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EMU Women's Soccer: Eastern Opens 2014 Regular Season at Scicluna Field

Eastern Michigan University

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Eastern Opens 2014 Regular Season at Scicluna Field

EMU soccer faces Fordham on Friday, Aug. 22, before hosting Indiana, Aug. 24

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YPSILANTI, Mich. (EMUEagles.com) -- After finishing the preseason with a 1-0-1 record, the Eastern Michigan University soccer team begins the 2014 regular season, the 20th season in program history, at home against Fordham University, Aug. 22, at 4 p.m. Two days later, EMU welcomes Indiana University, a 2013 NCAA Tournament qualifier, to Ypsilanti for a Sunday afternoon affair between two programs. The Aug. 24 contest is set for a 1 p.m. start time.

PRESEASON RECAP: Playing two exhibition contests prior to the start of the regular season, the Eagles went unbeaten with a 0-0 draw against Detroit, Aug. 14, before scoring late to down Butler, 2-1, Aug. 16. EMU Head Coach Scott Hall played over 20 Eagles in both contests, giving playing time to everyone available. Minutes were also split evenly amongst the two keepers. Last year's starter Megan McCabe started both games before Jenna O'Dell, the primary starter in 2012 who sat out all of last season due to injury, appeared for second half action.

In the scoreless draw versus the Titans, Eastern controlled the majority of the pace and ball possession with its starters. In the victory over the Bulldogs, Megan Trapp's header found the back of the net in the opening half before Butler squared up the match with a successful penalty kick. However, the Eagles responded behind sophomore Madison Hirsch. A Butler foul from 20 yards out set up a free kick for Hirsch, who blasted a screamer past the outstretched keeper, regaining the lead for Eastern and sending the EMU out with the victory.
OPENING HISTORY: The 2014 season marks the 20th season of EMU women's soccer, and the Green and White holds a 189-146-44 overall program record. Eastern has found success in season openers throughout the years, going 10-5-4 in those games, including a 4-3-1 mark at home. Last season, the Eagles rallied to score two goals in a five-minute span to secure a 3-2 decision over Detroit, Aug. 23. In the 68th minute of the 2013 season opener, Martha Stevens scored the game-winning goal, and the defense held strong for the win.

FACING FORDHAM: The Eagles butt heads with the Rams for the first time in history. Like the Green and White, Fordham played in two scrimmages last week, falling 0-1 to Wagner at home before defeating Army, 2-1, on the road to close out the preseason. The Rams will be making a return to Michigan for the first time since 2012, when they faced the University of Michigan and Michigan State University in the same weekend.

Last season, the Rams posted a 5-9-3 record, including a 3-4-1 mark in Atlantic 10 Conference play. They welcome back eight starters from the 2013 campaign as the top three scorers return for their senior seasons. Kelsey Dougherty-Howard tallied a team-high four goals a season ago, while Jessica Widmann and Maria Lorena Canicatti found the back of the net three times apiece. Senior goalkeeper Ally White will lead the Fordham defense after making 12 starts in 2013 and holding a 1.78 goals against average to go along with 40 saves.

EYEING IU: After falling, 0-1, Sept. 6, 2013, in the first meeting between EMU and Indiana, Eastern will look for revenge against the Hoosiers at home. Last season, IU set school records for wins (15), goals scored (43), assists (46) and shutouts (9) en route to appearing in the NCAA Tournament for the first time in six years. From that 2013 run, the Hoosiers lost their offensive leaders in Lisa Nouanesengy (11 goals, three assists) and Rebecca Candler (five goals, nine assists) as well as keeper Shannon Flower, who played every minute of the season in goal, to graduation.

Senior Abby Smith and junior Kayleigh Steigerwalt are the top returning attackers, both having scored five goals last year. In IU's lone exhibition contest of the preseason, the Hoosiers took down Louisville, 1-0. The goal from Smith in the 80th minute proved to be the difference. Before making the trip to Ypsilanti, Indiana opens the season by hosting Indiana State Friday night, Aug. 22.

PRESEASON POLL PREDICTS EMU TO FINISH SECOND IN MAC WEST: The 2014 EMU women's soccer team has been picked to finish second in the Mid-American Conference West Division as the conference released its preseason coaches’ poll, Monday, Aug. 18. In addition to the runner-up prediction, the Eagles also received two votes to win the West.

Western Michigan University topped the standings as the favorite to win the West with seven first-place votes, while EMU and Ball State each received a pair of first-place votes to follow the Broncos in second and third, respectively. The majority of coaches also felt that WMU would repeat as MAC Tournament champion. Rounding out the West in order of the final three spots are Central Michigan University, the University of Toledo and Northern Illinois University.

In the East, the coaches overall felt that Kent State University would claim the top spot in the division; however, Miami University, predicted to end up behind the Golden Flashes, held seven first-place votes compared to just five for KSU. With those two teams taking all of the votes to finish at the top, Ohio University followed in third and the University at Buffalo was tabbed to finish fourth. The University of Akron and Bowling Green State University completed the standings in the East division.

Last year, the preseason poll predicted the Green and White to finish second in the West, but the Eagles exceeded those expectations by standing alone atop the Mid-American Conference at the conclusion of the regular season with an 8-2-1 record in MAC play and a 12-7-2 overall record. The conference championship was the program's third
overall and first since the 2003 season. Despite losing five seniors to graduation, Coach Scott Hall returns a veteran cast that includes 2013 MAC Offensive Player of the Year Angela Vultaggio and MAC Co-Defensive Player of the Year Emily Dzik.

2014 MAC Women's Soccer Preseason Coaches' Poll (First-Place votes in parentheses)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>East Division</th>
<th>West Division</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Kent State (5)</td>
<td>1. Western Michigan (7)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Miami (7)</td>
<td>2. <strong>Eastern Michigan</strong> (2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Ohio</td>
<td>3. Ball State (2)</td>
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<td>5. Akron</td>
<td>5. Toledo</td>
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**MAC Tournament Predicted Champion:** Western Michigan

**LOFTY EXPECTATIONS:** With nearly the entire team returning from 2012, the EMU soccer team came into the 2013 season with high expectations that included a Mid-American Conference championship. The Eagles accomplished that goal with a 12-7-2 (8-2-1 MAC) record for the program's third regular season conference crown and first since 2003. The Green and White lost five seniors to last year's team but return a plethora of talent that hopes to defend the team's MAC regular season title.

The Eagles will once again be led by 16th-year Head Coach Scott Hall, who has taken the squad to the conference postseason 12 times along with winning the MAC Tournament in 1999. Hall's 2014 group features 19 returning letterwinners along with eight starters and six newcomers.

**VULTAGGIO'S SEASON TO REMEMBER:** Senior forward Angela Vultaggio is hoping to at least repeat what she did during EMU's MAC championship season last year; it certainly was a memorable 2013 campaign for Vultaggio, one that will go down in the EMU record books. Topping the MAC in shots (79), points (34) and assists (8), as well as being second in goals (13), Vultaggio became the third Eagle in program history to earn MAC Offensive Player of the Year honors. With 13 goals last season, the Chesterfield, Mich. native boasted the second-most goals scored in one season at EMU, trailing only Jessica Hupe, who scored 17 in 2002. Vultaggio's 34 points in 2013 were also the second-most for one Eagle in a season, trailing Hupe's 39 points in her historic 2002 run. After leading the team in assists with eight, Vultaggio tied with Stephanie Janssens, Cyndi Mullins and teammate Cara Cutaia for the third-highest total in one year.

**FINDING THE NET FIRST:** Scoring first can be an important aspect of any game when it comes to momentum, confidence and strategy. One important factor in the upcoming season's success could be whether or not the Eagles can be the first to score a goal. In 2013, Head Coach Scott Hall's squad was extremely successful when posting the first number on the scoreboard, managing games efficiently when they are the first to find the net and holding a record of 9-1-1 in those contests.

**DOUBLE DIGIT W's:** With 12 victories in 2013 and 11 in 2012, the Eagles recorded back-to-back double-digit win seasons for the first time since the 2008 and 2009 campaigns where EMU rattled off records of 13-5-5 and 11-4-6, respectively. Reaching double-digits in the win column for 2014 would mark the first time the program has tallied 10-or-more victories in at least three consecutive seasons since the Green and White posted six straight double-digit win seasons from 1996-2001.

**PROTECTING SCI CLUNA:** Throughout the 19-year program history, the EMU soccer team has done a fantastic job
of protecting Scicluna Field. Since the inaugural season in 1995, the Eagles have compiled a record of 97-44-24 on their home pitch. EMU soccer fans will have plenty of opportunities to see the 2014 Eagles in action at Scicluna Field, as the squad plays a total of seven home games which begins with the regular season opener versus the Fordham University, Aug. 22, followed by a matchup with Indiana University, Aug. 24. With a pair of victories to start the season as well as the home slate, the historical 100th victory would be in reach when Ball State comes to town, Sept. 28, in the Eagles’ first conference home game of the season.

**HITTING THE ROAD:** Following opening weekend at home, the Eagles will have 35 days until they play another match at Scicluna Field. Coach Hall and his team hit the road for six games through the five-week span, starting with the short drive to East Lansing, Aug. 29, to face the Spartans of Michigan State. After the in-state battle, EMU flocks south to South Bend, Ind. for a contest against nationally-ranked Texas Tech, Aug. 31. The Sunday morning game, set to begin at 11 a.m., will take place at Alumni Stadium on the campus of the University of Notre Dame.