

Big Ten Women's Soccer Wrap-up

Lady booters provide exciting Big Ten season

By JOHN GIBLIN
Collegian Staff Writer

As the Big Ten women's soccer regular season came to a close, the conference title picture came more into focus. Only the top eight teams qualified for the postseason tournament Nov. 6-8, while the remaining two teams will be forced to sit home and watch.

This year's race for the title has been one of the most exciting in recent memory, with upsets helping to separate the conference heavyweights from the have-beens and wanna-bes. With eight of the 10 teams above .500 for the year and four teams currently ranked in the top 25, the Big Ten once again has flexed its muscle.

"To repeat in any conference is tough, especially in the Big Ten," Michigan State coach Tom Saxton said. "The margin of difference between schools is who makes the most of that day."

Illinois Fighting Illini
Under coach Jillian Ellis, the Illini have surpassed preseason expectations to make their first Big Ten Tournament.

Last year's conference cellar dwellers, Illinois has greatly improved from last season's 7-10 mark, 1-8 in the Big Ten.

Despite their season-long suc-

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cess, the Illini have faced a late-season in-conference slump. In its final two games of the Big Ten season, Illinois lost to Minnesota 3-1, and Indiana 2-1.

Indiana Hoosiers
Another addition to the list of rising stars are the No. 24 Hoosiers. Coach Joe Kelley's squad has improved upon its accomplishments from a year ago, posting the third-best overall record in the conference.

"I think what you're seeing is squads that started when we did are showing how strong of a conference we have," he said.

Indiana is one game away from tying the team record of 12 wins in a season set in 1993. In addition, Indiana is 7-0 at home this year and will try to keep its record unblemished when it hosts Butler in its last home game this season.

Iowa Hawkeyes

Despite having a worse winning percentage than last year, Iowa coach Stephanie Gabbert feels her team has had a productive year in the Big Ten. Despite being one of only two teams not to qualify for the conference tournament, Iowa, in its second season in the conference, still hopes to improve on its 8-11 overall record from last season.

"This year, we've played better as a team," Gabbert said. "We've had more depth off the bench, and we're not relying on one player to win it for us."

Michigan Wolverines
After hitting a midseason low point, the No. 19 Wolverines finally have shown signs they can contend for the conference crown.

Last year's Big Ten Tournament champion, Michigan has come on strong during conference play. Its few setbacks this year have come to quality opponents, including losses to No. 18 Northwestern, conference runner-up Wisconsin and No. 5 Notre Dame. Picked in the preseason as the team to beat, the Wolverines face one final test before the Big Ten Tournament begins — No. 20 Brigham Young.

Michigan State Spartans
Along with Iowa, the Spartans failed to make the Big Ten's post-

season tournament. In what Saxton termed a "down" year, Michigan State has been walked on as the conference doormat.

The Spartans are last in the conference in goalkeeping, allowing 1.79 goals per game. In addition, it is the only team not to win against a conference opponent. Overall, Michigan State has only scored 80 points this season, second only to Ohio State for worst in the conference.

Minnesota Golden Gophers
Last year's conference champions have been anything but spectacular this season. Minnesota ran the gamut in Big Ten play last season, compiling a 9-0 record en route to the Big Ten regular-season title. Playing inconsistently, this year's squad — minus all-time school scoring leader Jennifer Walek and three-time All-American Jennifer McElmury — has failed to live up to its preseason expectations.

"This year has been a learning experience for us," coach Sue Montagne said. "We've had to adjust our game and find some chemistry."

One of the few highlights for the Gophers has been the play of forward scoring tandem Nicole Lee and Laurie Seidl, who rank 1-2 in the conference in scoring.

BIG TEN CONFERENCE Big Ten Women's Soccer Standings

	Big Ten		Overall	
	W-L-T	Pct.	W-L-T	Pct.
Penn State	7-1-1	.833	14-2-1	.853
Wisconsin	6-2-1	.722	9-5-2	.625
Northwestern	6-3-0	.667	12-3-1	.688
Indiana	6-3-0	.625	11-5-0	.781
Michigan	5-3-1	.611	11-4-1	.719
Minnesota	5-4-0	.556	11-5-0	.688
Ohio State	3-5-1	.389	10-6-1	.618
Illinois	3-6-0	.375	9-7-0	.563
* Iowa	1-7-1	.167	6-9-2	.412
* Michigan State	0-8-1	.055	5-11-2	.333

*did not qualify for conference tournament

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