

## 2009 Boys soccer preview

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### FIVE PLAYERS TO WATCH

1. A.J. Stueck, Brookfield, Senior -- Stueck's skill is not secret at this point. The forward/midfielder's skill in the midfield and speed up front completely change the way teams defend the Bobcats. The All-State and New England selection tallied 21 goals and 11 assists despite missing half the season with a broken hand. It's hard to imagine what the highly touted Division I recruit can do with a full season.
2. Brian Grisell, Brookfield, Senior --With Stueck grabbing most of the attention, Grisell, a forward/midfielder might be the most overlooked player in the SWC. The Division I recruit and All-State selection, however, warrants plenty of attention. Grisell had 11 goals and 11 assists last year, was the centerpiece offense that outscored opponents 44-12 and helped carry the team in Stueck's absence.
3. Jon Diker, Danbury, Senior -- Diker is back to anchor a Danbury defense that found itself in may close games last year. The All-FCIAC First team stopper, who also tallied four goals and five assists, emerged as a star as the Hatters' limited its FCIAC foes to just 19 goals. Diker's courage under fire will be key again this season if the Hatters are going to return to the state playoffs and perhaps even reach the FCIAC tournament.
4. Miguel Carneiro, New Milford, Senior -- Carneiro, a midfielder, proved last year he's got the skills to be one of the best in conference, registering 26 points (7 goals and 12 assists). The All-SWC First Team pick has the ball control and vision to take apart any defense. This year, however, Carneiro will need to do even more--especially score--as the Green Wave look to replace their top scorer (Max Schneider) and defender (Ani Lekaj).

5. Raphael Carvalho, Abbott Tech, Senior -- Carvalho, an All-CSC and All-State pick, is perhaps the most undervalued player in the area. The senior forward/midfielder tallied 32 points last year (10 goals and 12 assists) and only his unselfishness prevented him from scoring more. He ball control and vision in the midfield is on par with the best in the SWC and FCIAC. With Carvalho and his partners in crime (Joe Groski, Aisian Santori and Tadeu Bonini) back the Wolverines will be a very dangerous come tournament time.

### FIVE TEAMS TO WATCH

1. Brookfield -- Anything less than an SWC and Class L state championship will be a disappointment for the Bobcats. The team's top two offensive threats are back in A.J. Stueck and Brian Grisell are back along with their top defenders in sweeper Luke Niarhos, back Eric McKean and goaltender Matt Bonn. These same Bobcats, which outscored opponents 44-12 in the regular season, had to split a state title with Barlow in 2007 and suffered two emotional letdowns in the SWC and state tournament last year. These Cats are hungry and are starving for a crown to call their own.
2. Newtown -- Newtown's early exits from both the state and SWC playoffs were a rarity last season. Don't expect a repeat of that effort in 2009. Newtown only significant loss was leading scorer Andrew Miesel (six goals, four assists) and he missed half of the season last year anyways. The Nighthawks have a talented core that starts with captains midfielders Evan Kennedy and Jeff DiNicola and back Matt Slattery. The Nighthawks, which finished the season on a six-game unbeaten streak, will boast a balanced attack that should be very hard to stop.
3. Joel Barlow -- Barlow's defense, which gave up just nine goals last year, carried it to a second straight SWC title last year. Barlow's stout back four return in Chris Ferullo, Zack Frank, Jake Naber and Brian Kraekel. However, the Falcons will have a new goalkeeper for the first time in four years with the graduation of Barlow's career starts (87) and shutouts (45) leader Cody Hickok. Unless the offense can step up and offer the defense more support, the Falcons reign on top the SWC will likely come to an end and Barlow coach Paul Winstanley's team will miss the conference title game for the first time in his five-year tenure.
4. Danbury -- This is statement year for the Hatters. It's Danbury coach Sean Colley's third year and his team is no longer young and talented. Danbury is simply talented. Every key piece returns from a Danbury team that ended the school's four-year absence from the state playoffs. Stopper Jon Diker and goalkeeper Eric Cole are back on defense, Henry Ipin and Darion Richeime (two goals, three assists) are back in the midfield and Juan Galarza (eight goals, eight assists) and Raphael Moura (six goals, three assists) return up front. Danbury still has to prove it belongs among the best in the FCIAC and Class LL. This is the Hatters' year to do it.
5. Ridgefield-- Two years ago Ridgefield won the Class LL title and finished second in the FCIAC. Last year, the Tigers appeared on track for another title run -- starting 9-0-1 -- until injuries put almost the entire starting lineup, including leading scorer Connor McCarthy (14 goals, three assists), on the sideline. The positive many younger players got playing time and McCarthy -- who is bound for Harvard -- and head coach Phil Bergen feel this team may be even better than the 2007 championship squad. Midfielder Rex Messing and goaltender Sean Ceponis, both members of the 2007 team, return from knee injuries and sweeper Jake Kirsh is back to lead the defense. These Tigers are hungry which should put them right in the hunt for an FCIAC and state crown.

### FIVE GAMES TO WATCH

1. Sept. 15, Brookfield at Newtown (Blue and Gold Stadium), 7 p.m. -- You couldn't ask for a better game to kickoff the season. Arguably the best two teams in the conference get to size each other up. It may be a non-league match, but this one could be an SWC title game preview.
2. Sept. 18, Joel Barlow at New Milford, 3:45 p.m. -- Last year, the Falcons needed two shootouts to eliminate the Green Wave from the SWC semifinals. This will be a good early litmus test for these teams. Barlow will be trying to work in a new goalkeeper and improve its offense while New Milford will be looking for both revenge and respect as it tries to prove it belongs among the SWC elite.
3. Oct. 10, Staples at Brookfield, 6 p.m. -- Brookfield can prove they are a championship team with a win over the defending FCIAC champs here. The Wreckers wrecked the Bobcats last year, 3-0, even after A.J. Stueck returned from injury. Stueck, Brian Grisell and Co. would certainly like to return the favor and prove they deserve mention among the best in the state.
4. Oct. 15, Joel Barlow at Newtown (Blue and Gold Stadium), 7 p.m. -- This intense rivalry is always worth the price of admission. The coaches (Newtown's Brian Neumeyer and Barlow's Paul Winstanley) almost want to win more than the players and this late in the season there will be plenty more than respect on the line.
5. Oct. 20, Ridgefield at Danbury, 4 p.m. -- No one on the Hatters' roster could remember the last time Danbury qualified for the state playoffs or beat the Tigers. They did both on the same day with an impressive 2-1 win against injury-depleted Ridgefield last year. No doubt, the Tigers, who play FCIAC defending champion Staples three days earlier, would like a little payback in this classic rivalry.

-- Dan Farrand

