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Cerritos, LBCC and Cypress squads all believe they can improve on their 2010 seasons

By David Felton, Staff Writer
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"A total and complete failure."

That was how Cerritos College men's soccer coach Benny Artiaga described the Falcons' 2010 season, which ended in a 2-1, second-round playoff loss to College of the Canyons.

Cerritos ended the season with an 11-3-9 record, finished second in the South Coast Conference and made its earliest playoff exit since 2005, Artiaga's first season as head coach.

"Most colleges would be celebrating that kind of season," said Artiaga, who led the Falcons to state crowns in 2006 and 2008, "but around here ... that's not good enough."

To remedy the situation, Artiaga brought in a talented freshman group to join some seasoned veterans, and formed a team that reminds him of previous championship squads.



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Sophomore Alejandro Covarubias, a captain and emotional... (Scott Varley/Staff Photographer)

"I can't recall a time I've been more excited about a Cerritos soccer team," Artiaga said. "It seems like they've been together for years. ... They've completely bought into everything the program stands for."

"I've got a feeling this year's team is gonna win the whole thing."

At Long Beach City, the Vikings are trying to return to the Southern California playoffs for the first time since 2008. An explosive offense is paced by talented freshmen and the defenders are deft ball handlers who can get the counterattack going.

"We're not super deep," co-coach Pat Noyes said, "but I like all the guys we've got."

Like Cerritos, the Vikings will have to negotiate through the incredibly

tough SCC, which is considered the deepest and most talented community college conference in the nation.

Mt. San Antonio is the two-time defending state and national champion and an SCC team has won the last three state titles and four of the last five. In this week's National Soccer Coaches Association of America poll, Mt. SAC (3), Cerritos (5) and L.A. Harbor (18) are all ranked in the top 20 nationally.

"(The SCC) is just so hard-hitting," said Noyes, who is in his eighth year at the helm with Cameron Beaulac. "Fourteen games in seven weeks. There's no rest."

Noyes said the chemistry of his young team has been very good so far, and

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confidence is high.

"I feel like we've got an opportunity," Noyes said, "to challenge for one of the top two or three spots (in the SCC), maybe even first."

Third-year Cypress coach Ed Kephart believes his team has the talent, mental toughness and desire to challenge for a playoff spot out of the Orange Empire Conference.

Here's a closer look at the teams:

Cerritos

Coach: Benny Artiaga

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Last year: 11-3-9, 9-2-5 Second SCC

Key returners: Danny Lizama, GK, So.; Alejandro Covarrubias, Def., So.; Jaime Cano, Def., So.

Key newcomers: Christian Alvarez, MF, Fr.; Angel Anaya, For., Fr.; Dominic Escobar, For., Fr.; Art Flores, For., Fr.; Gerardo Soto, MF, Fr.

Outlook: The Falcons suffered unspeakable tragedy just before the season began when former players Carlos Ornelas and Eddie Valencia were killed in a car accident. The team has dedicated the season to their memory and has bonded very quickly.

"It's brought this group really close together," Artiaga said.

The strength of the team may be its defense. Covarrubias and Cano are rock solid on the back line and Lizama is experienced in goal. They are also the team's tri-captains. Artiaga calls Covarrubias the "cornerstone" of the team and its emotional leader.

"He's taken (this season) personally," Artiaga said.

Cano is finally recovered from several knee injuries and ready to play.

"This could very easily be the best back line we've ever had," Artiaga said.

Freshmen Anaya, Escobar and Flores will handle the striker duties and Soto (5-4, 125) makes things happen out of the midfield.

"He's small but he's maybe one of the funnest players to watch," Artiaga said.

Long Beach City

Coaches: Pat Noyes and Cameron Beaulac

Last year: 7-8-6, 4-6-4 Fifth SCC

Key returners: Richard Huezco, MF, So.; Adrian Garcia, Def., So.; Kevin Jimenez, Def., So.; Jessie Aguirre, For., So.

Key newcomers: Andre Martinez, MF, Fr.; Christian Gonzalez, MF, Fr.; Andres Montes, For., Fr.; Tim Harty, For., Fr.; Jesus Gutierrez, GK, Fr.

Outlook: Aguirre, Montes and Harty have a nose of the goal while Martinez and Gonzalez have the skills to get them the ball. In a nonconference game last week, Harty made a beautiful dummy run on a ball to fool the opposing goalie, then left the ball for Aguirre, who scored easily.

"We're gonna rely on them a lot," Noyes said. "They're going to be our goal scorers with season."

The defense is made up of former midfielders like Garcia and Jimenez and freshmen Geo Cazal and Jessie Hernandez, players who know how to keep possession, limit chances and get the ball moving the other way. In goal, Gutierrez has played well, including several beautiful stops in a 2-2 draw with Irvine Valley.

The Vikings are young this year - no more than three sophomores are usually on the field at one time - but have come together quickly.

"The chemistry is good," Noyes said. "They're hanging out together, having fun."

Cypress

Coach: Ed Kephart

Last year: 5-8-7, 2-7-5 6th OEC

Key returners: Hugo Trejo, For., So.; Omar Hernandez, Def., So.; Matt Spies, For., So.

Key newcomers: Nico Ruiz, MF, Fr.; Chris Berkley, For., Fr.; Mikey McKay, Def., Fr.; Max Moreno, GK, Fr.

Outlook: Berkley has been the early offensive leader for the Chargers. If he slows down, Trejo and Spies offer experience up top.

Kephart feels the talent level this year is the best he's seen at the school and there's a competitive fire in this group.

"The desire to compete is stronger than it has been in the past," Kephart said.

Thirteen-time defending champion Santa Ana is certainly the team to beat in the OEC, but Kephart believes his team is capable of challenging Irvine Valley and Golden West for second or third place.

"We're definitely capable of finishing in the top three," he said.

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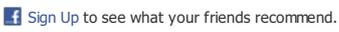
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