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Falcons' talent, depth must gel together

by Rocco Paul Valluzzo
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The talent is definitely there, but that is only half the challenge for the Joel Barlow High boys varsity soccer team as it prepares to start the 2007 season.

There is no question that the Falcons have the ability. What their key players have accomplished in the past will attest to that. Being able to play together as a whole is the second part of the equation.

Although practicing for less than two weeks, the Falcons are already well on their way to doing just that. Once they do it consistently they will be tough to beat.

"On any given day we can beat anybody in the state," said head coach Paul Winstanley, now in his fourth season with the team. "The next day we can play a mediocre team and fight for our lives."

With more than 40 players coming out for the program, which includes varsity and JV teams, Barlow again has numbers in its favor. It also appear to be a deeper team than it was last season.



Seniors Scott St. Cyr, left, and Dylan Stone are captains of the 2007 Joel Barlow High boys varsity soccer team. With more depth than last season, the Falcons could again make runs at South-West Conference and state Class M championships. — Rocco Paul Valluzzo photo

That says a lot based on what it accomplished. Going 11-2 in the South-West Conference, the Falcons qualified for the league playoffs for the 12th straight time. They advanced to the finals for the third straight year, where they were dethroned by Masuk as league champs.

They also went far in the state tournament, reaching the finals in Class M before losing a 1-0 decision to Suffield to end the season at 18-4-1.

Barlow may seem deeper this year but it did lose several key players from last season. Three who graduated are former captains Matt Cushman, Ryan Ogiela and Jake Edwards.

An All-SWC selection, Cushman was on defense, and Ogiela, an All-SWC second team selection, was in the midfield. Edwards was an All-SWC honorable mention as a forward.

Barlow also lost George Kastanaris, an All-SWC honorable mention on defense. Tom Keneally, midfielder Kevin Dohanue, forward Ronny Basask-Smith and midfielder Brandon Wohl have also graduated.

Even with these key losses the Falcons have players ready to step up. Two are senior captains Dylan Stone and Scott St. Cyr.

Stone was a big part of Barlow's offense as a forward, as was St. Cyr in the midfield. Together they combined for 32 goals and both were All-SWC and All-State selections last season.

"That bodes well," said Winstanley, noting their leadership. "The question is how well they can gel the team."

They lead a group of experienced returnees as well as some promising newcomers. Contributing to the offense will be classmate Alex Van Steinburgh.

He is part of a large senior class that also includes defender/midfielder Chris Naber. James Wayne will be on defense or in the midfield.

Also back is Taylor Armstrong. Aaron Kaufman, who played football last year, has returned, too.

From the junior class Barlow will have an experienced goalie with Cody Hickok, a three-year starter. Mike Flynn will start on defense. Other juniors include Martin Jocher and newcomer Alex Delmore.

Backing up Hickok in goal is sophomore Anthony Caruso. "We have a high level of confidence in him," said Winstanley. "He really worked hard in the off-season."

Zach Frank could start in a central defensive position. Chris Ferullo and Brian Craigle also have a chance to start on defense.

A possible forward is sophomore Dan Goldman, as is Will Kiriazides. Jake Soodek, Matt Giamportone and Nick Chu round out the sophomore class.

Barlow also had a few freshmen who could make varsity appearances. These include Sean Basak-Smith, Connor Regan and Jake Naber.

Already the Falcons have their sights set high. Once again they hope to reach the finals of both the league and state tournaments.

"This is the year to win it," said St. Cyr. "The pressure is on."

The Falcons open the season on Tuesday at Newtown.