

SPORTS

Coach Biancur Sees Many Positives in Young Team

Following the season, *The Decree* conducted an email interview with women's soccer coach Beverly Biancur. The Bishops finished 2-18 overall, 2-7 in the USA South Conference. In the conference tourney, though out-shot 36 to 2, the Bishops lost to CNU, 1-0, as the Captains scored the lone goal with seventh minutes remaining.

Q. Despite your team's overall record, you must have been pleased with the performance in the USA South tourney quarterfinals, a 1-0 loss to the top seed, Christopher Newport.

A. The CNU tournament game was one of the proudest moments of our season. The team is one of the hardest working teams I have coached and the youngest. Because of that, we were also the most dangerous opponent on any given day. I told the CNU coach Ruth Keegan prior to the game that they would see a different team than they had seen before, not because of strategy or scouting, but because we were hungry and knew we had been in every other game prior. We knew we had a chance to win. We played with the heart of champions and had CNU questioning. We were dangerous because we had absolutely nothing to lose and everything to gain. Ninety minutes was all it would take to defeat a team and nothing prior to that mattered. About 83 minutes in, we had a brief lapse but we knew we had seven more minutes and we never gave up. Their coach said at the end of the game that it was one of the hardest games they had played and was happy they did not have to play it again. We showed that we're a team of the future.

Q. How can you build on that game?

A. With that game, we turned a corner and the team saw that every team is beatable, no matter the record, no matter the depth of their roster. Because we're so young, we know that with a few more additions in our roster we'll be successful. We know how to fight. The last match ignited the team to the belief that we'll be better, stronger and more prepared for next season. Our youth are now veterans and our veterans are now more inspired than ever to be the best team we can be. To sum it up, our players have developed an ownership in their destiny as a soccer team and will be in control of it as players, as teammates and as athletes.

Q. What were some of the other highlights from the past season?

A. I believe each game has highlights. There was our Europe trip, the pre season and the growth of each player through the season. We had highs and we had lows, but every time we stepped on the field we had focus and determination. Ferrum College is always a nail-biting game and this year they came to us on a three-game winning streak. They did not expect the match we gave them. After all our games, every coach told me "you're not a team to overlook" and no one will look forward to facing us next season. I think we had a ton of highlights.

Q. You've got a young team, with only one graduating senior, Lauren Young. How did the relative youthfulness of your team affect their overall play?

A. We were young and had leaders in Lauren and Kasie Edwards. Our defense was a little more seasoned and experienced but the younger members of our team were still struggling with the speed of play and physical nature of the game. I asked a lot of

freshman Chelsea Laurens and sophomore Hanna Leena Kokonen, putting them in positions of game control, and as the season progressed, they became more comfortable and made veteran decisions that helped to show we were growing and jelling. Defense has been our strong suit and Katri Snellman and Kasie helped to instill the confidence in the younger players that if they did make a mistake, they had their back as long as we were in it together. We're all fallible and no one mistake will allow us to be defeated as a team without a fight.

Q. Talk about the play of the individual freshmen.

A. Chelsea Laurens was a starting freshman in the central midfield, a field general. She had to learn a lot very quickly and took that task to always improve and to compose her teammates. She's aggressive and tactical and will be a player no team will want to face in the future.

Amber Jones is one of the hardest working players I've coached. She's a defensive nightmare against every team and literally can play any position I ask of her. She is technical and hungry. When one of her opponents has the ball, she will fight to her last breath to take it or deny them a scoring opportunity.

Josie Adams was our leading scorer with one of the strongest shots on the

Men's Soccer Team Loses To CNU, Then Gets Snubbed

John Kostet
Senior Staff Writer

The NC Wesleyan men's soccer team looked back at a successful season with a disappointing ending.

The team claimed the USA South Conference regular season championship for the sixth time in the program's history with a 5-0-1 mark, but fell short in the conference tournament final to Christopher Newport, a close game that could have gone either way, according to Coach Jason Kilby.

"We were all devastated after the game," Thomas Sharp, senior midfielder said, referring to the team's 3-1 loss in the title match of the conference tourney. "We had worked hard throughout the season and had already beaten them, so we knew we had it in us, which made it feel even worse."

Wesleyan took an early lead after four minutes on Mark Wielitzka's header. But CNU came back fast and the 1-1 score stood at halftime, as Wesleyan missed two "golden chances," as Kilby called them. "In a tournament final we can't afford to miss two one-on-one situations with the keeper," he said.

The second half was controlled by Wesleyan, which did a good but inefficient job of moving the ball. CNU scored on two counterattacks to end the game 3-1.

The win avenges CNU's loss, 3-2, to Wesleyan on October 13, when the Bishops got two goals from Wielitzka at home. Wesleyan dominated ball possession throughout that game, which frustrated the Captains, then the nation's top-ranked team in division III.

The possession-style of play was adopted by the Bishops after a stretch of three losses at the end of September. "The cliché that you don't learn until you lose is actually true," Kilby said, as most of his team's early victories came through individual performances rather than a functioning team strategy.

"We aren't the most athletic team so we had to start moving and playing the ball," Kilby said of the team's mid season shift in strategy. "The guys accepted the challenge and it worked out well. Even the less technical players felt comfortable with the ball, as we switched up the practices a little bit."

Wesleyan finished with an overall record of 13-4-2, playing a tough schedule with numerous top teams such as Rutgers-Newark, Stevens Institute, Virginia Wesleyan and York College. "I'd rather play really good teams from the start and prepare for conference time," Coach Kilby explained.

Because of its regular season title and the strength of its schedule, the team expected to receive an at-large bid to the NCAA tournament, and when they didn't the frustration was obvious. "We felt that we deserved it, and especially when we saw which teams got in," Sharp said. "All the polls had us in so there shouldn't have been any question about it. But I assume there was someone out there who didn't like us."

Sharp's coach agreed. "I think we all felt robbed," Kilby said, as he explained the number

system to not always be fair. "Only in America," some would argue. But at the same time we should really have won that last game."

But Kilby tried to stay optimistic and called the season "one of the most enjoyable." He was pleased that a fresh group of players with different backgrounds could come together as a team. "It's usually not easy to make it work with such a new and diverse group of people from all over the world," he said.

The lack of consistency from season to season has been an issue the last few years, as there have been a lot of players moving in and out of the program. One explanation has been that many international players come to enjoy the overall experience rather than to pursue the actual education.

Changes are being made, and Kilby added that part of the focus in the recruitment process has always been on academics, but that it might require even more emphasis. "We need to dig deeper to find the players with the desire to stay for four years and finish a degree," he said.

A change already evident this year was having 11 seniors on the team, many of whom were transfers. "Which has to be some sort of record," Kilby said, adding that seniors bring so much vital experience. It is that type of consistency that is needed for a team to be successful. "Unfortunately a lot of players can't figure things out until they're upper-class men," Kilby said.

Someone who definitely figured things out this year was Sharp, who went from barely playing his first year to becoming a starter and key player, together with senior Javier Castrillo, at the central midfield. "Tom is one of those players who've been working hard from day one without complaining," Kilby said.

Another player who will be missed next season is Wielitzka who scored a team-leading 13 goals and added 7 assists, as part of an effective offensive combo with junior captain Owen White (7 goals, 7 assists). Wielitzka is going home to Germany to complete his master's degree in physics. "I had a wonderful experience here at Wesleyan," he said. "I met a lot of new friends and got the chance to play a different kind of soccer."

The trend of losing strong goal scorers goes on for Coach Kilby, as All-American Danny Persson left in 2008 after setting a new record at 26 goals, and last year Michael Muhsele transferred after a successful season with 14 goals. "There are obviously big holes to fill for next season, but I'm pretty sure we'll find someone," Kilby said, as he is planning a recruitment trip to France. "We have a good core of players right now. But we will also need a couple of good players coming into 2011."

The extra support will be needed as many players leave, and 12 of the 18 opponents next season are teams that played in the NCAA tournament, the tournament where Wesleyan wants to be. "Our primary goal should be to get revenge on CNU and make it to the NCAA tournament," White said.

Sarah Sallenger, a transfer from Cape Fear Community College, is fast, fast, fast. Technical and extremely positive, she was moved at her previous school to offense from her comfort zone on defense. Because of her technical ability, we were able to create offense on the flanks and look for her to go to the goal. She's a great athlete and a pleasure to coach. She'll be a huge factor in our success in the next year.

Q. You finished 2-7 in the conference (2-18 overall). What were specific areas that separated the Bishops from other teams in the conference?

A. Our youth and depth. We had 18 on our roster but any given day we had to overcome the same as any other team—injuries and getting to know each other's playing styles. We started one senior and two juniors and the rest were freshmen and sophomores. We had a lot to learn in a short period and we improved but we realized we had a lot to gain. We had lost a lot in the seniors over the past two years and offensively we had to find ways to score. We've improved and with a strong freshman class in 2011 we will improve in our overall game.

Q. Talk about the morale of your team. How well did the players react to losing and adversity in general?

A. We have a journal each girl is responsible for turning in each week. They are given a question or a thought that they must answer or analyze. The questions were pointed toward improvement, not dwelling on the mistakes of past practices or games. We had a progression of three things to improve on each week that cannot be measured by a scoreboard. We built upon our success individually and as a whole and the fact they saw and felt improvement was crucial. They have to buy in to the process of success because it does not just come because you wear the gear or can say you are a college athlete. It's always a work in progress and there will always be players that are as good as you or better. But what separates us are the things we can control—fitness, skill, determination and the psychology of "we can win and will win if we all work together."

Q. You played many teams pretty well on defense, allowing fewer than three goals per game (2.85). But your offense was punchless at times, with 12 shutouts in 20 games. Your team scored a total of 14 goals for the season. Besides more scorers, what will it take for your team to improve on offense?

A. Punchless is a tough word. I believe a better way to view it is we were very young and had a lot of players who had not faced a collegiate team defense. We had opportunities but with youth comes the development of confidence in our first decision. We have

to shoot more often and be more opportunistic. A quote I told them a couple of times is "you will miss a 100 percent of the shots you never take." Scoring is not an everyday thing in soccer or everyone would score and we would have double digit scores. We have to be opportunistic, confident and hungry. We'll focus on recruiting true offensive players and we'll build from what we have. But we too have to look within ourselves and find ways individually and collectively to improve on both sides of the game.

Q. On the topic of recruitment, does the high ratio of male students on campus make it difficult to bring female student-athletes to Wesleyan?

A. I don't believe so. As a coach I need to show each recruit the opportunities here at NCWC in the classroom and on the field. I think the size and focus of the college is a great draw. I believe the student-athlete ratio is also positive. As a college, we have become very student-centric, a quality which was absent when I first arrived. And being a female sport coach we have to understand most women are looking for the best education and athletic experience that makes them a marketable professional when their collegiate experience is complete. I have had very few girls that I have coached in college that desire to be professional athletes after college but play because of the passion they have for the sport and the sport affording them the opportunity at a better education. The college is evolving and we as coaches are evolving as well.

Q. What are your specific goals as far as recruitment for next season and beyond that?

A. When hired, I had told Coach Thompson we will be a team in the top third of our conference and back to the traditional excellence once earned by our alumni. I still aspire to that, by continually looking for players that can and will buy into our goals. It's a process that occurs with time and graduating 17 in the past three years is a lot to replace but there are players that want to be here and have the blue-collar player mentality that "we all have to work together to be successful." Not just one star but all of us have to shine. I look to bring in 8-10 freshmen who will compete to play, and the returners have the understanding that they're a part of the foundation and must continue to work to be better players. My focus is in the offense but I need to cultivate all aspects of our team and develop a program that is not year to year. We want to be a team that knows each one of us needs to work and sweat—bent over and out of breath—continually striving to be better...even when no one else is watching.

Football Team Ties for Second Straight USA-S Conference Title

By Jarad Brown
Decree Senior Editor

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines dynasty as follows: a powerful group or family that maintains its position for a considerable time.

The entry could also read "See North Carolina Wesleyan College football team."

With a 7-3 record that included a 6-1 mark in USA South Conference play, the Bishops earned a share of their second consecutive league title and the squad's third in four years.

Combine that with being the only No. 8 seed in NCAA Division III history to ever upset a No. 1 seed in the national playoffs and the near 100 players who have garnered all-conference awards in the team's seven-season history, and "dynasty" is the only word that comes to mind.

"They're going to remain on top," said senior running back Teron Bush, who graduated in December. "If they keep working with that talented coaching staff, there's no way they won't keep winning."

Bush, a member of all three conference championship teams and former USA South Rookie of the Year, isn't the only player who sees consistent excellence moving ahead.

Senior defensive tackle James Carter, who accepted the league's Defensive Player of the Year honors after tallying 65 total tackles, 17 of which went for loss, 4.5 sacks, a forced fumble and a fumble recovery for the season, thinks the Bishops "have too much talent not

to be great for a long time."

That's a statement not many could argue, considering the Blue and Gold nabbed both the Offensive Rookie of the Year (Jordan Vann) and Defensive Rookie of the Year honors (Tazmon Foster).

Despite those individual award winners and having a conference-leading 16 players named all USA South, Wesleyan found itself sitting at home watching the first round of the national playoffs. A shared championship resulted in Christopher Newport University earning the league's automatic playoff bid.

CNU (6-1) claimed the conference title by virtue of the first tie-breaker, head-to-head matchups. The Captains took advantage of five Bishops turnovers (four fumbles, one interception) on October 16 to become the first USA South team to hand NCWC a loss in more than two years.

"It hurts not to get to the playoffs," sophomore Jamal Smith said. "I wish we could have another shot at CNU, because I know we didn't play as well as we could. It is what it is."

The Bishops did end the season on a four-game winning streak which included a 50-point blowout of rival Methodist University, a shutout of Shenandoah, and a 28-13 season-fine against visiting Averett.

"I wish we weren't talking about turning the equipment in. I wish we were talking about game planning and all that," coach Mark Henninger said. "There's certainly a teachable moment in there for the guys coming back, though."



This fall former Bishop standouts Quentin Pope (with ball) and Scott Cooper found a new outlet for their competitiveness— intramurals.

Photo courtesy of Alex Langley