

LTCC soccer teams eager to launch '17 season



Camaraderie is key to success on the soccer field.
Photo/Terra Breeden

By Terra Breeden

The only thing artificial about soccer at Lake Tahoe Community College is the field on which the players smack that white and black ball.

The men and women's teams have been practicing for weeks in anticipation of the season opener Aug. 22, with both squads hoping to improve upon last year's results. In 2016 the men went 12-5-6, after winning the Golden Valley Conference championship the year before for the second time. Two years

ago the team earned its first state final four appearance. The women went 11-5-4 in 2016.

Men's head coach Nick Arbelaez and women's head coach Jeremy Evans have built what they hope are all-star teams, having recruited players from all over the country to play at LTCC. Both soccer teams are expected to do well this year.



LTCC coach Jeremy Evans, center, works with the women in preparation for the 2017 season. Photo/Diane Lewis

The Coyotes are in their fourth season, with head coaches who are in their second (Arbelaez) and third (Evans) years.

"In soccer, we are one of the top 10 junior colleges in the country," Arbelaez told *Lake Tahoe News*. "The focus is there and we're hoping to come away with a championship this year."

Sixty percent of sophomore soccer players at LTCC receive an athletic scholarship to attend four-year schools and because of LTCC's standing as a top junior college, many gifted

players come to the school for soccer.

"I'm looking forward to a fun year and the expectations are high because for these players. Soccer is a privilege, not a right," Arbelaez said.

Both teams are practicing nonstop to get ready for their first game on Tuesday. The women take on West Valley College at 5pm and the men will be playing the 1868 Reno professional soccer team at 7pm. Both games will be at the LTCC soccer field.

Once the season starts, the LTCC teams will be competing every week. Each plays 22 games in 90 days.

"It can be a grueling schedule, but we're excited for the season," Evans said.

Although the teams are composed of a lot of talented locals, both have players from all corners of the globe. On the men's team, three players come from England, one from Spain and another from Jamaica. The women's soccer team has many local players, as well as members from the Bay Area and England.

"This is about providing a college experience and having players from different cultural backgrounds provides that," Evans said.

There are several players to keep an eye on this season.

"We have 18 solid players," Evans said. "It's the best collection of talent that has ever come through this program."

Veterans like Caitlyn Bidart, who plays defender center-back, and forward Kenya Maltese should be forces to be reckoned with.

"Caitlyn Bidart had a phenomenal freshman year and having that kind of leadership on the team is critical because I have 16 newcomers who are looking for guidance," Evans said.

Last year, Maltese was voted to be an all-league player in the Golden Valley Conference as a freshman. This year, she is revving up for another big season as she returns to the field at LTCC.

“I’m looking for her to be leading goal scorer and build on her impressive first year,” Evans told *Lake Tahoe News*.

On the men’s team, sophomore forward Sean Keith is captain of the team. Keith will be graduating from LTCC in June. He already has an opportunity to play at Creighton College, which is a Division 1 school in Nebraska.



LTCC men’s soccer team is aiming for a division title. Photo/Diane Lewis

“He’s quick and an overall leader,” Arbelaez said. “He’s the first one at practice and the last one to leave, just a really special athlete.”

Co-captain of the men’s team Dalton Rice plays center-mid

position and brings high energy to the game.

“He’s a dynamic player and a team leader who’s also great in the classroom,” Arbelaez said.

Sophomore Omar Trujillo came to LTCC from the Reno area and is the goalkeeper. Although Trujillo will be graduating from LTCC soon, his soccer skills define him as one of LTCC’s star players.

“He has quite a few schools gauging his interest – he is that good,” Arbelaez told *Lake Tahoe News*. “He had the starter position as a freshman.”

Although both LTCC soccer teams are looking forward to a stellar season, there is more to the players than school and sports. Players are involved in the South Lake Tahoe community throughout the year. They tutor and read books with local children at South Lake Tahoe elementary and middle schools. Several team members also volunteer at Tahoe Youth & Family Services and provide mentoring to youth. Both LTCC soccer teams are involved in the South Lake Tahoe American Youth Soccer Organization (AYS0) and have “soccer days” at the schools.

“Soccer is a big part of their lives, but we encourage community outreach. When the players get out in the community, the community gets to know them on a different level, as human beings and not just talented athletes,” Arbelaez said.