ABAC Soccer Season Begins Today

TIFTON—With the all-time single season goal scorer back in the saddle for the Fillies, the soccer team at Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College takes the field today for its season opener in a 5 p.m. matchup at Toccoa Falls College.
Nikita Morris, a sophomore from Norfolk, England, scored 34 goals for Coach Jimmy Ballenger’s 2012 team, which rolled up a 12-8 record and lost in the semifinal round of the state tournament.

“We are excited to have Nikita back this year, and we’ve added some other components to the team who will take some pressure off her so she won’t have to carry the entire scoring load on her back,” Ballenger said. “She’ll be the first to tell you that soccer is a team sport, and she can’t do it alone.”

Morris, a physical education major, became the first ABAC player ever to be named the Georgia Collegiate Athletic Conference Player of the Year last season. She was also named first team all-conference and a member of the National Junior College Athletic Association All-America team.

“I am very excited about this season coming up,” Morris said. “We have a great team and a good bunch of girls.”

Morris is only 15 goals short of the ABAC career record of 49 goals set by Katrina Duncan-Marshalleck in 2008-09.

“Hopefully, I can break that record but mainly I want the team to score a lot of goals so we can win,” Morris said. “We are trying to go all the way this year.”

Ballenger will mix six returnees with 15 freshmen to try to come up with a winning combination in a tough league that features always strong Darton and Georgia Perimeter.

“We want to have double digits in wins every year,” Ballenger said. “That puts us in a good position for the playoffs which puts us in a good position to win state and go to the national tournament. Our ultimate goal every year is to win the national championship.”
Ballenger started the women’s soccer program at ABAC in 2006. His Fillies have had a winning record every year and have advanced to the state playoffs six times in seven years. Besides Morris, key players on this year’s squad will include Jodie Corless, Kerry Newman, and Katie Sills, all from England.

“Jodie is a striker, and she’ll give some support to Nikita when it comes to scoring,” Ballenger said.

Developing contacts all over the world has been one of Ballenger’s goals since he began developing the ABAC soccer program. Those contacts have certainly paid off with the international flavor of the squad.

“Our contacts come across women’s soccer players who want to come to the States to play and get a great education,” Ballenger said. “We have been fortunate to get some outstanding players. But we also have some good players from Georgia and Florida this year.”

Ballenger said Kayla Goodwin from Green Cove Springs, Fla., Hanna Wilkes and Sydney Humphrey from Houston County, and Jasmine Johnson from Warner Robins must play huge roles if the Fillies are to attain a successful season this year.

ABAC plays four games on the road before its first home contest at 5 p.m. on Sept. 3 against Andrew College. Eight home matches are on the regular season schedule.

“We are so blessed because we get to play at one of the nicest facilities in the state,” Ballenger said. “It’s an excellent field, and we get great fan support from the students and the community.”

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