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Port boys' team turns to mix of senior, young talent in bid for improved season

With several of its best players last year lost to graduation, the Port Washington boys' soccer team is searching for new leadership this fall.

Early season numbers indicate the Pirates have no shortage of applicants for the job.

With nearly 50 players out for soccer, varsity coach Mike Bultman and his staff find themselves searching for a winning blend of talent.

"The numbers are there, but it all depends on how they step up," said Bultman, whose team is coming off a 5-15-2 season in 2011, including a 1-6 finish in the North Shore Conference.

"The junior-varsity guys last year had a fantastically cohesive unit. Hopefully they can bring that to the next level."

The largest voids the Pirates need to fill include the loss of three players who earned all-conference recognition last year as seniors. Midfielder Alex Bello and defender Carlos Helmstedt were named to the second team, and goalkeeper Mitchell Lemons received honorable mention.

Helmstedt and Lemons were the steadiest members of a back line that was one of the Pirates'

bright spots in 2011.

This time around, Bultman is counting on steady contributions from about a half-dozen seniors, most of whom received varsity playing time last year.

They include defenders Jacob Setzke and Alex Becker, midfielders James Klotz and Dan Macek, goalkeeper B.J. Laforest and utility players Marcos Rodriguez, Brett Melichar and Kelvyn Larsson. Rodriguez is expected to divide time at midfield and forward, and Melichar and Larsson will play midfield and defense.

The Pirates' juniors include Mason Purtell and Tyler Mueller, who will both play midfield and forward, and goalkeeper Ethan Heinecke. Heinecke and Laforest are battling to replace Lemons, one of the area's top keepers.

Sophomores vying for varsity spots include sweeper Tyler Grisar, midfielder Tyler Shultis and stopper Jamison Soya.

Bultman is hoping an influx of talent from last year's JV squad will boost the Pirates' chances at an improved season. He also noted two-thirds of the freshmen out for the sport are year-round soccer players.

But he remains cautiously optimistic, at best, about the 2012 outlook for his team, which will move up to Division 1 for the WIAA tournament.

"We have some good young players, but they still have to prove themselves at the next level," Bultman said.

This week, the Pirates opened the season against Sheboygan Christian/Lutheran on Tuesday and will play in the Mukwonago Invitational on Friday and Saturday.

Port's first game of the tournament will be against Burlington at 4:30 p.m. Friday.

The Pirates will begin conference play Aug. 21 with a 7 p.m. match at Milwaukee Lutheran.

Image Information: MASON PURTELL is expected to be one of the offensive leaders for the Port Washington boys' soccer team this season. Press file photo