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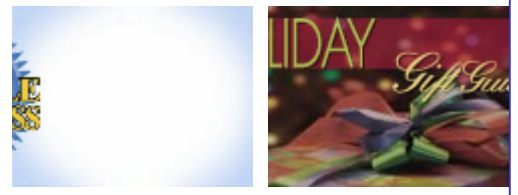
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LOS ANGELES TIMES

2006-07 GIRLS' SOCCER PREVIEW: Area's best look for better

Local girls' soccer teams hope to improve on prior year's performances.

By Grant Gordon

GLENDALE — Controversies, injuries and unforeseen circumstances characterized last season's girls' soccer campaign.

To show for it, there were no league champions and just three playoff teams — all of which advanced no farther than the first round.

Flintridge Sacred Heart Academy Co-coach Frank Pace called this a "transition year."

Crescenta Valley Coach Cesar Hidalgo called it a "rebuilding year."

And Flintridge Prep Coach Sean Beattie said: "There's a lot of stuff we're still iffy about."

For now, controversy has subsided and most of the injuries have healed, but, obviously, questions still abound.

Hidalgo's Falcons looked to repeat as Pacific League champions in 2005-06 and were off to an undefeated start when they were saddled with a controversial forfeit loss. Crescenta Valley fell to third after a 1-0 loss to Arcadia in the season finale on what is often referred to as the "phantom goal." Many dispute if Arcadia ever scored against Crescenta Valley that game.

Many are also questioning the prospects of a Falcons team that has lost nine lettermen and seven starters — including league most valuable player Sydney Vermillion.

"It was crazy last year, to say the least," Hidalgo said. "[This is] a rebuilding year."

Still, Hidalgo remains optimistic of the possibilities for a league crown and a deep CIF playoff run.

"We're ready to go and battle," he said, "and I think my team is going to go the extra mile to accomplish the goal of going to the top."

Senior midfielder Astrid Castaneda returns from injury, while senior goalie Emma Dearman, junior midfielder Kim Carcich and sophomore midfielder Brittany Berger are also expected to lead the Falcons.

Stefanie Chan will be called on to do her share of leading for the Tologs. She'll be called on to deal with the void left by tri-captains Angie Torres, Linzee Luper and Lauren Bustos, the two-time All-Area Player of the Year.

Last season, the Tologs advanced to the CIF Southern Section Division I playoffs for a fourth straight year. They did so without Giselle Galanto, their top returning scorer, who was lost for the season due to injury.

As this season begins, the Tologs are banged up, but without any injuries of that magnitude. It bodes well for a team that's small, but brimming with speed.

"I believe we're going to be a very good offensive team," said Pace, who returns top-scorer Heather Riley at forward and midfielder Pip Harrigan, who led her team in assists. "The key to our success will be how quickly we'll be able to get our defense together."

Pace and Co-coach Kathy Desmond also return the likes of Bianca Garoian, Mimi Roukoz and Carter Vettese in hopes of developing a potent offense.

"All the kids that are coming back have improved," Pace said, "and that's what you want."

Beattie has a slew of kids coming back for Flintridge Prep.

He'll need them, as the Prep League features defending Division IV champion Chadwick.

"It's going to be a tough league as always," said Beattie, whose team lost in the first round of the playoffs last year, but was without All-CIF goalie Ayana Sumiyasu. "We're still looking to be pretty strong."

How quickly his team will reach its maximum strength remains to be seen.

All-CIF forward Lauren Von Der Ahe hasn't practiced with the team yet, as she's been with the cross-country squad — which runs today in the CIF-State Meet. Sumiyasu is still tied down by club commitments.

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"We're still kind of toying around with things a little," Beattie said.

Glendale and Hoover are looking for improvement after tying for fourth in the Pacific League last year.

Both are led by returning All-Area selections: Catrina Flores of Hoover and Sarah Mizuki of Glendale.

Said Glendale Coach Kris Lowe: "We have better players this year, definitely, we should improve our record."

Hoover will be led by first-year Coach Julie Testin, while Holy Family also welcomes first-year man Marco Calderon.

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