



Steadfast determination and united support help SIUE student-athletes excel

by Megan Wieser

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EDWARDSVILLE - The Southern Illinois University Edwardsville women's soccer team is back on the field as its 2017 spring season got underway Monday, Feb. 20. The team made school history during its 2016 fall season when it advanced to the second round of the NCAA Division I Tournament, demonstrating the tremendous talent and drive of its players.

In addition to their athletic success, the players exhibit a dogged determination to excel in their academic coursework and achieve a successful balance as student-athletes. Junior midfielder Lindsey Fencel and junior striker Caroline Hoefert are shining examples of this balance. Both are pursuing baccalaureate degrees from the SIUE School of Nursing (SON).

“I decided to come to SIUE, because the University offers both of the things I’m interested in —nursing and soccer,” said Hoefert, a native of Godfrey who was named the Most Valuable Player of the 2016 Ohio Valley Conference Tournament. “I was fortunate to find a school that was close to home and provided those opportunities.”

“Our coaching staff places an immense amount of emphasis on our team’s academic success, just as much as our athletic success,” added Fencel, of Bethalto. “We’re always reminded that we are student-athletes, not athlete-students.”

Hoefert’s and Fencel’s passion for nursing stems from a strong desire to help people. As they pursue their aspirations, they note the immense support they’re receiving from both the SIUE SON and SIUE Department of Intercollegiate Athletics to achieve balance and find success.

“Our number one goal as a department is to educate and graduate our student-athletes,” said Jaci DeClue, associate athletic director for compliance and student services at SIUE. “When our coaches recruit, they are charged to recruit students who perform well not only on the playing surface, but also in the classroom. We offer class scheduling and advising, tutoring, study hall, academic mentoring and monitoring, and an academic computer lab.”

Athletics also works directly with representatives within each school and the College of Arts and Sciences to collaboratively support student-athletes.

“We work closely with the School of Nursing to review our nursing student-athletes’ competition schedules in relation to the established nursing cohorts” DeClue explained. “This ensures our student-athletes do not miss their classes or clinical rotations.”

“The School of Nursing and Athletics have developed a great relationship over the years and share the major goal of giving these student nurse athletes every opportunity to excel in the classroom, while participating in their chosen sport,” said Roberta Harrison, PhD, RN, associate professor and assistant dean of undergraduate programs in the SIUE SON.

“Student nurse athletes have extraordinarily busy schedules filled with frequent practice times, games, classes, clinical days and finding time to study,” Harrison continued. “The

athletes, who I have had the pleasure to work with, are extremely organized, motivated individuals. Their dedication to class and sport makes them a great group to assist.”

“Not only does success on the playing field benefit the individual athlete, but also other prospective students benefit as well, because they see that it is possible to accept a sports scholarship and succeed in our rigorous nursing program,” explained Rhonda Comrie, PhD, RN, associate dean for academic programs in the SON. “Plus, the energy and passion these students bring to the playing field, carries over into their desire to become excellent nurses.”

According to DeClue, SIUE student-athletes have been recognized for multiple academic achievements:

- Fall 2016 marked 21 consecutive semesters achieving a cumulative semester grade point average of 3.0 or higher.
- In 2016, SIUE’s Graduation Success Rate (GSR) ranked number one in Division I public institutions in the state, and tied for number 10 in all Division I public institutions.
- For the 2015-16 academic year, seven SIUE teams earned a perfect score on the GSR report, including men’s tennis, men’s track and field/cross country, women’s basketball, women’s golf, softball, women’s tennis and volleyball.
- In 2016, five SIUE teams, including baseball, men’s cross country, men’s golf, women’s golf and women’s tennis, received top 10 percent recognition for their multi-year Academic Progress Rate.

Both Fencel and Hoefert agree that the rewards of being an SIUE student-athlete far outweigh any challenges they’ve had to overcome.

“I’m thankful for the time the coaches set aside for our studies,” said Hoefert. “We are required to participate in study hours while on campus and away on travel. I work to balance my time by planning my days out.”

“I would encourage all incoming student-athletes to never quit,” Fencel added. “Last season was the most rewarding season of my entire career, and that came from my dedication to my team and my studies. There will be times when you have never been so stressed in your life, or so tired you feel like you can’t function. But when you finally get a break and look back at what you’ve accomplished, you will be extremely glad you stuck with it and persevered.”

The SIUE School of Nursing's fully accredited programs are committed to creating excellence in nursing leadership through innovative teaching, evidence-based practice, quality research, patient advocacy and community service. Enrolling nearly 1,400 students in its baccalaureate, master's and doctoral programs, the School develops leaders in pursuit of shaping the nursing profession and impacting the health care environment. SIUE's undergraduate nursing programs on the Edwardsville campus and the regional campus in Carbondale help to solve the region's shortage of baccalaureate-prepared nurses and enhance the quality of nursing practice within all patient service venues. The School's graduate programs prepare nurses for advanced roles in clinical practice, administration and education.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville provides students with a high quality, affordable education that prepares them for successful careers and lives of purpose to shape a changing world. Built on the foundation of a broad-based liberal education, and enhanced by hands-on research and real-world experiences, the academic preparation SIUE students receive equips them to thrive in the global marketplace and make our communities better places to live. Situated on 2,660 acres of beautiful woodland atop the bluffs overlooking the natural beauty of the Mississippi River's rich bottomland and only a short drive from downtown St. Louis, the SIUE campus is home to a diverse student body of more than 14,000.