

sports

A good start for men's soccer

by Angel Figueroa

The tight-lipped words used in describing last Sunday's season-opening rout of Saint Mary's in men's soccer action were quiet, direct, and simple.

"It's a good beginning."

Indeed it is. If season-openers are supposed to be any real indicator, well, quite frankly, we're in for a good one. Graced by warm sunshine and a healthy pitch, the boys in white rumbled to a convincing 4-0 victory over our cross-town rivals. This sets an optimistic, yet cautious tone for the new season that intends to culminate with the defending of the Atlantic league crown, won last year for the first time by Dalhousie in 14 years.

The words were those of Ian Kent, head coach of the team and architect of last year's AUSA championship. Undoubtedly, the delivery and context of those words only point at the ambition of the whole team in matching last year's glorious drive to win the Holy Grail. But it's now a totally different season, with quite a modified team. The departure of many veterans, plus a large influx of quality players at a tough training camp, has resulted in a new, comprehensive roster that remains a hybrid of rookie and veteran talent tagged as the undisputed team-to-beat this year.

To stress the point, even the starting eleven against SMU was a mix of old and new players. Freshman Jeff Axel, playing midfield, opened the scoring with a little help from above. Taking a skilful cornerkick, the ball was misjudged by the SMU keeper and ricocheted into the upper net for the Tigers to go one-up early in the first half. Axel's play was quick and decisive throughout the game, in a manner which made you wince every time he touched the ball. Axel is just one of the new assets, mind you, and only one of the seven Canada Games players that was recruited by Kent.

Another new face on the pitch to raise more eyebrows was forward Colin Audain, whose strength and speed-work delivered a great goal late in the first half by nailing one in the top left corner from inside the six yard box. This new addition to the Tiger squad is noteworthy, as the last time Audain played on Studley Field was two seasons ago, when he helped Mount Allison defeat Dal for the league title in a tear-jerking 2-1 championship match. With Audain's switch of colours, the tide that has turned in favour of Dal is now even more evident.

Contrasting the new talent (which accounted for the first two goals) is the ever familiar old-guard, such as Neil Sedgwick and John Richmond, who took care of goals three and four. Working with fellow half-back Andy Wheeler and sweeper Adrian Ibbetson, Sedgwick showed the fitness and skill that seems a step beyond his play-work last year, which was incredible enough.

Just as Sedgwick and Wheeler are well known for their effective teamwork, another fine duo seems in the making, judging by the interplay between Richmond and Audain, both designated target-men for the Dal scoring machine. The two worked very well together, and their dynamism marked the 47th minute, when a setup by Audain enabled Richmond to score from inside the six yard box.

At the 84th minute, Sedgwick drove the final nail in the coffin when his patented throw-in beleaguered the SMU back-line, and the ball bounced off a defender and flew into the net. None too pretty to end a scoring spree, but a goal's a goal and besides, it sets up Sedgwick on the usual flow of his one-goal-per-game average.

Richmond was straightforward in his reflection of the team's first game: "We had a job to do and we did it. There could've been a bit more talking out there but half these guys are new and they're still nervous so it's understandable. All things considered it's a great start, especially against SMU. In the future, we'll do the same as we did today; we are not going to analyse how strong the other team is. We'll just take into account that whoever we play will be a strong team. We know we are the team to beat this year and we're going to have to come out hard like this every game."

"We know we are the team to beat this year."

Reflecting on the last two weeks of preparation for the game, Kent admitted there were some tough decisions to make during tryouts. "It wasn't clear in the beginning how we would end up playing because there were so many permutations, but it looks like we have a good formula that worked well to start off the season. All last year we played four in the back [defensive line] but today we played with three. I wasn't sure



Star half-back Neil Sedgwick battles for the ball against St. Mary's

DAL PHOTO: BILL JENSEN

how that would go but for a first game-plan system it went quite well."

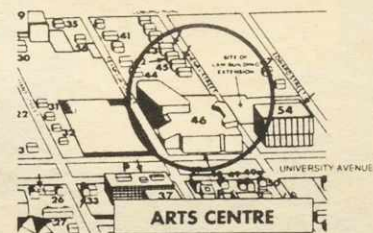
Rounding out the roster is the dinosaur club, including Rob Adams and Ian Clark, both veritable talents and each playing their fifth and final year on the squad. There's also past-M.V.P. Sean Grondin, who's been absent for a few years but is back again. Other veterans include Rob and Jamie Sawler, both solid players who tend to go psycho now and then with their Dave Semenko impersonations. (Yes, they're brothers). And then there's national team member Craig Janc, man of little words, who scored last year's championship goal.

He'll be right up there with one of the biggest additions of the team, Tony Pignatiello, who is on loan from the Toronto Blizzard and won't be able to play until the CSL season is over. Also new is keeper Trevor Chisolm, lauded as an acrobat between the posts, who will replace the sensational Phil Samyn. Larger-than-life Samyn left last year, but not without being one of the cornerstones of the championship year. Also gone are the big personalities of Tim Hall and Bob Hathaway, but they'll soon be recruited as the writer's advisors for analysis on the more subtle aspects of the game (such as locker-room vocabulary, etc., etc.).

Dal heads to Acadia on Saturday for game number two and then enjoys a big break before the next home game on Wednesday September 30, at 4p.m. at Studley Field.

Off The Wall
POSTERS AND PRINT SALE
 Up to
50% OFF
Store Prices

Impressionist • Monet • Black & White
 Classical & Contemporary • Escher • Dali
Over 1000 Different Images and Sizes



One Week Only!
 Dalhousie Arts Centre (The Cohn)

SEPT. 21 - 25 & 28 - 29
 6061 UNIVERSITY AVE.
 (See map)

Care to meet the Press?

The Dalhousie Gazette and CKDU 97.5 invite anyone and everyone to a joint party for all volunteers (past, present, or future) at the

DOUBLE DUECE ROADHOUSE

1560 Hollis Street, just around the corner from the Maritime Center

Monday September 28

(pass the word around...we look forward to seeing you!)