

DAILY NEXUS

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SANTA BARBARA

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NCAA

Men's Soccer

COLLEGE CUP 2018

December 7 & 9

Harder Stadium

Bright Road Ahead as College Cup Returns to "Soccer Heaven"

Brandon Victor
Staff Writer

This week, thousands of fans will pour into Harder Stadium to watch a new NCAA men's soccer champion be crowned. Akron, Michigan State, Indiana and Maryland will all fly cross country, hoping that this will be their year. But how did Santa Barbara – a school more renowned for its academic prowess than its athletic department – earn the chance to host the most important collegiate soccer game of the year?

In large part, UCSB Tim Vom Steeg deserves credit for how far the Gauchos have come. Since his hiring in 1999, the Gauchos have made the postseason 14 times. In 2004, Santa Barbara shocked the nation by making the College Cup final, ultimately falling to Indiana. In 2006, current LA Galaxy midfielder Chris Pontius and the Gauchos raised the trophy for the first time in program history after knocking off UCLA in the final.

In 2010, just before college cup for the first time, ESPN.com writer Scott French described Harder Stadium as "Soccer Heaven." At the time, the Gauchos easily led the NCAA in attendance, averaging more than 6,000 people per game. When UCSB took the game drew nearly 16,000 people – shattering the old NCAA record by almost 6,000 people. Even this year, in what was at times a trying season for the Gauchos, the team drew nearly 8,000 people for the rivalry game against Cal Poly.

Another big reason Santa Barbara's location. With Harder



Santa

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for the "Soccer Heaven" Santa Barbara's location. With Harder

Stadium less than a mile from the beach and almost always in ideal weather, it's not much of a surprise that teams and their fans love coming to the West Coast for the College Cup.

Hosting the College Cup further reinforces what students at UC Santa Barbara already know: soccer is an ingrained tradition at UCSB. For the second time in the last eight years, Santa Barbara will be the center of the college soccer world for an entire weekend.

When UCSB hosted the final in 2010, nearly 10,000 fans came out to watch Akron defeat Louisville for its first-ever title. After the game, Akron Head Coach Caleb Porter – who would go on to coach the Portland Timbers – praised the energy that the crowd brought to the game.

With Santa Barbara hosting both the 2018 and 2020 College Cups, there has been some talk of Santa Barbara becoming the permanent host for this event. While that likely won't happen, it proves that the NCAA recognizes the legitimacy of UCSB as a soccer program.

Unfortunately, the UCSB men's soccer team will not be competing for the title this year. Despite going undefeated at home during the regular season, the Gauchos were upset in the first round of the Big West tournament by Cal State Fullerton.

Still, there is reason for optimism for the future. By hosting the College Cup, which will be televised on ESPNU, UCSB will become more of a household name when it comes to soccer. Ideally, this will help Vom Steeg bring in highly-touted recruits and replenish the talent pool of the squad.



SIYAVASH GHADIRI / THE DAILY NEXUS

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As Showcase Comes Home, Gauchos Left Wondering What Could Have Been

Arthur Wilkie
KCSB

On Halloween night at an hour far past most young trick-or-treaters' bedtimes, a dejected Tim Vom Steeg, in his twentieth year as head coach of the UCSB men's soccer program, set down his keys on the table in the College Cup room situated under the east end of a now-empty Harder Stadium.

He faced the local media to discuss wrong in their Big West Tournament versus Cal State Fullerton, which visiting Titans advance to the semifinal after a penalty kick shootout.

These season-ending press conferences have become par for the course for Vom Steeg and the Gauchos over the past

three years as they've fallen short of reaching the NCAA Tournament in either the quarterfinal or semifinal stages of the Big West Conference Tournament.

For a program that was once considered a perennial lock for the NCAA Tournament and a contender for the title, a postseason drought of this length is rare.

In the three years since UCSB's last appearance in the NCAA Tournament when they fell to Clemson in the Round of 16, each season's Gaucho team has seen their campaign end in disappointment come conference tournament time. This year's Gauchos became the latest to join that group.

As unsuccessful as the have been in recent times, recipe for success to make grand stage of the College on the surface, but it crown jewel of college require perfect execution that make it that far.

Tactics: Outsmarting
"That's been our 'something different' Vom Steeg has the upper hand against any have so much talent at what formation would Throughout, formations: first a the end of the An argument its season in any exposed in one setup it was on to the next one.

This constant tinkering hampered players who excelled in one formation and struggled in others, and there was no regularity for the team to grow into a formation as a unit.

One such example is senior defender and team captain Jan Ilskens. If he could be listed as a utility man, that would be a better descriptor since he's been deployed as a center back, defensive midfielder, right back and even as a striker in the past two years. After starting the season as a right back in the 4-2-3-1, he moved to right center back in the 3-5-2. With the wingback spots occupied in the 4-4-2 by juniors Ignacio Tellechea and Noah Billingsley, he began to get some playing time up top to support sophomore Rodney Michael in the forward lines. Playing out of position in attack didn't suit him, so he moved back into the defensive midfield in the 4-3-3.

Consistency: Establishing Your Roles
"If you follow Gaucho soccer, scoring goals this year has always been an issue for us. When we scored goals, it usually happened in bunches."
The 2018 Gauchos certainly did score in bunches: Five times this year they managed

all that went quarterfinal saw the
Gauchos there's a it back to the Cup. It's simple wouldn't be the soccer if it didn't by the four teams

the Opponent
issue all year. What's been that that can get us a goal?" expertise and know-how to have opponent, but as good a problem his disposal, it was also a nightmare to get the most out of his team. he worked with four different 4-2-3-1, then a 3-5-2, onto a 4-4-2, and toward season shades of a 4-3-3. can be made that UCSB played the best soccer of got slightly of the formations, but once the team

to score multiple goals within a five-minute span. In the game against CSUN, it was Vom Steeg's tactical switch at halftime that worked to their favor as they scored a trio of goals in just seven minutes.

Yet it was hard to spread the goals around the team and even harder to score on the road.

The Gauchos had just five players with multiple goals on the season. Of those five, freshman forward Carter Clemmensen's goals were both in the opening weekend of play, and sophomore forward Kaya Fabbretti didn't join the ranks until the final game of the regular season.

UCSB's road woes were well-documented this season, but one statistic still seems unbelievable until it's checked against the team's results: the Gauchos failed to score in each of their six road losses.

When the Gauchos scored, they got results. When they didn't, they lost. It should be no surprise that Michael had a goal and two assists in the road win at New Mexico and draw at UC Irvine. This year's team relied heavily on the sophomore and oftentimes struggled to find a Plan B.

This was the result of an ever-shifting midfield and attack for the Gauchos. The backline became solidified very early on in the season, but each game saw a rotating cast providing support for Michael and Billingsley, seemingly the only two regulars in the attacking half of the starting lineup.

UCSB played best when midfielders like junior Sahid Conteh and Fabbretti made deep runs and were able to contribute to the attack. When there's so much talent and so many different styles of play vying for such few spots on the field, it can be difficult to implement one method of play over another. Injuries and suspensions didn't help Vom Steeg's case either.

Figuring out the perfect combination in both areas will be the biggest challenge for the Gaucho coaching staff heading into next season.

Luck: What Every Champion Needs
"Soccer is a sport that if you don't feel like you're going to score, then you don't let the other team score, and then you leave it to the penalty spot and see what happens."

Part of the reason why UCSB to the NCAA Tournament is hasn't been able to make it back especially one with as small a sample size as three games like in the Big West Tournament, a deflection or a shot that hits the post or crossbar can be the difference between winning and losing.

In this year's quarterfinal against Fullerton, UCSB dominated possession in the second half of the game, but sophomore midfielder Carson Vom Steeg missed an open shot, and Michael failed to convert on an opportunity late in extra time.

Lady (Bad) Luck struck again in the penalty shootout when junior forward Ignacio Tellechea hit the crossbar, ironically after scoring his first goal of the season earlier in the match to get them that far.

Luck isn't just a big factor in the conference tournament; the landscape in the Big West would have looked completely different if Michael hadn't missed his penalty in the ninth minute at UC Irvine and the Gauchos didn't have to come from behind to secure the 2-2 draw. If anything, it's as important considering the college soccer season features so many games in such a small window.

With so many players being introduced into the fold, it may have been far-fetched to think that everything would come together in just one year.

Yet the hope remains. If Tim Vom Steeg gets all of this right and the Gauchos can get some luck on their side, the next trip to the College Cup might not be far off.

Arthur Wilkie is the Sports Director at KCSB-FM and served as the station's lead play-by-play commentator on men's soccer for the past two seasons.



SIYAVASH GHADIRI / THE DAILY NEXUS

Vom Steeg's Strong Will Brings College Cup Back to a University Campus

Jorge Mercado
Editor in Chief

Back in 2010, four years after winning its first national championship, UC Santa Barbara had the privilege to host their first-ever NCAA College Cup. Despite some things not going as planned and some upgrades not being finished in time, the event was a relative success.

"We were asked back in 2010 to host in kind of a last-minute situation, and we sort of scrambled to get it done, but even today people look back at that college cup and hold it as a high watermark over the last 10-plus years," Head Coach Tim Vom Steeg said.

More than 9,600 people were packed in the stadium dubbed "Soccer Heaven" to witness Akron upset top-ranked Louisville 1-0. Now, as UCSB prepares to host the College Cup for the second time in school history, the university and its staff hopes it can do an even better job.

"It's a great honor and a unique opportunity [to be the hosts of the college cup]," Vom Steeg said. "I love being a host, and I love the cycle of having one year off to relax and then getting another opportunity to do even better in 2020, but our focus this weekend is to do a good job."

Vom Steeg played a significant role in the College Cup making its way back to Santa Barbara. There were multiple reasons why Vom Steeg felt he wanted the championship matches on his home turf.

The first reason is that this is just the 10th time since 1959 (when the College Cup began) that it will be held on the West Coast and just the third since the turn of the century. Hosting the matches on the West Coast is great because usually that means better weather in the winter, especially in a place like Santa Barbara.

"It's really, really hard to have people come out in Philadelphia in the second week of December to watch Stanford and Indiana," Vom Steeg said. "Great teams, great programs, but when it's 20 degrees outside it is hard."

Even bigger than that, UCSB hopes to attract support

for the College Cup being played at university campus stadiums instead of being held at big Major League Soccer (MLS) stadiums.

"I understand why the Soccer Committee likes the MLS stadiums. They are usually in big cities next to big airports and they are made to hold big games, but over the last four years I have been one of the more vocal critics in that our championship doesn't reflect our game," Vom Steeg said.

Having participated in two College Cups himself, including UCSB's historic 2006 championship, Vom Steeg said he feels disappointed for coaches and athletes who work hard all year for a once-in-a-lifetime experience when the championship does not live up to the event.

To Vom Steeg's point, the average attendance the past three championship games has been just over 5,300, much lower than UCSB's 9,600-plus showing in 2010.

Additionally, having such low attendance in big MLS stadiums makes for a much weaker atmosphere and feel to the game.

In a site like UCSB's Harder Stadium that seats about 16,500, according to UCSB's Assistant Athletics Director for Communications Bill Mahoney, having about 9,600 fans will look full and help build a strong atmosphere for players and fans alike.

But at a place like BBVA Compass Stadium, home of the Houston Dynamo and site of the 2016 College Cup Final, only 6,315 were in attendance. For a stadium seating 22,039, only about 29 percent of the stadium was full for a championship game.

If the game was at a place like Harder, the stadium would've been at about 40 percent capacity. Not great, but still a huge difference, especially considering that Vom Steeg and company hope to garner a bigger attraction this year.

"We are attempting to reverse the course of the last few

years this weekend, and we are attempting to bring back the National Championship to a college campus and hopefully show everybody that this might be the better route," Vom Steeg said.

He also said that even if the College Cup isn't in Santa Barbara, as long as it is in a community that will support it and give the championship game the feel it deserves that would be a good thing.

This year, in order to prepare for a good showing, UCSB has had to improve Harder Stadium quite a bit. Even though the Gauchos were hosts in 2010 Vom Steeg notes that the past eight years very well could have taken 20.

"We literally had to start all over again. It takes a lot of work, but what we are hoping for this time around is being able to build off of this for the 2020 College Cup," Vom Steeg said.

At the beginning of this process of hosting the College Cup, UCSB listed out 11 projects it wanted to get done, and Vom Steeg said nine were able to be completed with the rest to be finished before the start of the next college season and certainly before the next College Cup.

"When people show up to the field they are going to see Harder Stadium in the best shape it has ever been in, and a lot of these changes are permanent that our fans will be able to enjoy for years to come," Vom Steeg said.

One of the biggest improvements at Harder was the field, investing \$100,000 in it before the start of the season.

Other changes include bringing in international goal posts, putting new MLS type benches, expanding benches, increasing seating area in the "gold" zone by about 125, a new sound system at the stadium, new sewer lines for the bathrooms, beautifying the entryway, expanding the press box for media and finishing painting both the inside and outside of the stadium.

"The school really stepped up in helping improve the infrastructure of Harder, and it will go a long way," Vom Steeg said.

Overall, this weekend has a lot on the line for UCSB. Despite not being one of the final four teams, Vom Steeg still sees both Friday and Sunday as huge opportunities to continue this course of action by having the College Cup at college campuses.

"I hope we at least match what we did in 2010, and put on a great event," Vom Steeg said. "This weekend will mean a lot but also is a project because if this weekend goes great we know we can make it even better in 2020."



PHOTOS COURTESY OF UCSB ATHLETICS

Media Press Conference

“

The strength [of our team] is the collective spirit we bring, and when it's that, then the talent can shine through

Akron Head Coach Jared Embick



“

Everyone talks about familiarity, but once it's tomorrow night, its the semifinal that happens to be against Maryland... and the rest goes out the window

Indiana Head Coach Todd Yeagley



“

It's been 50 years since we have made a College Cup and it's been about 50 days since we have been able to wear shorts and a T-shirt, so we are excited to be here

Mich. St Head Coach Damon Rensing





DAVID EGBO

University of Akron, Ohio

Position: Forward

.203 shot percentage

22 shots on goal

.373 shots on goal percentage

6 game-winning goals

12 goals

5 assists

29 points

59 shots



University of Maryland,
College Park

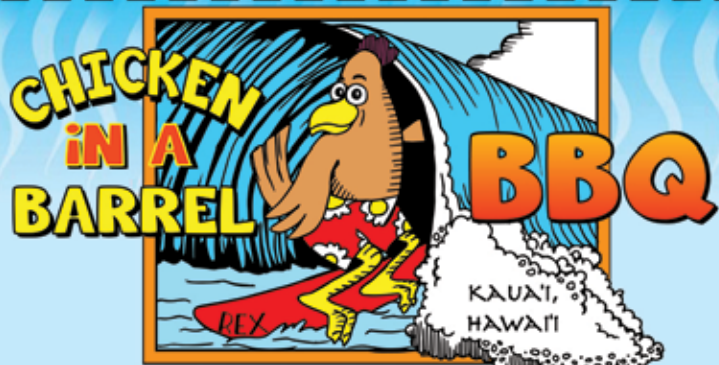
Position: Goalkeeper

16 goals allowed

.715 goals against average
(No. 19 in the country)

21 games played
2015 minutes played
68 saves

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16 assists
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1 goal
22 shots
9 shots on goal

Indiana University Bloomington

Position: Midfield

Michigan State University

Position: Forward

8 goals
5 assists
21 points
43 shots

.186 shot percentage
20 shots on goal
.465 shots on goal percentage
4 game-winning goals



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Photos Courtesy of University Of Akron, Department of Athletics

Akron Hopes for Second Cinderella Finish at 'Soccer Heaven' Stadium

Jorge Mercado
Editor-in-Chief

The last time Akron was in Santa Barbara for a College Cup – technically the only time Santa Barbara hosted a College Cup – it was a Cinderella moment for the Zips, who won their first title in program history by upsetting top-ranked Louisville, 1-0.

This year, Akron will hope to repeat its good fortune in more ways than one. Fourteen games into the season, the Zips sat at 6-6-2 with hardly any hopes of making it to the NCAA Tournament.

“We had ups and downs this season. We beat good teams, but we also had tough losses and we knew we had to turn it around,” senior goalkeeper Ben Lundt said.

Turn it around they did, for the Zips reeled off four straight wins including a victory over then-No. 12 West Virginia. The four wins were just enough for Akron to nab one of the 48 spots in the NCAA Tournament.

After a play-in win against Rider University, Akron faced Syracuse, a team that defeated them earlier in the year, 3-1. Akron flipped the script though and won at top-seeded Wake Forest and ninth-ranked Stanford to launch them into the Final Four.

That is the beauty of sports: One week the season feels over and yet, if the right changes are made, the next week you could be right back in the thick of things.

“Going into the season, we had expectations of being here, but how the season went, around midseason it didn’t look like we would make the tournament, let alone make a run,” Head Coach Jared Embick said. “But we always knew we could get right back into it, and we did.”

It also only feels fitting that Akron returns to the place it has won its only title – Santa Barbara – something Coach Embick doesn’t take for granted.

“Everyone gets excited to make it to the last week of the season, and it’s great to be in a sunny, wonderful place like Santa Barbara,” Embick said.

The last time Akron was in Santa Barbara for the College Cup, the SB fans really seemed to gravitate toward the Zips. In fact, in 2010 when Akron scored its only goal to defeat Louisville, many fans threw

tortillas onto the field, a celebration usually meant only for UCSB.

“Us mid-majors have to stick together,” Emrick said while laughing.

“In all seriousness, it was a great memory and hopefully we can draw from that experience and pump our guys up. We are hoping some of the same people and a few others do the same thing this year.”

In general, Akron also enjoys a lot of success in Santa Barbara. Last year, the Zips defeated the Gauchos 3-1 in a game that saw Akron then-forward Sam Gainford score two goals.

“We consider this place our home away from home. Our guys have had success on this turf, and we are really excited to keep that up,” Embick said. “We always approach this place with good memories, and hopefully we use that to our advantage this weekend.”

There is no doubt Akron’s confidence is at an all-time high, and honestly why shouldn’t it be? The Zips have won eight straight matches, they have knocked off some of the best teams in the country to get to the Final Four and they are returning to a place where they have had much success.

It might be easy to get carried away and think Akron is destined to win, but Coach Embick is not so quick to say so.

“As a coach you always temper excitement, but given everything we have done this season we have proven we are capable of getting it done,” Embick said. “Some people tossed us aside earlier this year, and we have proven we deserve to be here, but now we have to get it done.”

Akron first needs to reach its fourth final in program history by defeating Michigan State, a team that is making its own history by being in its first College Cup in 50 years. The Zips defeated the Spartans earlier this year, 2-1.

If you didn’t believe in coincidences enough, Akron knocked off the other Michigan team, the Wolverines, in 2010 before winning their first title. That same year, they also beat Michigan in the regular season, 7-1.

“I have already told our guys about how we beat a team from Michigan first last time we were here

and how funny everything seems to be playing out,” Embick said. “Hopefully that is a good omen, and hopefully we get it done.”



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Zips Aim to Continue Decade of Success with a Championship Finish

Omar Hernandez
Co-Sports Editor

Situated in the Ohio city best known as the birthplace of LeBron James and Steph Curry, Akron University has become one of the most respected schools in the world of college soccer.

Since 2007 the Zips have tallied an NCAA-best 203-42-29 record. Combined with an NCAA championship appearance in 2009 and trophy in 2010, they've arguably put together one of the most dominant 10-year stretches in the history of the sport.

Akron also has had the most players selected in the MLS draft in the last 10 years, with big names such as Newcastle RB DeAndre Yedlin headlining an impressive set of alumni. After a dominant 2017 season in which they won the M.A.C. conference championship yet eventually fell to No. 1 Stanford in the College Cup Semifinals, expectations were high heading into the 2018 season.

The Zips didn't quite start off the season the way they wanted to. Early non-conference losses to NC State, Seattle University and Washington didn't have too much of an effect on Akron's overall ranking, but the team still didn't have a winning record a month into the season.

A quick three-game win streak at the end of September, along with big wins over ranked opponents Michigan State and Creighton in early October helped the Zips evade the bottom of the M.A.C. standings. They ended the conference season with a 1-0 win over SIU Edwardsville and a fourth-place finish in the conference to go along with their No. 14 national rank. Even though three teams finished ahead of the Zips

in total points, they finished the season leading the conference in goals (42), shutouts (8) and assists (22).

"We had our ups and downs during the season," explained senior goalie Ben Lundt. "But when we realized that we [just had to] take every game 90 minutes [at a time], we realized that we could beat any team anywhere."

Akron floated through their conference tournament, outscoring their opponents 8-2 and earning a spot in the NCAA College Cup. The Zips dominated both Rider University and No. 20 Syracuse 3-1 in their first two games. They then squeaked by No. 2 Wake Forest 1-0 to set up an Elite Eight matchup with the No. 2 ranked Stanford Cardinal that had knocked them out of the tournament the year before. Akron ended up getting their revenge and beating the Cardinal 3-2 to advance to the Semifinals where they are now set to take on a familiar foe in Michigan State.

A player to watch in this matchup will be Akron sophomore forward David Egbo. Egbo led the team and conference in both goals (12) and overall points (29), and he will be looking to make a mark in the late stages of the College Cup for the first time in his young career.

The forward made a monstrous improvement of 11 goals and one assist from his freshman year, and although he hasn't had a breakout game so far in the postseason, he definitely is due.

Junior forward Marcel Zajac has also been dominant on the offensive end for the Zips. Although he is second in the conference in goals (10) only behind his teammate Egbo, Zajac has also taken on the mantle of playmaker.

The forward led the team in assists this year and was tied for fourth in the conference (8). Although his goal

total shows that he is capable of taking and making shots on his own, Zajac has seemingly unlocked another level to this Akron offense by focusing on being a distributor. With Egbo up top ready to knock in any ball close to the goal, Zajac has made sure that his teammates stay involved as well as maintained the synergy between the forwards and midfielders on his team.

This teamwide synergy has been one of Akron's greatest strengths all season. The team's game-winning goal last week against Stanford went viral on Twitter, not because of the goal itself, but because of the 34 consecutive passes leading up to it.

"The strength [of this team] is their collective spirit," Head Coach Jared Embick explained in his pre-Cup press conference. "They're really together, and they fight like heck out there. When they do that, the talent comes through. When they focus on that fighting spirit and being a team, you see what we could do out there."

One drawback to this focus on a teamwide offense and more European-style passing is that the Zips' goal scoring can stagnate when faced with a defense that is content with letting them play with the ball. Against a hungry Michigan State squad making their first appearance in the Final Four in 50 years, Akron will have to be able to push the place and play rougher than usual.

Overall, the Zips seem like a good bet to win the College Cup. The combination of Final Four experience that the players from last year's team have with breakout performances by their young stars this year makes this one of the most balanced teams in the country.

As they get set to take on a familiar foe in an unfamiliar environment, Akron has a special chance for a storybook ending to a decade of dominance.



Photos Courtesy of University Of Akron, Department of Athletics

Schedule of Events

Friday, December 7

Michigan
5 p.m. State vs. Akron

Live ESPNU/
WatchESPN

Maryland
7:30 p.m. vs. Indiana

Live ESPNU/
WatchESPN

Sunday, December 8

**National
Championship
game**

5 p.m.

Live ESPNU/
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Michigan State University



ANNIE BARKER / THE STATE NEWS

After Five Seasons of Defeat, this is MSU's Moment

Kara Keating
Michigan State University's *The State News*

When thinking about Michigan State athletics, the first thing that comes to mind is often the football team or the men's basketball team. For other fans, they tend to point out the men's soccer team, especially after they posted 14-4-4 in the regular season are beginning to be known as a powerhouse.

For the first time in 50 years, the Spartans are making their appearance in the Final Four after losing players to injury, going through scoring droughts and being eliminated in the Elite Eight four times in the past five seasons. This is their chance to earn the victory they have been dreaming of. With Head Coach Damon Rensing at the helm since 2009, the team has a 2018 NCAA Tournament record of 11-5-3.

The team has been named co-champions twice – once back in 1967 and again in 1968 – but this is their moment to shine and win it all as independent champions.

The Spartans would defeat some of the top teams in the Big Ten Conference and in the nation, but it was merely talked about while being shadowed by the 7-5 football team and other major news surrounding the campus. Before the start of the season, MSU fans would support the soccer team and head to the free games on campus, but they never truly got the buzz that they are getting now from Spartan fans and the student section known as the Red Cedar Rowdies.

After beating James Madison University last

Saturday, the team is now seeing what impact they have made. While leaving a restaurant in town after a team meal, people began applauding, which is something the players have never experienced before.

"That just hit home on just how much of an effect this team has had," Rensing said.

Not only do the fans in East Lansing want another National Championship for their town, but so do these players. Senior forward Ryan Sierakowski and his senior class-mates made this their goal starting their freshman year and are determined to make it there.

This season Sierakowski is close to becoming the first Spartan player to lead the team in points in his four seasons in the green and white uniform, and he is ranked No. 10 all-time in scoring, putting up 82 points in 81 games.

The offense aren't the only ones hitting the back of the net, though. Three MSU defenders have scored a total of five goals together throughout the season: redshirt sophomore Patrick Nielsen, junior Michael Wetungu and senior John Freitag.

Another strong advantage for this tournament is the familiar faces that they will come to play against in the tournament. To start the Final Four off, they will take on Akron for the second time this season after losing to the Zips

2-1, but they feel ready to compete after regaining players back from injuries.

"We don't have to watch film," Rensing said. "We know Akron, and they know us ... You'd rather dance with the devil you know than the one you don't know."

Going from multiple NCAA tournament runs and constant letdowns before making it to the Final Four, this team has a chance to come together for not only the fans, but also for their former teammates to earn them the title that they know they deserve.

Whether they become National Champions or lose to Akron on Friday night, Michigan State will become a little more focused on what the soccer team will bring for years to come.



Spartans Sharpen Spears for First Final Four Appearance in 50 Years

Max Kelton
Staff Writer

Half a century in the making, the Spartans have finally earned another trip back to the Final Four in the 2018 edition of the all-coveted College Cup Playoff.

Following a 14-4-4 season that landed Michigan State in the third spot of the Big Ten, the Cinderella Spartans hope to continue their fairytale performance in the NCAA playoff with just two games separating them and the title of the top collegiate soccer program in the nation.

Although Michigan State has been 8-3-3 back home in Sparta, it will be on the road for the College Cup in Santa Barbara. The Spartans have only one loss on the road this season, which came in Fort Wayne, Indiana as the Hoosiers knocked off the green and white in a 1-0 overtime thriller.

MSU has thrived since its last game against a Big Ten foe as the Spartans are winners of four straight matches heading into the Final Four this weekend. Following a first round win against the University of Chicago, Illinois with a 2-0 victory, Michigan State found itself matched up against No. 4 Louisville in the second round.

The Spartans got out to an early lead in the 16th minute as freshman midfielder Jack Beck received a lead from senior forward Ryan Sierakowski on a breakaway hook to the bottom right-hand corner. Louisville was able to tie it up one goal apiece with a strike in the 77th minute that ultimately forced the game into overtime.

Just two minutes into extra time, junior midfielder Giuseppe Barone sent a free kick from the left side into the six. Louisville bobbled a crucial clearance as senior defenseman John Freitag netted a walk-off finish that propelled Michigan State to its second Sweet 16 appearance in as many seasons.

In game three of the playoffs, sophomore midfielder Michael Miller lasered a first-half strike from 35 yards out, which was all the Spartans needed to edge out the win against No. 13 Georgetown with a slim 1-0 shutout. Georgetown peppered off five shots in the final five-minute frame, but their comeback attack fell short as the Spartans advanced to their second consecutive Elite 8 appearance.

James Madison University struck early in its Quarter Finals matchup with Michigan State as Dukes' junior defensive midfielder Niclas Mohr snuck a dribbler past senior keeper Jimmy Hague for one of only two goals that Hague has allowed during the postseason tournament.

As the Spartans' season was dwindling at point-blank range, Sierakowski took matters into his own hands as he lifted the ball just over a diving Dukes keeper to tie the game up at 1-1 with less than 20 minutes to play.

Under 10 minutes later, Sierakowski was back for vengeance again as the Spartans made a game-winning drive down the pitch. Senior defender Connor Corrigan lofted a long, arcing pass up to redshirt sophomore defender Patrick Nielsen who corralled the feed and found Sierakowski in the box for a split-second look.

Sierakowski made a snap decision as he read the keeper's range from three yards out. With a hesitation move and a swift heel touch, the veteran striker finessed a curl around Dukes goalkeeper TJ Bush that capped off the 2-1 comeback and sent the Spartans to their first Final Four appearance in 50 years.

In his senior year, Sierakowski has been premier on the attack for the Spartans as the McHenry, Illi. native has delivered eight goals and five assists in 22 games this season while leading the Spartans past a mighty Big Ten Conference that boasted four teams that were selected to participate in the 2018 NCAA tournament.

The Big Ten commands the Final Four this season as Michigan State, University of Maryland and University of Indiana make up three of the remaining four teams still in the running to take home the College Cup.

Ryan Sierakowski finished the season as the No. 4 goal scorer in the Big Ten Conference and in the No. 5 spot for overall points as well with a team-leading 21 points on the season. On top of that, his four game winners on the season were tied for second in the Big Ten.

The dangerous forward is complimented well by a playmaking Barone who ranks second in the conference in assists with 10 on the year. Barone is an elusive 5'9" attacking mid that powers the Spartan charge with 16 points tallied this year, which was good for second on the team.

As if the Sierakowski-Barone one-two punch wasn't enough, senior forward and Michigan native DeJuan Jones has posted five goals along with five assists in 2018 to round out a deadly triangle rotation for MSU. The trio of experience led Michigan State to the No. 2 in the Big Ten Conference in both total points with 112 and goals on the year with 35 goals in 22 games.

Holding it down on the defensive end for Sparta, Hague owns the No. 1 goalkeeping mark in the Big Ten with 79 saves this year, putting him on a track for nine shutout performances in the 22 games he started for the Spartans. blanks this season are tied for No. 9 in the nation among

save percentage is the best in the conference and No. 10 in the NCAA, while his .66 goals allowed per match is No. 2 in the Big Ten.

With a stout Spartans backline that only allows .77 goals per contest, the best way to slow down Michigan State is to limit its sharp attack. Ryan Sierakowski spearheading the attack and a fearsome duo in Barone and Jones at Sierakowski's immediate disposal, this Spartan squad looks to ride its unforeseen tournament run to its first title in 50 years.



University of Maryland

Joe Catapano

University of Maryland's The Diamondback

Throw out the standings, the seedings and the statistics. Forget that Maryland didn't score for the first 476 minutes of the year, didn't win until its fifth match and didn't have a record that would even qualify for the NCAA tournament 12 games into the regular season.

No. 11 seed Maryland's campaign can be summarized using the cliché adage: "It's not how you start. It's how you finish." And the Terps show no signs of ceasing their magical postseason – one that's featured two road upsets without conceding a goal in the tournament.

Head Coach Sasho Cirovski's Terps are just as capable of winning the national championship as any of the other College Cup participants. Despite a semifinals matchup against a team they haven't beaten both times they've tried this year, the Terps' season took a dramatic turn with a loss on Oct. 12 to Indiana.

Maryland is 7-1-1 since falling to the Hoosiers with 18 seconds remaining in Bloomington. The

They knew going into the season that the offense would take time to develop after losing three of their top four goalscorers from 2017. Maryland has now scored in 10 straight games and has scored on its first shot

on goal in all three tournament games.

They knew they would become tougher playing through what's now the No. 1 toughest schedule in the nation. Maryland only had two ranked wins in the regular season, but they now have three since the Big Ten tournament began.

They knew they had a senior class that lost in the NCAA quarterfinals as freshmen, only to see first-round exits in the next two years. Maryland has now redeemed itself, but those seniors didn't come to College Park to reach a College Cup – they came to win one.

The means of doing so starts with the backline. It's rare for a Maryland team, but its foundation is defense. Junior defenders Donovan Pines and Johannes Bergmann are an elite center back duo, complemented by outside backs senior Chase Gasper and sophomore Ben Di Rosa.

If that stout four-man unit breaks down, goalkeeper redshirt junio Dayne St. Claire will make every save he's supposed to and most ones he

shouldn't be expected to. The Terps switched to a two-center defensive midfielder formation midway through the year, which essentially adds senior Andrew Samuels and junior Eli Crognale as reinforcements to an already-impenetrable defense.

Senior Amar Sejdic pushed forward as a center attacking midfielder, where he's thrived for a team-leading seven goals this season. The three forwards up top have done enough to keep winning. Freshman William James Herve has the dribbling skills, junior Paul Bin has the speed and senior Sebastian Elney has the clutch gene.

Cirovski has called this season a redemption story, and with two previous heartbreaks against Indiana this year, the Hoosiers might be the penultimate victim in the Terps' title tale.



impressive record is thanks to Andrew Gutman, who Cirovski continuously boasts is the best player in college soccer.

Even after two convincing 2-0 performances over former ACC foes in NC State and No. 6 Duke, it was hard to see Maryland upsetting No. 3 Kentucky in the quarterfinals. The Wildcats hadn't trailed, lost or been shut out at home all season.

Maryland scored in the 29th minute and then held on for another 61 to accomplish all three feats. So now's the time to refer back to my opening sentence: Through all the adversity this season, the Terps' confidence has never wavered. They're not surprised they're playing in Santa Barbara, and understandably so.



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RICHARD MOGLEN / THE DIAMONDBACK



How the Terps Made it to the Final 4

Calvin Thrift
Co-Sports Editor

After a five-year drought, the University of Maryland men's soccer team has again arrived at the College Cup. This year, the Terrapins have made easy work of their opponents through the NCAA Tournament thus far, achieving shutouts in all matches.

Despite the story told by the numbers, No. 11 Maryland has knocked off nationally-ranked programs along the way. Most notably perhaps, is the Terps' 1-0 victory over No. 3 Kentucky last Friday, Nov. 30. Not only shutting out the third-ranked team in the nation, but also doing so on the Wildcat's home turf in Lexington demonstrates the momentum Maryland is riding heading into this year's Final Four.

Given Maryland's success in the postseason this year, it may be assumed the team has been prospering since the season's start in August. Contrarily, the Terps didn't pick up their first win until they hosted West Virginia at home on Sep. 10, roughly two-and-a-half weeks into the season. Prior to its 1-0 shutout win over the Mountaineers, Maryland held a 0-2-2 record. Obviously an undesirable start for any team, the Terps still find themselves at the College Cup, thriving nonetheless.

After the team's shaky start, Maryland has managed to culminate a 11-6-4 overall

record; however, the narrative of the Terps' season encompasses an element of growth. An overtime loss at home to Big Ten foe Wisconsin in September found the Terps deflated, sitting sub-.500 once again.

The loss came only a week after Maryland earned its second consecutive win of the year to get to .500. Whether or not the Terrapins knew in September that they'd return to racking up consecutive wins when it mattered or not, the team bounced back from the Wisconsin loss, going 9-3-2 to reach the biggest stage of college soccer.

Through their rejuvenation following the loss to the Badgers, the Terrapins mustered a 4-4 record in the competitive Big Ten conference. At the top of the Big Ten this season is Indiana, boasting a perfect 8-0-0 conference record as part of its 20-2-1 overall record.

Interestingly enough, the Hoosiers are who stand in Maryland's way now as the two conference opponents are set to face off for the third time this season. This time, though, the stakes are much higher.

Back in October, Indiana defeated the Terps 2-1, but November saw Maryland settle for a 1-1 tie against the Hoosiers in the second round of the Big Ten Tournament. It is since that 1-1 tie that the Terps have achieved three consecutive NCAA Tournament shutouts.

The aforementioned victory over

Kentucky stands as the most recent of upsets for Maryland, but a week prior to the taming of the Wildcats found the Terps defeating No. 10 Duke at home 2-0. The Blue Devils had no answer for Maryland, as they were met with the same fate that Kentucky arrived at a week later.

The Terps may have an inclination to spoil opposing fans' hopes on the road, but Harder Stadium in Santa Barbara will perhaps offer an even greater outcome to be coveted.

Along with two winless games worth of potential revenge, the Terps have the opportunity to knock off the kingpin of the Big Ten and the second-ranked team in the country on Friday night. The Hoosiers will undoubtedly aim to prove why they're deserving of their unblemished 8-0-0 conference record; however, Maryland is a different, more nuanced team heading into the match.

Led primarily by senior midfielder Amar Sejdic, Maryland boasts a balanced attacking core featuring junior forward/midfielder Paul Bin alongside Sejdic. Sejdic in his senior year has started all 19 games for the Terps and leads the team with six goals off of 54 shots.

Despite the hefty amount of misses implied in the midfielder's shooting statistics, it's clear Sejdic is comfortable taking the lead and will undoubtedly be looked for on the

offensive side of things Friday night.

While clearly a prominent part of Maryland's offensive gameplan, Sejdic remains without a goal in this year's two games against Indiana. Likely drawing ample and deserved attention from the Hoosiers on Friday, Sejdic will perhaps open up chances for teammates like Bin to exploit.

In October's loss to Indiana, Bin scored the lone goal for Maryland, so he will look to find the back of the net again. With four goals and two assists, Bin sits behind Sejdic in scoring but ranks second on the team in efficiency. In contrast to Sejdic's 54 shots, Bin has tallied only 26.

While Sejdic and Bin have been responsible for 12 of Maryland's goals this season, the Terps' roster holds three other players who have scored at least two goals on the year. This balanced scoring potential as well as experience might be expected at this stage of the postseason, but it provides Maryland the luxury to trust their offensive sets and find the net organically rather than play hero ball.

Heading into Friday's game against Indiana, Maryland has the opportunity to knock out a Hoosier team responsible for two winless matches, but the Terps are playing for much more than revenge. Despite the tantalizing element of revenge, Maryland looks for a more rewarding outcome of playing for the College Cup Championship.



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Maryland vs. Indiana
Friday Dec. 7 10:45 p.m. ESPN

National Championship (Santa Barbara) Home vs. Away

TBA vs. TBA
Sunday Dec. 9 8:00 p.m. ESPN



Indiana University



MATT BEGALA / INDIANA DAILY STUDENT

Hoosiers Back in the Final Four, Seek Redemption for Last Year's Loss

Dylan Wallace
Indiana University, *Indiana Daily Student*

Redemption.

That's been the underlying theme of this season for Indiana men's soccer. Sure, Head Coach Todd Yeagley and his team would say all season long how the focus is just on the next game, and as much as that's true, we know what this season meant.

Just about one year ago, the Hoosiers were seven minutes and 57 seconds away from going into penalty kicks with Stanford in the National Championship. But when IU forward Griffin Dorsey chose to try and dribble out of the box instead of clearing the ball away, a Stanford attacker stole it and shot it just over the outstretched hands of goalkeeper Trey Muse.

Before they knew it, the season was over.

It was a season that saw IU finish 18-1-6 and put together the fourth-longest shutout streak in NCAA history at 966:28 minutes. Just two key players left that team, and now 10 of IU's 11 starters return in hopes of avenging that cold Sunday in Philadelphia on Dec. 10, 2017.

From offense to defense this Hoosier team is filled with talent and built for success. There is no weak link on this team.

Starting in the net, the sophomore goalkeeper has 30 shutouts in his two seasons at IU. Just last week, Muse made an incredible diving save to prevent Notre Dame from taking the lead 1-0 in the quarterfinals. Then there's IU's two rocks in the backline in redshirt senior Timmy Mehl and freshman Jack Maher, who rarely let anyone sneak by them. The two outside backs are seniors Rece Buckmaster and Andrew Gutman. Both are quick and versatile in becoming offensively minded when the time is right. Gutman leads the team in goals with 11.

Mix that in with the controlling midfielders that are redshirt senior Francesco Moore, senior Jeremiah Gutjahr, redshirt senior Trevor Swartz, redshirt sophomore Spencer Glass and redshirt senior Cory Thomas, who can all shift back when

Buckmaster or Gutman push up, and you get a team that controls possession and allows very few chances.

Then there's the forwards – Dorsey, sophomore Justin Rennicks, senior Austin Panchot and redshirt sophomore A.J. Palazzolo. Panchot scored the game-winning goal against Notre Dame last week off a header from Gutman's cross. Palazzolo is a big body that is dangerous on set pieces while Rennicks and Dorsey have the speed and talent to take any defender one-on-one.

The makeup of this team is dangerous, and that's why the Hoosiers are 20-2-1 this season. The last time the team lost was Oct. 3 against Kentucky, which was an uncharacteristic 3-0 defeat. In the 63 days since then, which has included 12 games, IU has only given up three goals.

Also, since that loss, IU has scored 22 goals and been crowned Big Ten Champions – becoming the only team in conference history to go an undefeated 8-0 – and Big Ten Tournament Champions.

Everything is coming together right now for the Hoosiers, and they are playing their best soccer.

"We're locked in as much as we've ever been," Yeagley said on Tuesday before the team left for Santa Barbara, Calif. "That's what you want: You want the team to find another gear in every phase of their game. I think we're in that mode right now where everyone is locked in."

The redemption of this season wasn't supposed to be beating Stanford. No, the redemption was to claim what the Hoosiers believe is rightfully theirs: the National Championship.

Four teams and two games stand in IU's way of accomplishing that goal. Akron, Michigan State and Maryland are all deserving of spots in the College Cup, but there's only one team who is so driven, so talented and so deserving of winning on Dec. 9, and that team hails from Bloomington, Ind.

Now more than ever, redemption is within grasp of claiming the program's ninth National Championship.



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| 10:00 am | 12:45 pm | 3:30 pm | 6:15 pm |
| 12:00 pm | 2:45 pm | 5:30 pm | 8:15 pm |
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Dominant Defense Strives to Bring Championship Title Home to Indiana

Jake Ciccone
Staff Writer

On Friday, Dec. 7, the No. 11 Maryland Terrapins and the No. 2 Indiana Hoosiers will face off during the 2018 Men's College Cup at Harder Stadium. Maryland comes into the matchup with an 11-6-4 record, while Indiana sports a 20-2-1 mark for the season.

The Hoosiers and the Terps are well acquainted with one another as they have met twice already this season, with Indiana emerging victorious both times.

The first meeting came in Bloomington, Ind., during Big Ten Conference play when the Hoosiers escaped with a 2-1 win, thanks to a last-minute goal by senior defenseman Andrew Gutman. The second matchup between the two teams came in the semifinals of the Big Ten Tournament, during which Indiana again edged out the Terps in penalty kicks. Both matches came down to the wire and could have gone either way, save for a few miscues and lucky bounces that ultimately went the way of Indiana.

If the game on Friday is also a defensive battle, then it seems that the Hoosiers will have the advantage yet again. They haven't allowed a goal so far in NCAA play and don't show any signs of loosening their stringent backline.

Indiana was just as stingy during conference play, in which they led the league in shutouts (12) and goals lost against (11). They haven't lost since Oct. 3, and their effort on the defensive end is a big reason why.

Redshirt senior Timmy Mehl and Gutman have been the main players commandeering defense this season, and both already have years of experience competing in the postseason.

Gutman in particular has been the main leader of this Indiana squad. He hasn't been just a defensive anchor; he also has been pulling his weight on the offensive end as well. The team in goals (11) and is second in the Big Ten Conference.

The Hoosiers have a loaded roster that contains four first-team All-Big Ten players as well as four second-team players. Goalie Trey Muse has only allowed 11 goals on the season, putting him en route to be named the best goalie in the Big Ten.

Indiana has historically been a fixture in the College Cup. This is its second consecutive year qualifying for the Cup and its NCAA-record 20th

time qualifying overall.

The Hoosiers last won the championship in 2012 – the most recent victory for any of the teams in the Final Four – and have nine titles overall.

Even with such an illustrious history, this year's team is definitely unique.

"This group is a special one amongst the teams we have had," Head Coach Todd Yeagley explained. "The numbers certainly speak for themselves. They're very focused, just a wonderful group to coach."

So far this season, Indiana emerged victorious from the Big Ten Tournament with a 3-0 victory over Michigan in the title game and thus earned an automatic bid to the NCAA Tournament. After receiving a first-round bye, the Hoosiers flexed their muscles against UConn in their second-round matchup, winning the game 4-0 in a match that was never in doubt.

Their second game of the tournament pitted them against Air Force, and the Hoosiers again got off to an early lead with two goals scored within the first 22 minutes of action. From there the Hoosiers rode their defense and held Air Force scoreless for the rest of the game.

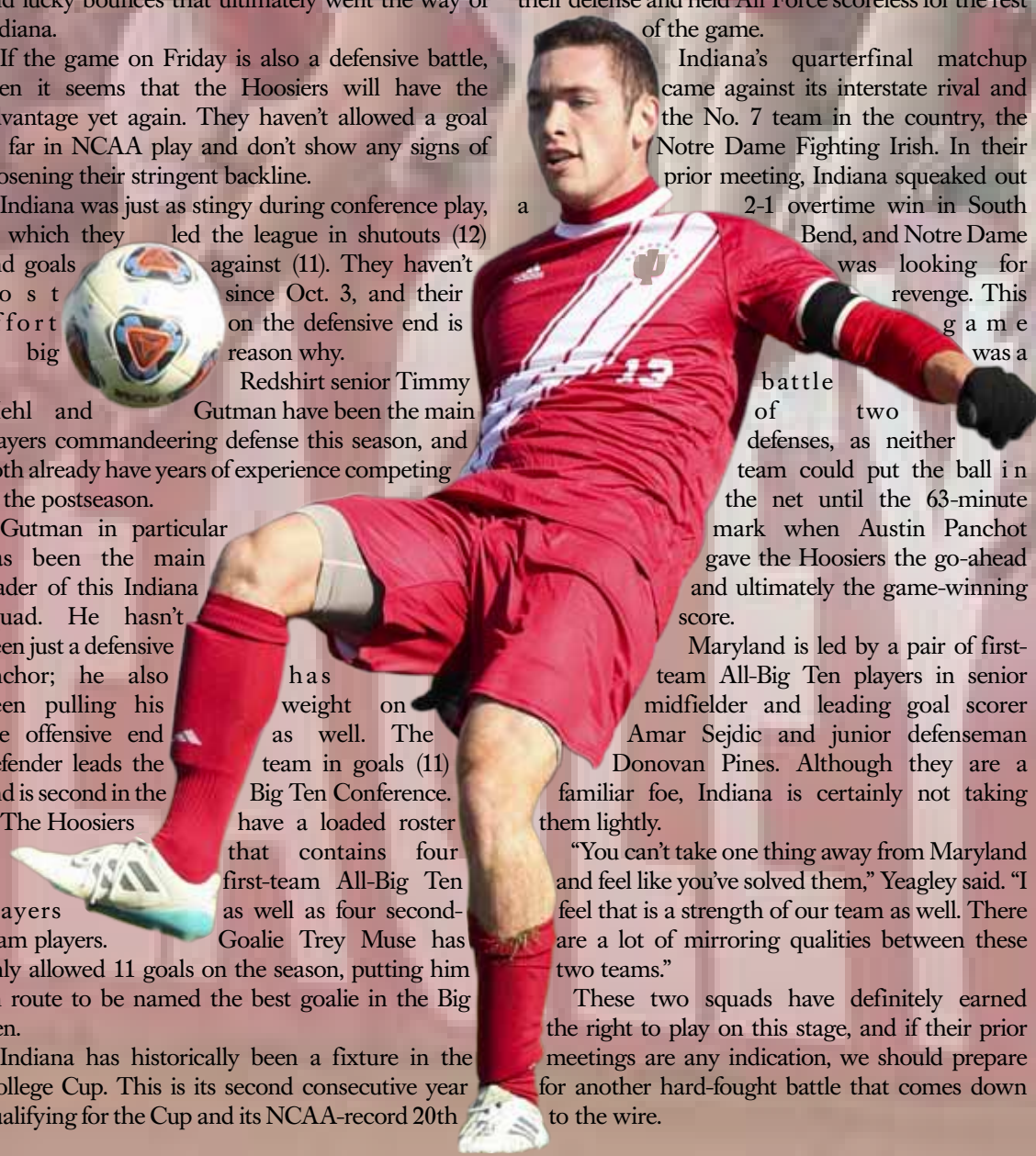
Indiana's quarterfinal matchup came against its interstate rival and the No. 7 team in the country, the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. In their prior meeting, Indiana squeaked out a 2-1 overtime win in South Bend, and Notre Dame was looking for revenge. This game was a

battle of two defenses, as neither team could put the ball in the net until the 63-minute mark when Austin Panchot gave the Hoosiers the go-ahead and ultimately the game-winning score.

Maryland is led by a pair of first-team All-Big Ten players in senior midfielder and leading goal scorer Amar Sejdic and junior defenseman Donovan Pines. Although they are a familiar foe, Indiana is certainly not taking them lightly.

"You can't take one thing away from Maryland and feel like you've solved them," Yeagley said. "I feel that is a strength of our team as well. There are a lot of mirroring qualities between these two teams."

These two squads have definitely earned the right to play on this stage, and if their prior meetings are any indication, we should prepare for another hard-fought battle that comes down to the wire.



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Heat up your day with a quick meal at Blaze. Guests can customize their own pizzas with their choice of sauce, cheese, meat and vegetables. They specialize in thin, personal-sized pizzas, but you can definitely share it or save it for another meal. The thin crust makes it lighter than a traditional pizza, and customizing your pizza just makes the whole experience better. I would recommend getting half red sauce and half white sauce for the best of both worlds.



BLENDERS

Stop by Blenders for a quick and affordable smoothie or juice that comes with one free supplement. There is a wide array of beverage options, from juicy to creamy to tropical, and while all the flavors I've tried taste amazing, my favorite is the Red Banana. If you stop by in the morning, consider getting one of their amazing acai bowls for a tasty and nutritious breakfast.



BUDDHA BOWLS

If you're looking for something savory and rich, Buddha Bowls is the restaurant for you! Customers can construct their very own carved-out bread bowl with a choice between sourdough and whole wheat, and they even have a vegan option. You can then choose your sauce, meat, veggies and cheese, and afterward the whole thing gets toasted into savory goodness. If you're indecisive, you can opt for bowls that already have predetermined toppings on them. The most popular is the Mac Daddy bowl, and I would recommend adding meat and extra cheese to it.



CAJUN KITCHEN

Cajun Kitchen Cafe is a brunch place you don't want to miss out on, with two locations in Goleta and one in downtown Santa Barbara. The restaurant serves traditional American breakfast and lunch dishes in a lively atmosphere that is perfect for both small and large parties. Some of my favorites are the beignets, the french quarter omelet and the fried chicken and waffles. Be sure to come with a big appetite because the portions here are pretty generous!



FREEBIRDS

Did you really visit I.V. if you didn't eat Freebirds? You can't miss this Chipotle-style spot on Pardall, so make sure you fill up with a monster burrito, rice bowl or nachos. The nachos are perfect to share with a group of friends or family because the portion sizes are huge. Pro tip: Ask to have your nachos and toppings separated into two different containers. You'll get more bang for your buck.



NIKKA RAMEN

Located on Calle Real, Nikka Ramen serves up delicious noodles just a quick drive from campus. Their savory pork broth is boiled for 24 hours to complement your choice of thin or thick egg noodles. Each ramen option comes with your choice of meat including pork shoulder, pork belly and chicken chashu. I would recommend trying the Tonkotsu Black "Kuro" Ramen with pork belly. Since the weather is getting chillier, a bowl of warm broth and noodles from Nikka Ramen is sure to warm you up.

SOUTH COAST DELI

There may be three subway's within a one mile radius of UCSB, but no sandwich compares to that which can be found at Southcoast Deli. Some say the perfect sandwich doesn't exist, but those people haven't been to Southcoast. Whether you are getting a tri-tip, bbq chicken or a Greek salad sammie, Southcoast has found the perfect blend of flavor in their sandwiches. They always give you a little lollipop when they bring out your food and that type of kindness just has not been reciprocated anywhere else. No matter where you are on campus, walking those few extra steps to get to Southcoast is worth it.



SHARKY'S

If you are looking for one of the most diverse spots to eat in Santa Barbara, then Sharky's would definitely be a place to hit up during your time in sunny SB. Sharky's is great because of the variety of great food on its menu. If you're looking for some killer tacos or trying to sink your teeth into some other great grub like pizza, nachos, burritos, quesadillas and enchiladas then Sharky's is a must-hit. An added bonus to their selection is organic and vegan options such as salmon and tofu.

Uniboil

Uniboil is a hot new restaurant that specializes in hot pot soup. Customers are served with a bowl filled with simmering soup and various types of meat and vegetables. The pots come with vermicelli or a bowl of rice and everything is served on top of a portable stove that will keep your soup warm during your entire eating experience. I would recommend trying the Korean Army Stew. Uniboil also serves sizzling rice plates that come with angus beef, egg and different vegetables ready for you to mix and eat. Uniboil also co-owns Phresh Tea, which is right next to the restaurant, and you can order a beverage from Phresh Tea to go along with your meal.



Woodstocks

Woodstocks offers a variety of pizzas made from handmade dough, and it's conveniently located on the corner of Embarcadero Del Norte and Madrid. They serve a fun variety of pizza, and their cinnabread is a unique dessert you definitely have to try. It's the perfect fusion of a cinnamon roll and a pizza topped with a sweet glaze. They also have wings and beer if you're not in the mood for pizza.



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7. SUCCESS



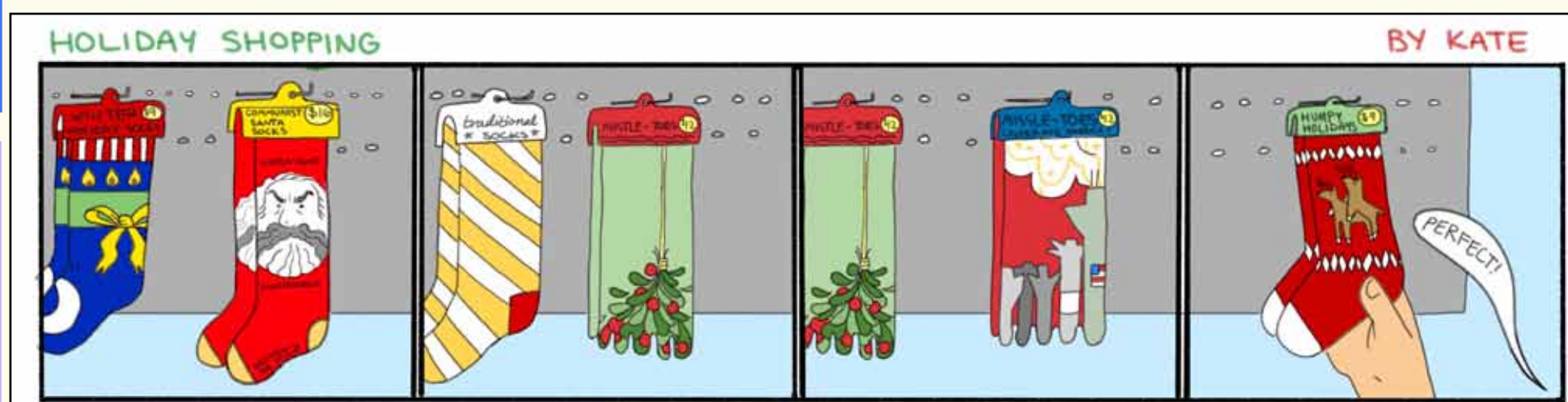
R. BRUDER



MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY

PEYTON STOTELMYRE





TOURNAMENT BRACKET

