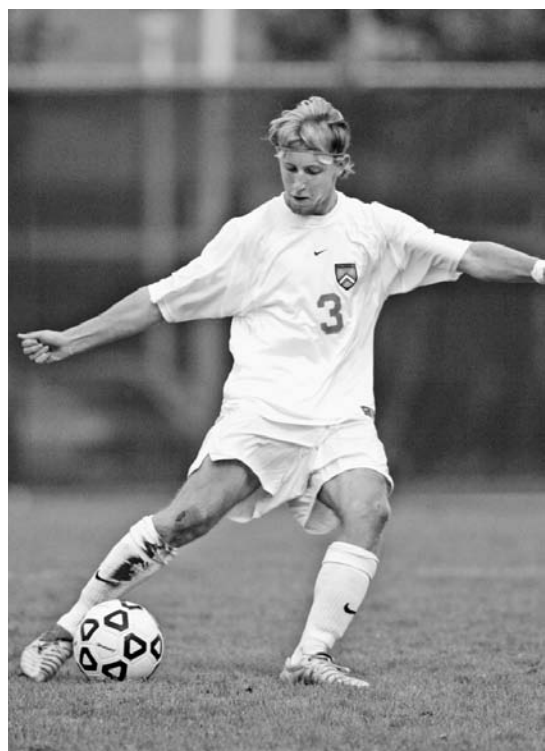
In just two seasons, head coach Monica Holmes has recruited a team of top athletes and now has them poised for success. Last year, the team tripled its overall win-total. Now, with some experienced sophomores in its ranks along with some new faces, the team expects to see continued improvement in 2005.

"There is going to be com-

petition at almost every position," said Holmes.

At middle hitter, the Lions return Nikki Learned, who was named All-Ivy last season. The Lions also expect Natalie Gerling to dominate on the right side of the court.

Holmes has set up a schedule that should help her young team to bond quickly: they'll soon be playing four non-conference teams that reached the 2004 NCAA tournament.



Above: Football co-captain Prosper Nwokocha, CC'06

Far left: John Mulhern, CC'07, men's soccer

Left center: Blakely Low, CC'08, volleyball

Left: Laura Cosan, BC'07, field hockey

All photos Gene Boyars