

Soccer first to begin new season

When the curtain opens on the new-look 2001-02 high school sports year for Mooresville Senior High this week, only one of its teams will be officially featured on center stage.

Soccer. It fills that starring role when emerging as the first of this fall season's five programs to get its season officially underway, engaging in the regular-season debut in an endowment match at cross-country, inter-classification opponent West Iredell this (Wednesday) evening.

It is a varsity-only affair featuring a 7 p.m. starting time on the home field of the 2A class member Warriors. Though an endowment contest that contributes part of the game's proceeds to the N.C. High School Athletic Association, it will count in regular-season standings for both teams.

"It's the real thing," assured Steve Stith, returning this year as Mooresville's head coach after a previous nine-year stint with the Blue Devils came to a close following the 1996 season. "I don't know if we're ready, but it's here."

In an unusual twist, the season-opener comes a few days before Mooresville's only scheduled preseason scrimmage appearance, it also taking place at West Iredell when the same two teams join a host of others in a multi-team affair scheduled to be held most of the day Saturday. During that event, the Devils will be engaging in a least three scrimmages against undetermined opponents.

With the return of Stith, who led Mooresville to state 2A class championships both in 1989 and 1991 while also guiding the Devils to a total of three state championship

appearances within as many year span, the 2001 season christens a new era for the school's sports program overall.

With the arrival of this sports year, Senior High begins life anew as a charter member of the seven-school, North Piedmont Conference, one that is being considered by many the most competitive in all of the state's 3A class in nearly all sports. Making matters more trying will be the fact that, across the board all year, the members will be scrambling to lock in just two available state playoff berths.

In addition to Mooresville, other members of the NPC include Iredell County residents North Iredell and Statesville, as well as Northwest Cabarrus, Kannapolis, and Rowan County rivals East Rowan and West Rowan. During the course of league play that won't begin in full until next month, the Blue Devils will square off against each remaining league foe twice each on a home-and-home basis.

Before then, Mooresville will engage in seven non-conference matches and also appear in an invitational tournament highlighted by a first-round meeting with arch-rival South Iredell before becoming the school's second fall sports program to initiate NPC play.

Following this week's trips to West Iredell, one in the official capacity and the other under scrimmage conditions, the Devils will debut at home along with the school's junior varsity team when hosting Alexander Central Monday night. Play is scheduled to begin in the Mooresville Stadium with jayvee play at 5:30 p.m., followed by the varsity contest.

Beginning with tonight's official regular-season opener, the complete Mooresville Senior High boys soccer schedule, with home contests in all capitals, follows:

Aug. 8.....West Iredell
Aug. 13.....ALEX.CENTRAL
Aug. 15.....Newton-Conover
Aug. 20.....South Point
Aug. 22.....Davie County
Aug. 27 SOUTH
Aug. 29.....ROWAN
Sept. 4-8 Hickory

Tournament

Sept. 10.....Northwest Cabarrus
Sept. 12.....Elkin
Sept. 17.....EAST ROWAN
Sept. 19.....North Iredell
Sept. 24.....KANNAPOLIS
Sept. 26.....West Rowan
Oct. 1.....STATESVILLE
Oct. 2.....N.WEST CABARRUS
Oct. 10.....East Rowan
Oct. 15.....NORTH IREDELL
Oct. 17.....Kannapolis
Oct. 22.....WEST ROWAN
Oct. 24.....Statesville

Super World

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Coming off a preparing 2 performance in the USSSA N.C. Western Division Open State Championships held in Charlotte during which they outscored their two victims by a 34-1 count prior to the NSA event, the Carolina Comets posted three straight wins, two of them by shutout, to put themselves in contention for a bid to the Super World attraction.

Then, after suffering a first loss, they bounced back to win by shutout before suffering only a second loss that sewed up their final position.

In the process, Carolina bagged wins by scores of 2-0 over the Center Grove Lightning from Indiana, 7-0 over the Maryland Chill, 10-1 over the Weddington All Stars, and 2-0 over the Tigerlilies from Ohio.

Pitcher McCutcheon, whose dad Sid McCutcheon is one of the team's coaches, figured in on all of the pitching decisions except the opening win.

Prior to earning the bid to the Super Worlds, the Carolina U-10 Comets' resume was highlighted by a

perfect showing in the USSSA April Fools qualifier held in Marion.

Following the World Series showing, the team will now be in regular rehearsals for the Super Worlds, scheduled to be held in Kansas City over Labor Day Weekend.

In Graham's case, according to her dad Gary, the family plans to make the most of the opportunity by getting in a little family vacation time in the process, stopping along the way to catch a professional baseball game in St. Louis before competing in the NSA national competition.

"It means that Hannah might miss a few days of school," offered her dad. "She's all for that."

Ten-year-old girls, it seems, will do anything for that right.

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Stith back in charge as new soccer coach

Steve Stith didn't need all those aptitude tests to tell him what he already knew. Selling health insurance on a commission basis just wasn't for him.

So Stith, perhaps the most successful of all of Mooresville's soccer coaches, is back doing what he feels he was meant to do, returning after a four-year absence to start a second stint as Mooresville's boys soccer coach.

"This is what I was meant to do," beamed Stith, wrapping up his first full week of official preseason practice, "be a teacher and a coach. It feels great to be back. I'm excited. The opportunity became open, and they asked me to fill it. They're really rolled out the red carpet to welcome me back. The kids seem to be into it, too. I glad to be here."

If being back means half as much as what it meant to have Stith on the sidelines in the past, then the entire soccer program could benefit from his decision to surrender his insurance salesman's pitch and get back into the coaching profession.

During his earlier coaching career at Mooresville that accounted for his first venture into that profession, Stith proved he belonged by leading the Blue Devils to state 2A class championships to cap both the 1989 and 1991 seasons. Both state titles were won at the team's home facility in the Mooresville Stadium, still ranking them as the only such champi-

onships for the school captured on home ground. Stith primarily made his mark while coaching the school's boys team that also made a state finals appearance before settling for a second-place finish in the state's 2A class in between the two odd-number year title runs. During a single stretch, the Devils reached at least as far as the N.C. West final four straight seasons.

He was also on hand to help start the school's girls soccer program and helped break new ground in that program as well. He was the Lady Devils' coach the first time they made an appearance in the state playoffs, doing so twice during his reign while just missing making a third appearance with him as the coach.

Stith coached both the girls and boys teams through the 1996 seasons before leaving education completely to embark on the insurance salesman's career path. It was one he remained on for the last four years, still keeping very much involved in the game of soccer at the competitive youth Select and Classic levels.

He has helped direct area organizations designed to help youngsters of all ages increase their skills by facing quality competition across the state. As it turns out, there are former products of that program that are now playing at the high school level for Stith.

Though no stranger to the Mooresville soccer program

by any stretch, Stith's return is being made more comfortable by the fact that joining him on the coaching staff is Terry Shinn, previously the head coach of both the girls and boys teams. Last fall, though the Devils missed out on a state playoff berth, they fashioned a 7-7 record during their final year within the old Western Foothills Conference and constructed an 11-12-1 overall record while losing just three players off that squad to graduation.

"The kids seem very excited about this season," revealed Stith, who teaches social studies, as he headed into this week steering the squad towards its season-opener set for tonight (Wednesday) at West Iredell. "We've got some talent, especially within our senior class. We had a lot of players at tryouts, and making the final cut was hard. We feel we have the best players available, and we're looking forward to our chances. Like always, we've got a goal of winning the conference championship and making it to the playoffs."

Now that Blue Devils' coach Steve Stith feels like he's back where he belongs, reaching those goals is well within reach.

After opening the season tonight, Mooresville returns to West Iredell for three scrimmages Saturday afternoon before making its at-home debut when hosting



State titles, league crowns stack Stith's resume.

Alexander Central Monday night in play that will also account for the first outing of the season for the school's junior varsity team.

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Polesitter Marlowe settles for race silver

Mooresville's Greg Marlowe came oh-so close to finishing what he started at Hickory Motor Speedway last weekend.

Marlowe, the reigning ARA Late Model Series' national champion, earned the pole position for Saturday night's Touring Series 125-lap feature race at HMS and rode point up through the event's early laps before settling for a tight second-place finish.

Marlowe sat behind the wheel of the No. 7 Southern Pride machine, one he used to set the field's pace earning him the Battery Supply of Virginia pole award. He led the pack to the green with a blistering pace, one that led to a number of pilots trying to keep up to lose the handle on their entries through the first 10 laps.

Following the second caution around Lap 29, Marlowe protected his status as the race leader through the restart before being passed by the race's eventual winner. The two then fought tooth and nail through the remainder of the race before fashioning the one-two performance.

On Lap 75, the final caution flag of the evening fell, forcing what proved to be his final restart. Marlowe, now

in second, tried to keep pace with the new leader but also fought off challenges from a trio of entries close behind, holding them off to post the runner-up finish.

Marlowe is expected back in the field when racing resumes at Hickory during the ARA Weekly Racing Series event set for Saturday night.

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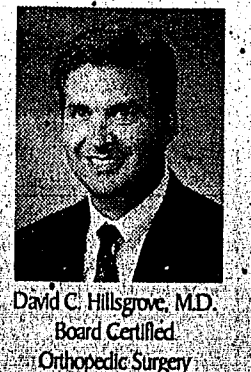
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