

2005-2006 Season Summary

The season started out with uncertainty. The Boys Varsity Soccer Team began the 2005 season with their 4th coach in as many seasons. The talent on this team was obvious with many boys coming from successful club soccer programs. But who was this new coach, Paul Wright? A popular math teacher, to be sure, but what was his soccer background? As it turns out, Coach Wright had a vision and he quickly put it to work. The first sign that this season would be a bit different came at tryouts. Hell Week took on a whole new meaning as the ‘footballing’ aspirants faced 6-8 hours of daily workouts, ball skill sessions and chalkboard talks. But it all began with a 5 mile run in the summer heat with a maximum allowable time of 45 minutes. As Coach Wright put it, “If a player can’t run for the equivalent of a half of soccer, he’s not going to play.” At the end of the week, 17 players were selected for the Varsity, and the real work began. Players quickly discovered that practices didn’t end on the field, as they brought home ‘playbooks’ with set plays as their soccer homework.

The Huskies started the season beating community rival Fenwick 2-0 at the Priory. Despite playing on a pitch which hadn’t seen a lawnmower for weeks, the quicker, possession-minded Huskies dominated play from the outset. In a set piece, which became a feared OPRF weapon throughout the season, Junior Aaron Press launched a throw-in near Fenwick’s penalty box, dropping it perfectly at the feet of Liam Bird, for a tap-in goal.

Competing in the Maine East tournament prepared the Huskies for a tough season ahead. Easy victories over Chicago Latin and Notre Dame were tempered by shootout losses to Prospect and Maine West. An emerging theme was that the Huskies were difficult to score on. Led by the talented and commanding Jim Gullo between the posts, the defense featured senior Jared Rifis playing his first season as sweeper, Aaron Press at stopper with junior Dan Finnegan and senior Bradley Clarke as fullbacks. John Stoffer, Joe Kelly, and Graham Killian stepped in capably as substitutes. The defense led the Huskies all season, as evidenced by the fact that the all losses were by a one-goal margin.

On the eve of the regular season, the Huskies were not predicted as a top tier team in state, nor in their highly competitive conference. However, they stunned many teams with their fluid style of play and heart (beating conference rival Hinsdale Central 1-0 with a man down for 66 minutes) and suffering all losses by one goal deficits to ranked teams in state.

‘Fluid style of play’ was a concept not often seen with past Huskie teams, but was on display this season thanks to the skilled midfield play of Patrik Maldre, Mark Rosenberg, Liam Bird, Pat Koller, and Kevin Blaha. The forward line of Drew Golz, Robin Hargadon and Jared Reddrick, supported by reserves Chris McCole, Nate Race and Hilel Ehrman put pressure on opponents throughout the season.

The win over Hinsdale Central was followed by an easy win over St. Patrick’s and a close 2-1 loss to a talented Glenbrook South side. A highly touted (and eventual Sectional champion) Leyden then came calling, but left the field losing to the Huskies 3-2 in a thrilling contest. Up 2-nil, the Huskies then conceded 2 penalties and found themselves in a 2-2 dogfight. However, a goal by Chris McCole came with 9 minutes left sealed the deal.

Then came the annual “road trip” to Morton for the Pumpkin Classic. Wins over Normal and host team Morton were sandwiched around a loss to eventual State champions Chatham-Glenwood 2-1. People were starting to hear the bark of the big dog.

Downers North then came calling, sporting a high-powered offense and a top 10 ranking. The game remained scoreless for 80 minutes before the Trojans finally broke through for the lone tally. The Huskies never quit and created several excellent scoring chances. The Huskies snapped out of it with a convincing 1-0 win over Hinsdale South, giving Gullo 8 clean sheets on the young season.

The conference battle then heated up with Lyons Township paying a visit to OPRF. Stung by last year's 3-0 defeat to the Huskies on the same pitch, LT played with composure turning away many determined Huskie attacks. Despite the 1-0 loss, the Huskies served notice to LT that they would be a feared conference opponent for seasons to come. Argo next fell victim to the Huskies 3-1, as did conference opponent Glenbard West 3-0.

The season wound down with a wild 5-4 win over York, and 2 tense 1-1 draws against top-ranked Wheaton Warrenville South and Morton squads.

The Regionals opened with an easy 14-0 win over Orr, setting up the championship against Prosser. The Huskies controlled the game with a fluid style of play typical of their season, and walked off the Regional Champions by a 2-0 margin. The right to advance to the Sectional Championship came down to the line against old friends Morton. Down 1-0 with 6 minutes remaining, Mark Rosenberg evened the score with a clutch goal, but the post-season dream ended a scant 5 minutes later on a Mustang winner with 56 seconds left.

Chuck Race, Soccer Satellite Booster Representative