



mike getman

UAB Head Soccer Coach

BY LOYD MCINTOSH PHOTO BY JASON WALLIS

plished many of the goals I set for us when I first came here, but our number-one priority has always been to win a national championship at UAB."

The 2005 Blazers lineup has many in the college soccer community buzzing. Getman's 2005 recruiting class has been ranked 22nd in *Soccer America* magazine, and the team returns all but two players off of last year's roster. It's enough to make even the most grizzled follower of UAB athletics positively giddy.

"You take a team that is returning so many players and one that seems to have gained a lot experience and seems to be very healthy, then you add a very good recruiting class to that, and everyone is pretty optimistic about what can happen," Getman says. "This team has the ability to be as good as any team that we've had, and we've had some great teams here."

Among the leaders on the 2005 Blazers are Leandro de Oliveira, a mid-fielder from Texas who Getman tentatively says may be the best in the nation, and Jason McLaughlin, a Wetumpka native.

McLaughlin is only one of a dozen players currently on the roster from Alabama, a fact that may be surprising to many. While the Blazers still have their share of recruits from other areas, Getman says that he has always relied on quality players from the state, and several have served as team captains in his 13-year tenure as head coach. Getman says that UAB's success along with better coaching at youth levels and a greater level of exposure of young players to the sport has increased the pool of good players available each year.

"When I came in 1992, there was us, Birmingham-Southern, and a few high schools that played. There really was not much else going on in soccer. Then, the Olympics came in 1996, and the whole state and really the whole Southeast was exposed to world-class soccer. More and more high schools have picked up the sport, more colleges have added soccer teams, and people have become generally more aware of the sport," Getman explains. "In 10 years, I think things have changed dramatically. First of all, Birmingham has become much more of a soccer town," Getman adds. "When I first came here, there might be one or two players each year who were good enough to play at the top levels of college soccer. Now, there are eight to 10 players who are that good every year and they are only getting better." ◉

IT WAS THE SUMMER OF 1992 when a young, quiet, and focused Indiana native named Mike Getman arrived on the campus of UAB with the unenviable task of turning UAB's soccer program into a winner. That September, when the Blazers took the field for the first time under Getman, a new era began not only for UAB soccer but for the sport as a whole in Birmingham.

Arriving on the Southside from a stint as Harvard's head coach in 1992, Getman had an enormous challenge ahead of him. UAB's soccer program had very little success in its 13-year history. It wasn't uncommon for the Blazer soccer team to play in front of less than 50 fans on less than suitable surfaces for NCAA Division I soccer, such as Lawson Field, the patchy, bumpy pitch adjacent to Legion Field.

From 1979—the first year UAB competed in soccer at the inter-collegiate level—through 1991, UAB amassed a record of 94-126-17. During that time, the Blazers' best season came in 1986 when they went 11-4-3 and advanced to the finals of the Sun Belt Conference tournament. That year was also UAB soccer's last winning season until 1994, Getman's second year as head coach. Since then, UAB has been one of the most successful and consistent teams in college soccer, reaching the NCAA tournament four times (1994, 1999, 2000, and 2001) reaching the Elite 8 in 1999 and Sweet 16 in 2001. They have been ranked as high as Number 3 in the nation and have gone from drawing a handful of disinterested fans to between 1,000 and 1,500 UAB faithful to their top-notch on-campus field for home games. Still, Getman has yet to lead the Blazers to a national title, a level of success he believes UAB is perfectly capable.

"Our goal is to win a national championship, and it will happen. When will it happen? I don't know," Getman says. "We've accom-

The 2005 UAB soccer season began on September 2 in Kingston, Rhode Island, at the Rhode Island University Invitational Tournament. The Blazers play the bulk of their Conference USA schedule in October with games against college soccer powerhouses like East Carolina, Memphis, and Central Florida scheduled in Birmingham at the West Campus Fields at UAB. For a 2005 schedule, visit www.uabsports.collegesports.com.