

# STORY OF THE 2016



# TOURNAMENT CHAMPIONS





Overall: 15-6-1 • GPAC: 7-3 (3rd) • Home: 10-2 • Away: 5-4-1

## 2016 Concordia Women's Soccer Schedule

Date	Opponent	Location	Time/Result	Record
Aug. 26	Avila University	Kansas City, Mo.	L, 0-2	0-1
Aug. 27	MidAmerica Nazarene University	Kansas City, Mo.	T, 2-2 (2 OT)	0-1-1
Aug. 31	York College	Seward, Neb.	W, 6-0	1-1-1
Sept. 3	Graceland University	Seward, Neb.	W, 1-0	2-1-1
Sept. 7	Grace University	Seward, Neb.	W, 5-0	3-1-1
Sept. 10	Friends University	Seward, Neb.	W, 2-1 (2 OT)	4-1-1
Sept. 14	Bellevue University	Omaha, Neb.	L, 1-2	4-2-1
Sept. 17	Bethany College	Seward, Neb.	W, 5-1	5-2-1
Sept. 24	*Northwestern College	Seward, Neb.	L, 0-1	5-3-1, 0-1
Sept. 28	*(11) Hastings College	Hastings, Neb.	L, 1-2	5-4-1, 0-2
Oct. 1	*Morningside College	Sioux City, Iowa	W, 2-1	6-4-1, 1-2
Oct. 8	*Mount Marty College	Seward, Neb.	W, 12-0	7-4-1, 2-2
Oct. 12	*Midland University	Seward, Neb.	L, 1-3	7-5-1, 2-3
Oct. 15	*Dordt College	Sioux Center, Iowa	W, 4-0	8-5-1, 3-3
Oct. 19	*College of Saint Mary	Seward, Neb.	W, 4-0	9-5-1, 4-3
Oct. 22	*Briar Cliff University	Seward, Neb.	W, 3-0	10-5-1, 5-3
Oct. 26	*Doane College	Crete, Neb.	W, 5-0	11-5-1, 6-3
Oct. 29	*Dakota Wesleyan University	Mitchell, S.D.	W, 4-1	12-5-1, 7-3
<b>GPAC Tournament: Nov. 1, 5, 10</b>				
Nov. 1	Briar Cliff University	Seward, Neb.	W, 5-1	13-5-1
Nov. 5	Midland University	Fremont, Neb.	W, 1-0 (OT)	14-5-1
Nov. 10	Morningside College	Seward, Neb.	W, 3-1	15-5-1
<b>NAIA National Tournament: Opening Round (Nov. 19)</b>				
Nov. 19	(3) Keiser University	West Palm Beach, Fla.	L, 0-2	15-6-1





### THE STAFF

Head coach Greg Henson

### Assistant Coaches

Dan Ball  
Jordan Sergi  
Annika Uden



#00 Abby Goeckeler



SR • GK

#0 Jessica Knedler



FR • GK

#1 Lindsey Carley



FR • GK

#2 Jeannelle Condame



JR • D

#4 Leigha McConnell



JR • MF

#6 Esther Soenksen



JR • MF/F

#7 Ashley Martin



SO • D

#8 Morgan Raska



FR • MF

#9 Rachael Bolin



FR • F

#10 Maria Deeter



SO • MF

#11 Hannah Sain



SO • D

#12 Jessica Skerston



JR • MF

#13 Jordan McCoy



SR • MF

#14 Cortney Prange



SO • F

#15 Kaitlyn Sims



FR • D

#16 Rachel Brandt



SR • MF

#17 Kaylee Brown



SO • MF

#18 Kristin Manley



SR • D

#19 Rebekah Freeman



FR • MF

#20 Madeline Peacock



FR • F

#21 Leah Shohat



SR • D

#22 Lauren Martin



SO • MF

#23 Taylor Roby



SO • MF

#24 Sami Birmingham



FR • F



#25 Jessi Combs



FR • D

#26 Michaela Stevens



SO • D

#27 Megan Brunssen



SR • D

#29 Kaitlyn Stradtman



SO • D

#30 Chrissy Lind



SR • GK

#32 Leah Hoffmann



SR • MR





# 2016 SEASON PREVIEW



The current class of juniors knows nothing but success. Entering 2016, Concordia women's soccer has earned the right to boast as the only program to reach the GPAC tournament title game two years running. Over that time the Bulldogs have gone a combined 28-9-6 for easily the best two-year record since women's soccer became a varsity sport at Concordia in 1996.

With the help of fourth-year head coach Greg Henson, the perception of the program has changed. So too has the culture of a team that has celebrated on the home turf of conference power Hastings at consecutive GPAC tournaments.

Says Jordan McCoy, one of the team's three captains, "It's awesome. I know when Coach came in his first year he was saying things like that. I didn't know what it meant. I was like, 'Cool, we'll go win the GPAC.' Now it's not just a goal, we have to do that to get our real goals. That's an expectation for us and that's awesome. When we first got here that wasn't an expectation. It was a goal."

The scary thing for opposing sides is that the 2015 Bulldog edition employed an overwhelmingly youthful roster after the graduation of a host of key players from the 2014 GPAC tournament championship team. Just two seniors started

last year's GPAC title tilt at Morningside, where another national tournament bid narrowly escaped Concordia's grasp.

All five players who collected some form of all-conference recognition in 2015 are back with an eye on succeeding where last year's group failed. There were letdowns in the middle of the season before a six-game unbeaten run that led into the GPAC championship. Behind rising star sophomore Maria Deeter, the Bulldogs are again setting their sights skyward.

"When you get there you get that taste (of nationals) and there's an expectation to get back," Henson said. "It's easy to say it. It's harder to do it. We have to go out and put the work in. We play in a very difficult conference. The best route for us is to get through the conference tournament. That's three tough games at the end of the year. We've been on both sides of that the last two years. It's a tough ticket to punch."

Deeter, who took her game to a new level in the postseason, is stronger and more experienced after starting all 21 games in 2015. Deeter, fellow rookie Ashley Martin and senior Madison Hawkins were the only three Bulldogs not to miss a start. Martin joined Deeter with second team all-league honors. Deeter plays an attacking midfielder role while Martin held down an outside back spot.

Senior Chrissy Lind has already put together a career that makes her the most accomplished goalkeeper in program history. A native of Colorado Springs, Lind owns the most single-season and career shutouts in school annals and was one of the reasons why the Bulldogs again broke the program record for fewest goals allowed in a season while also topping

## GPAC PRESEASON COACHES' POLL

- |                         |                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Hastings - 98 (8)    | 7. Midland - 51               |
| 2. Morningside - 92 (3) | 8. College of Saint Mary - 34 |
| 3. Concordia - 79       | 9. Doane - 31                 |
| 4. Northwestern - 70    | 10. Dakota Wesleyan - 22      |
| 5. Briar Cliff - 62     | 11. Mount Marty - 10          |
| 6. Dordt - 56           |                               |



all GPAC squads in fewest goals surrendered per game.

It's not as if Concordia can't score. It outnumbered its opponents by a tally of 45-16 in 2015 behind top goal scorers Esther Soenksen (12) and Jessica Skerston. But stingy defense will again be a hallmark of the 2016 team.

"We're going to be defensively strong first," Henson said. "Hopefully we can get going in the attack a little bit more. We've got some nice attacking-minded players and skilled players up front. In addition, we added a couple freshmen up front that are proven goal scorers at the high school and club levels. Hopefully we can put a few more balls in the back of the net, but at the end of the day we're going to make sure we're defensively strong out of the gate."

Familiarity should allow Concordia to retain its defensive strength. Martin could again be joined in the back by juniors Jeannelle Condame and Leah Shohat. The three players combined for 55 starts in 2015. Shohat battled injury as a junior, but has the makings of another rock-solid center back. One of Condame's biggest contributions is her ability to put the opposition in danger on set pieces.

The Bulldogs show plenty of potential for growth on their attacking end as well. Of the 45 goals it scored in 2015, 42 of them came from players who return in 2016. Skerston has totaled 27 goals over her first two seasons in Seward. Plus there's help from a freshman class that adds additional goal-scoring options.

Considering there were just two significant roster departures – Hawkins and Katrina Muther – competition should be fierce for playing time.

"I said this last year at this time, and it's still true," Henson said in early August. "This is going to be the deepest team we've had in my four-year tenure here. I expect competition in preseason camp to be very good. There are a number of spots where we'll have a lot of players that can step in and win that job. It's going to be interesting to see who comes out on top to start the season and how things play out as the season goes along."

In 2014 Concordia had the luxury of sneaking up on teams. That's not the case two years later and three wins over Hastings (one was technically a tie) later. Now battles with Morningside and Hastings are viewed as heavyweight bouts. The Broncos won't be taking the Bulldogs for granted.

"Those games are crazy," said McCoy of the matchups with Hastings. "Those are the best memories I have. We're on their field celebrating and they're just walking away like, 'How did we let that happen?' I think before we needed to earn their respect a little bit and now they're like, 'OK, this is a big game for us, too.' It's more of a rivalry. Before they knew

they were better than us."

A program that has averaged 14 wins over the past two years could be in for another fun ride, especially if this more experienced group can avoid its 2015 midseason lull that resulted in three-straight 1-0 defeats.

"Last year the best lesson that our players learned was that you can't take days off in this conference and you can't take anybody for granted," Henson said. "If you do you're going to come out on the wrong end of the result. They realized that last year. We have to stay focused if we're going to do what we really want to do, which is win the conference outright. That's where we need to get to. It's a matter of consistency throughout the year."

Said Deeter, "I'm counting down the days for the season to start. I'm pumped."





# BULLDOGS SHUT OUT IN 2016 OPENER

Aug. 26, 2016

**FINAL:** Avila University 2, Concordia 0

## GOALS

19' - (A) Sydney James  
73' - (A) Stephanie Lewis

**KANSAS CITY, Mo.** – Despite a two-to-one advantage in total shots, the Concordia University women's soccer team suffered defeat as it opened the 2016 season at Avila University on Friday afternoon. The host Eagles used a goal apiece from Sydney James and Stephanie Lewis on the way to a 2-0 victory in Kansas City, Mo.

Picked third in the GPAC preseason poll, the Bulldogs dropped a season opener for the first time under fourth-year head coach Greg Henson. Avila, a member of the Heart of America Athletic Conference, went 4-11-2 last season.

Henson thought his team responded well from the 19th-minute goal it surrendered, it simply didn't show on the scoreboard.

"They caught us on our heels early on. After that we really limited their chances," Henson said. "From that 19th minute

on we took control of the game. We just couldn't find that equalizer. In the second half we came out with better energy and better tempo. We were creating chances, but we couldn't find the back of the net."

Concordia got the better of the Eagles in every manner other than the scoreboard. The Bulldogs owned advantages of 18-9 in total shots and 6-0 in corner kicks. Four different Concordia players fired three shots each: Bolin, Jeannelle Condamine, Maria Deeter and Esther Soenksen. On one occasion, Soenksen beat the keeper only to miss wide of the goal. Two other quality chances met the crossbar.

Three Bulldogs made their debuts in Concordia blue and white on Friday. That list included freshmen Bolin and Sami Birmingham and sophomore Lauren Martin, a transfer from St. Cloud State. Henson credited Martin with giving the Bulldogs a spark off the bench.

"It was a good learning opportunity," Henson said. "You have to capitalize on the chances you get. Now we have the opportunity to bounce back tomorrow against a very good team that will be fresh. We know it will be a challenge to get a split on the weekend."

The Bulldogs will remain in the Kansas City area for a 4 p.m. kickoff versus MidAmerica Nazarene (Kan.) on Saturday.





# CONDAME, SOENKSEN GOALS ALLOW FOR 2-2 DRAW

Aug. 27, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 2, MidAmerica Nazarene 2 (2 OT)

## GOALS

31' - (M) Taryn McClendon

66' - (M) Ilyssa Ruzan

82' - (C) Esther Soenksen (1)

84' - (C) Jeannelle Condame (1)



**OLATHE, Kan.** – Facing a possible 0-2 opening weekend, the Concordia University women's soccer team produced late heroics to force a draw while up against a team receiving votes in the NAIA national poll. A goal apiece by Esther Soenksen and Jeannelle Condame over the final 10 minutes of regulation highlighted a 2-2, double overtime tie at MidAmerica Nazarene University (Kan.) in Olathe, Kan., on Saturday evening.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad is now 0-1-1 at the conclusion of its season-opening journey to the Kansas City area. The Bulldogs dropped a 2-0 decision at Avila University (Mo.) on Friday.

"We made some changes late in the game to try to provide us with a spark," Henson said. "It was a challenging situation

for us. We talked about it yesterday. They were fresh. They hadn't played since Tuesday. We played a tough 90-minute game yesterday. We found ourselves in a battle against a tough team. Late in the game we tinkered a little bit and got a spark."

Concordia waited more than 170 minutes before finding the back of the net for the first time in 2016. The long-awaited score came in the 82nd minute when Soenksen headed in a ball played by freshman Morgan Raska. Suddenly the Bulldogs had life after being muzzled on the attack for more than 80 minutes.

Just 121 seconds later Condame scored directly off a corner kick to make it an even match, 2-2. From there Concordia saw out a double overtime draw, a positive result considering MidAmerica Nazarene's shot advantage of 20-9 on the day. The Pioneers (1-0-1) made it appear as though they may cruise to victory after a 66th-minute goal from Ilyssa Ruzan put the Bulldogs in a 2-0 hole.

Having played the previous day, Henson went deeper on his bench on Saturday in an effort to rally back. Raska saw her first minutes as a Bulldog and received commendation from Henson afterwards. A total of 16 Bulldogs appeared in the contest.

Concordia hopes to carry over momentum from its late surge against a quality opponent.

"After 200 minutes of soccer this weekend we've learned a lot about who we are," Henson said. "We reclaimed our identity as a hard-working, never-say-die kind of team. I think this is the first time this preseason we can say that we've identified our culture. We're heading in the right direction."

Chrissy Lind, who owns school goalkeeper records for shutouts in a season and in a career, made five saves. She was credited with one of those saves in the 103rd minute, preserving the tie. Pioneer goalkeeper Anesa Curic also saved a shot from Rachael Bolin in the closing seconds of the second overtime.

The Bulldogs will host their home opener on Wednesday when York College (0-0) visits Bulldog Stadium. Kickoff is slated for 5:30 p.m. Concordia has gone 22-8-1 at home under Henson, who remains one victory shy of equaling Bill Schranz (38 wins) for the most coaching wins in program history.



# BULLDOGS ROUT YORK FOR FIRST VICTORY OF 2016

Aug. 31, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 6, York College 0

## GOALS

19' - (C) Sami Birmingham (1)

19' - (C) Lauren Martin (1)

35' - (C) Esther Soenksen (2)

43' - (C) Rachael Bolin (1)

68' - (C) Maria Deeter (1)

76' - (C) Sami Birmingham (2)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – Making its debut home appearance, the Concordia University women's soccer team routed visiting York College, 6-0, on Wednesday night. As part of the first official game since the installation of new turf inside Bulldog Stadium, the Bulldogs got goals from five different players on the way to their first win of the 2016 season.

The victory pulled fourth-year head coach Greg Henson (38-19-9) even with Bill Schranz (38-53-1) for the most coaching wins in the history of the program, which held its first varsity season in 1996. Concordia is now 1-1-1 this season.

"This time of year it's about us," Henson said. "It's not about the opponent we're playing. It doesn't matter who we're lining up against. We have to go out and focus on the things that we need to improve upon. I thought we did well with that tonight. I thought we maintained the tempo and the style of play that we wanted to have throughout the game. I was happy with that."

Three players notched their first career goals as Bulldogs on Wednesday. Freshman Sami Birmingham got Concordia on the board with her 19th-minute goal. That opened up the floodgates for the home team, which got a big offensive day from sophomore Maria Deeter. She assisted on a pair of goals and then tallied one of her own on a scramble situation resulting from a Jeannelle Condame corner kick.

Birmingham, a Johnston, Iowa, native, wasn't done yet. She picked up her second goal of the contest in the 76th minute when Jessica Skerston played her behind the Panther defenders with a perfect ball. Birmingham was joined by transfer Lauren Martin and freshman Rachael Bolin as Bulldogs to record the first goals of their careers.

In the 35th minute, Esther Soenksen found the back of the net for the second-straight outing. A year ago she topped Concordia with 12 goals. Soenksen's late score over the weekend helped salvage a draw at MidAmerica Nazarene.

On Wednesday it was essential for the Bulldogs to get back in the win column.

"It's very important just for our overall confidence," Deeter said. "In Kansas City in the beginning of the year, you've got some bumps and bruises and little mistakes. Today we put things together and got a lot of confidence, especially in our younger players."

The Bulldogs never allowed York to get much of anything moving forward on the attack. The Panthers (0-2) managed just a single shot, which was saved by Concordia goalkeeper Chrissy Lind in the first half. On the other hand, the Bulldogs peppered three different Panther keepers with 35 total shots – 20 on goal. Birmingham was most active, firing seven shots. Off the bench, Bolin took five shots and added an assist in addition to her 43rd-minute score.

The Bulldogs will be back at home on Saturday when it hosts Graceland University (Iowa). Kickoff is slated for 5:30 p.m. from Bulldog Stadium. Graceland kicked off its season on Wednesday with a 0-0 draw at Park University (Mo.).





# CONCORDIA MAKES DEETER GOAL STAND UP

Sept. 3, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 1, Graceland University 0

## GOALS

16' - (C) Maria Deeter (2)

**SEWARD, Neb.** — The Concordia University women's soccer team has now held its opponents scoreless over the past 224 minutes. All the Bulldogs needed on Saturday evening was a 16th-minute goal from Maria Deeter in order to see out a 1-0 victory over visiting Graceland University (Iowa) inside Bulldog Stadium. Periods of heavy rain made for miserable conditions for much of the first half.

But a second-straight victory made up for it. The result means fourth-year head coach Greg Henson is now the winningest coach in the history of the program. Now 39-19-9, Henson passed up Bill Schranz on Saturday as his team bumped its record to 2-1-1 on the young season.

"It really boils down to the players and their buy in to what we're doing and the culture that we're trying to create," Henson said. "Hats off to the senior class. We came in together. They've been a great class. This is just another one of the records that this program's broken over the last four years."

Senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind notched five saves in picking up the 21st shutout of her career. The Bulldogs outshot the Yellowjackets, 16-12. Concordia put nine shots on frame, including three by Esther Soenksen, who assisted Deeter's second goal of the season.

After surrendering a combined four goals during the season-opening weekend in Kansas City, the Bulldogs made it an emphasis to return to their stingy defensive ways.

"When we came back from Kansas City we wanted to focus on our work off the ball and tightening some things up," Henson said. "We want to make sure that we're sound defensively. There are still a few things that we need to tweak and work on, but overall, it's really coming along for us right now."

A member of the Heart of America Athletic Conference, Graceland went 7-11 overall in 2015. It opened up its season on Wednesday with a 0-0 draw at Park University.

The run of four-straight home games continues on Wednesday when the Bulldogs welcome Grace University to town for a 7 p.m. kickoff. In the previous meeting which occurred in 2014, Concordia handed the Royals a 6-0 defeat.





# BLOWOUT OF GRACE EXTENDS WIN STREAK TO THREE

Sept. 7, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 5, Grace University 0

## GOALS

3' - (C) Sami Birmingham (3)  
 11' - (C) Sami Birmingham (4)  
 12' - (C) Leigha McConnell (1)  
 43' - (C) Jessica Skerston (1)  
 46' - (C) Esther Soenksen (3)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – Freshman Sami Birmingham has found Bulldog Stadium to her liking. She needed less than 11 minutes to record her second multi-goal game over the past three outings. Her firepower up top helped the Concordia University women's soccer team to a 5-0 victory over visiting Grace University on Wednesday night.

The Bulldogs are now 3-0 on their current stretch of four-straight home contests. Concordia improved to 3-1-1 overall this season while fourth-year head coach Greg Henson picked up his 40th career victory.

"We're still trying to work out some kinks of our own and some of the things we want to do as far as repositioning some players and things of that nature," Henson said. "We wanted to make sure we got a lot of players minutes again. Being able to get everybody who was healthy and available some minutes is going to be vital for us down the road. From that aspect I'm very pleased."

Birmingham was one of four Bulldog goal scorers as part of another landslide. Technically skilled, Birmingham stole the ball from a defender, played a touch past a second defender and drilled a shot from 15 yards out inside the left post, giving her a second goal in 10-and-a-half minutes. Less than a minute later, Concordia made it a comfortable 3-0 lead with Leigha McConnell's first career goal, assisted by Lauren Martin.

Veterans Jessica Skerston (43') and Esther Soenksen (46') piled on to make it a runaway. Moved to the midfield, Skerston recorded her first goal of 2016 and 28th of her career. Meanwhile, Soenksen netted her third goal of her junior campaign and 19th of her career.

A native of Johnston, Iowa, Birmingham could see her name rise up the school's goal-scoring charts if she continues her

play of late.

"It's really different than high school," Birmingham said. "It's a lot of competition, but I just try my best every day through practice and games. It's worked out well for me."

The Royals (0-6) are still seeking their first goal of the 2016 season. They managed shot a single shot in the first half and did not put a strike on frame until less than 20 minutes remained in the contest. In that instance, Diana Estrada broke behind the back line, but failed to slot the ball past goalkeeper Jessica Knedler, who relieved starter Chrissy Lind at the beginning of the second half.

With the game well in hand by halftime, Henson went to the bench often and used a total of 25 players on Wednesday. Of them, 12 took at least one shot. Birmingham and fellow freshman Rachael Bolin fired four shots apiece.

Assists were also credited to Soenksen and Cortney Prange. Defensively, the Bulldogs have shut out their opponents over the last 314 minutes of game time, dating back to a draw at MidAmerica Nazarene University (Kan.).

The Bulldogs will be right back at home on Saturday to play host to unbeaten Friends University (Kan.) (3-0). Kickoff is slated for 5:30 p.m. The Falcons are a member of the Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference.





# DRAMATIC WIN TAGS FRIENDS WITH FIRST LOSS

Sept. 10, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 2, Friends University 1 (2 OT)

## GOALS

7' - (F) Kaylee Gatzke

57' - (C) Sami Birmingham (5)

102' - (C) Maria Deeter (3)

**SEWARD, Neb.** — While it failed to convert on several prime opportunities throughout regulation, the Concordia University women's soccer team ultimately celebrated when Maria Deeter's golden goal in double overtime sailed into the net. Deeter's heroics allowed the Bulldogs to prevail, 2-1, over Friends University (Kan.), which entered Saturday's contest with an unblemished 3-0 mark.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad is now 4-1-1 overall and in the midst of a four-game win streak while again protecting the home turf at Bulldog Stadium. Concordia is 26-8-1 in home games under Henson.

"Giving up the goal early set us back a little bit," Henson said. "We came out a little sluggish out of the gate. Friends is a good team. They've really improved over the last couple of years. After we got behind early I thought we really started to play and created a lot of dangerous opportunities.

"It was a back-and-forth affair. It was a little more exciting than we would have liked to have had it, but I'm really happy with our players being able to overcome adversity."

The game came to an abrupt end with 8:15 showing on the clock in the second overtime session. That's when Jeannelle Condame, set up on the far right side of the field, lofted a long free kick into the box. That's where a well-positioned Deeter headed the ball into the net for her third goal of the season.

"All game I had been aiming for Deeter's head, because she's the best on our team in the air," Condame said. "She told me right after she scored, 'She's going to be so mad at me if I don't score this.' I just aimed for Deeter and she got it in."

Concordia finally responded to Friends' seventh-minute goal with an equalizer in the 57th minute. Productive freshman Sami Birmingham found the back of the net for the fifth time already this season with a goal assisted by Lauren Martin.



Friends, a member of the Kansas Collegiate Athletic Conference, had outscored its first three opponents by a combined total of 12-1. On Saturday the Falcons were outshot, 19-12. Esther Soenksen was particularly active, firing eight shots. One of those hit the crossbar.

In goal, Chrissy Lind made five saves while covering all 101 minutes and 45 seconds. Lind and company had shut out their previous three opponents.

A difficult road trip awaits the Bulldogs on Wednesday when they head to Bellevue University (2-2) to take on a Bruin program that has made five appearances all-time at the national tournament. Kickoff is slated for 5 p.m. Both teams were ranked heading into last season's meeting in Seward, which went in Concordia's favor, 2-1.





# FIVE-GAME UNBEATEN STREAK HALTED AT BELLEVUE

Sept. 14, 2016

**FINAL:** Bellevue University 2, Concordia 1

## GOALS

36' - (B) Jordyn Seidel

50' - (C) Rachael Bolin (2)

54' - (B) Jordyn Seidel

**BELLEVUE, Neb.** – For the second-straight outing, the Concordia University women's soccer team attempted to rally back after conceding the game's first goal. This time around, the Bulldogs failed to match the pair of goals recorded by Bellevue's Jordyn Seidel and the host Bruins prevailed, 2-1, on Wednesday night. In the process, Bellevue avenged a 2-1 loss to Concordia in 2015.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad saw its five-game unbeaten streak come to an end and now stands at 4-2-1 overall. The Bruins (3-3) were Concordia's opponent of the season that received votes in the NAIA preseason coaches' poll.

"They struck first with unfortunately has been kind of a theme this year," Henson said. "We responded very well throughout the end of the first half and into the second half. We created a lot of very dangerous opportunities. Rachael Bolin had a very nice goal early in the second half. I felt like we had Bellevue on its heels at that point. Unfortunately we weren't able to capitalize on the momentum and the chances that we had."

After facing a 1-0 halftime deficit, Bolin's equalizer found the back of the net in the 50th minute for her second goal of the year. But the score didn't hold for long. Seidel bit the Bulldogs again with a goal in the 54th minute. The performance gave Seidel her second and third goals of the season.

Bolin put four shots on frame on the night for a Concordia squad that held advantages in total shots, 20-18, and shots on goal, 10-6. Sami Birmingham and Maria Deeter also took four shots apiece on the night.

"It was a back-and-forth affair with two good attacking teams going at each other," Henson said. "The game could have easily been 6-5 one way or the other. Both goalkeepers played well to keep the score line at 2-1. There a lot of positives to take away from the game even though the result



is not what we want."

Chrissy Lind played all 90 minutes in goal for Concordia and made four saves. A total of 15 Bulldogs saw action.

This marked the fourth-straight season that the Concordia-Bellevue matchup was decided by a margin of one goal in what has become a competitive in-state rivalry.

The Bulldogs will conclude the nonconference portion of their regular-season schedule on Saturday when Bethany College (2-3) visits Bulldog Stadium for a 5:30 p.m. kickoff. Concordia is 4-0 at home this season. The Bulldogs and Swedes have not met since an 8-1 Concordia victory on Sept. 11, 2010.



# SECOND-HALF FLURRY BURIES BETHANY

Sept. 17, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 5, Bethany College 1

## GOALS

3' - (C) Rachael Bolin (3)  
 27' - (C) Rachael Bolin (4)  
 30' - (B) Sarah Henderson  
 66' - (C) Maria Deeter (4)  
 68' - (C) Sami Birmingham (6)  
 70' - (C) Esther Soenksen (4)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – At one point early in the second half, visiting Bethany College looked as though it had the Concordia University women's soccer team on its heels. But the Bulldogs rose to the challenge, exploding for three goals in a five-minute span that turned a competitive contest into a 5-1 victory on Saturday evening. Freshman Rachael Bolin got the attack going with two-first half goals as part of the team's third game of the season with five or more goals scored.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad remains unbeaten this season at Bulldog Stadium (5-0). Concordia has now concluded its nonconference portion of the schedule with an overall mark of 5-2-1.

"They really kind of put the pressure on us (to begin the second half)," Henson said. "Sometimes you have to ride that storm and get through it. I would have liked us to be a little bit cleaner and a little bit more technical during that time of the second half, but we got through it and the score line held. After that we got the ball on the floor and started to play better. I'm definitely happy with the result."

Four different Bulldogs found the back of the net. The scoring onslaught picked up with Maria Deeter's 66th-minute score, which came on a rebound after an Esther Soenksen shot had been saved. Less than two minutes later Sami Birmingham followed with her team-leading sixth goal of the season. Then in the 70th minute, Soenksen played a ball from Birmingham in the box, giving the Lincoln native her fourth goal.

It was the first multi-goal game in the career of Bolin, who matches the four-goal season output of both Deeter and Soenksen. Bolin got loose for scores in the third and 27th minutes. Her first goal came after Kristin Manley played Bolin behind the defense. The freshman then finished in a one-on-one situation with the keeper.

Concordia won despite a 17-14 disadvantage in shots.

Bulldog goalkeeper Chrissy Lind was called upon to make nine saves during her 80-plus minutes of action. One of those saves required Lind to sprawl out to her left in a high-light-worthy effort. For a team that's beginning to take more chances on the attack, Lind may see more shots in the back.

"It's kind of hard when I don't get the ball as much. I have to control and organize a lot more," Lind said. "My goalkeeper coach Dan (Ball) usually talks to me after every half. He might say to slow the game down or we need you to get the ball. Sometimes I like games where I get more shots because I feel like I'm doing more."

With the game well in hand late, Henson used subs liberally. A total of 23 Bulldogs saw action. Bolin was most active on the attack, firing four shots. Sarah Henderson had the lone goal for the Swedes (2-4). She took nine shots, including five on goal.

The Bulldogs now break from action until next Saturday when Northwestern (3-4, 0-0) visits Bulldog Stadium for a 1 p.m. CT kickoff. The two sides played to a scoreless draw in Orange City last season.





# BULLDOGS BLANKED IN GPAC OPENER

Sept. 24, 2016

**FINAL:** Northwestern 1, Concordia 0

**GOALS**

31' - (N) Alissa Christoffer

**SEWARD, Neb.** — Goals have been hard to come by in the series between the Concordia University women's soccer team and Northwestern. That trend continued on Saturday afternoon as the visiting Red Raiders needed just a lone goal from Alissa Christoffer to escape with a 1-0 conference-opening victory from rainy Bulldog Stadium.

The defeat snapped a seven-game home win streak for fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's program. The Bulldogs dropped to 5-3-1 overall.

"I thought Northwestern handled (the lightning delay) better than we did. We got off to a sluggish start," Henson said. "We really couldn't find control of the ball. We failed to play simple, which is one of the things we've been trying to focus on.

"I thought we came out of the second half with a little bit more energy and did some nice things. There were some periods of play in the second half where we really got the

ball on the floor and kept it. That's where we need to be as a team if we're going to be successful in games like this."

Northwestern perfectly executed a corner kick in the 31st minute when Maddie Jacob played the ball into the box to Christoffer, who headed it into the upper right corner of the frame. It was one of four shots placed on goal by the Red Raiders (5-4, 1-0 GPAC).

Northwestern outshot Concordia, 10-8. It was another frustrating offensive day for the Bulldogs against the Red Raiders. Concordia last scored against Northwestern in 2011. Some of the Bulldogs' prime scoring opportunities came from Rachael Bolin, who had two one-on-one chances with the keeper.

Concordia had entered the week with four players ranked amongst the top 10 goal scorers in the GPAC. The Bulldogs had outscored their opponents by a combined total of 19-2 over their first five home games of the season.

The Bulldogs will take their act on the road on Wednesday when they travel to play No. 12 Hastings (7-1-1, 1-0 GPAC). Kickoff is slated for 5:30 p.m. Concordia has celebrated victories at Lloyd Wilson Field in the GPAC tournament each of the past two seasons.





# BULLDOGS PUSH NO. 11 HASTINGS IN TENSE RIVALRY BATTLE

Sept. 28, 2016

**FINAL:** (11) Hastings 2, Concordia 1

## GOALS

9' - (C) Sami Birmingham (7)

68' - (H) Megan Kruse

88' - (H) Heidi Bartsch

**HASTINGS, Neb.** – Making its sixth trip to Hastings since 2013, the Concordia University women's soccer team led for the majority of the night in a rivalry renewed with the 11th-ranked Broncos. But host Hastings exacted a measure of revenge for last year's GPAC semifinal result and rallied for a 2-1 victory at Lloyd Wilson Field on Wednesday evening.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's program had been 2-1-1 versus Hastings over the previous four meetings entering Wednesday. Each of the last five contests in the series have now been decided by either a single goal or penalty kick shootout. The Bulldogs are now 5-4-1 overall and 0-2 in conference play.

"It just shows who we're capable of being," Henson said. "When we stick to the game plan and decide as a group of 11 to put in the effort, we have the ability to play with anybody. We needed to put away another one of those chances in the first half. If we put the second goal on the board we're probably having a different conversation."

"I told the girls after the game if we continue to play with the energy level and the effort level that we had tonight through the rest of the season, we have the opportunity to put ourselves in the position we want to be in."

For more than 67 minutes, Concordia executed its defensive game plan to perfection. Concordia drew first blood in the ninth minute when Megan Brunssen's free kick led Sami Birmingham in behind the Hastings defense. After playing a touch from Maria Deeter, the freshman from Johnston, Iowa, calmly tapped the ball into the net for her team-leading seventh goal of the season. Remaining on the attack, the Bulldogs nearly added a second goal on several occasions, including one instance in which Jeannelle Condame's free kick hit the cross bar.

Concordia kept Hastings' terrific goal-scoring trio of Heidi Bartsch, Taylor Geis and Megan Kruse quiet for much of the affair. Kruse emerged in the 68th minute with the equalizer. Then with less than three minutes remaining before a potential overtime session, Bartsch dashed the Bulldogs' hopes

with her 10th goal of the year on a beautiful, indefensible strike.

"If we're going to lose, let's lose on that," Henson said of the game-winning goal. "She did a great job. We did a nice job shutting her down throughout the course of the game, but she got loose on us and put it away. But Chrissy (Lind) had a great game. She made some good saves for us. I thought our team defensively as a whole did a great job defending as a unit."

By shifting numbers into the defensive side, Concordia made life tough on a potent Bronco bunch. When Hastings did penetrate the backline, it struggled to slot the ball by Lind, who made a series of highlight reel saves to preserve the 1-0 lead. The Broncos held a shot advantage of just 14-13 (10-8 in shots on goal) for the night.

The Bulldogs will get back on the road on Saturday for a trip to Morningside, site of the 2015 GPAC tournament championship game. Kickoff from Sioux City, Iowa, is slated for 5:30 p.m. CT. The Mustangs (4-5, 2-1 GPAC) defeated Briar Cliff, 1-0, on Wednesday evening.





# BULLDOGS AVENGE 2015 GPAC TITLE GAME LOSS

Oct. 1, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 2, Morningside 1

## GOALS

15' - (M) Amy Grause

35' - (C) Jessica Skerston (2)

68' - (C) Sami Birmingham (8)

**SIoux CITY, Iowa** – It was an exorcism of demons on Saturday evening as the Concordia University women's soccer team returned to the site of its 2015 GPAC tournament championship game loss. Having last won at Morningside in 2011, the Bulldogs tamed the Mustangs by a final of 2-1 underneath the lights at Elwood Olsen Stadium in Sioux City, Iowa.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad also got another monkey off its back by winning on the road for the first

time in 2016. The Bulldogs improved to 6-4-1 overall and to 1-2 in conference play.

Coming off a solid effort on Wednesday that saw Concordia come up just short of an upset at 11th-ranked Hastings, the Bulldogs played with the urgency needed to avoid an 0-3 GPAC start.

"I'm pleased with the effort," Henson said. "We were in this position last year where we come off an emotional game at Hastings and come here and lose the championship. It was nice to see us rebound this year after another emotional game on Wednesday. Collectively it was a good team effort. This is something we can build on."

Concordia had to dig out of a 1-0 hole after Amy Grause found the back of the net at the 15-minute mark for her sixth goal of the season. The response came 20 minutes later when Jessica Skerston, assisted by Esther Soenksen, put away the equalizer.

A consistent force as a freshman, Sami Birmingham notched the game winner at the 68-minute mark when she tallied her eighth goal of the year after playing a ball from Jordan McCoy. The forward tandems of Birmingham and Rachael Bolin and Skerston and Soenksen proved to be a handful for Morningside. Skerston and Leigha McConnell both lent solid contributions off the bench and Henson also made note of the play of senior defender Megan Brunssen.

Shots were at a premium on Wednesday. The Bulldogs out-shot the Mustangs, 9-8, while putting all nine shots on frame. Goalkeeper Chrissy Lind made three saves. Morningside (4-6, 2-2 GPAC) returned the bulk of its key players from the 2015 team that won the GPAC tournament and advanced to the national tournament. Though the Mustangs are below .500 overall this season, they have dropped four games by a margin of just a single goal.

The Bulldogs will have a mid-week bye before returning to action next Saturday when they host Mount Marty (0-6, 0-3 GPAC) as part of homecoming festivities on the Concordia University campus. Kickoff from Bulldog Stadium is slated for 5:30 p.m. CT. The Lancers have surrendered at least five goals in each of their first six games.





# THREE PLAYERS RECORD MULTIPLE GOALS IN HOMECOMING ROUT

Oct. 8, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 12, Mount Marty 0

## GOALS

3' - (C) Sami Birmingham (9)  
 6' - (C) Jessica Skerston (3)  
 10' - (C) Sami Birmingham (10)  
 15' - (C) Rachael Bolin (5)  
 23' - (C) Maria Deeter (5)  
 28' - (C) Lauren Martin (2)  
 34' - (C) Rebekah Freeman (1)  
 47' - (C) Esther Soenksen (5)  
 50' - (C) Sami Birmingham (11)  
 53' - (C) Jessica Skerston (6)  
 54' - (C) Rebekah Freeman (2)  
 90' - (C) Rebekah Freeman (3)



**SEWARD, Neb.** – Freshman Sami Birmingham set the tone with a goal less than two minutes after kickoff and the Concordia University women's soccer team rolled to a breezy 12-0 victory over visiting Mount Marty in a homecoming Saturday contest. Seven different Bulldogs registered in the goal scoring column while taking advantage of a short-handed Lancer team. Birmingham and fellow rookie Rebekah Freeman both went off for hat tricks.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad improved to 6-1 at home this season. Concordia moved to 7-4-1 overall and 2-2 in conference play.

"We challenged our starting lineup to get out early, get some goals and put the game away," Henson said. "We wanted to go deep into the bench and get a lot of players minutes. Then we challenged our subs to continue to play and keep the pace of play and work rate up."

The Bulldogs dominated just the way they hoped to, out-shooting Mount Marty, 55-0. The Lancers (0-8, 0-5 GPAC) still have yet to put a goal on the board in 2016. They spent the entire evening chasing the ball on Concordia's attacking end. No one was more active than Freeman, who seven shots on frame.

Scoring goals has not been a problem for Birmingham, who netted a pair of goals in the first half and then another in the second while recording the first hat trick of her young career. The native of Johnston, Iowa, leads Concordia with 11 goals on the year.

Jessica Skerston joined Birmingham and Freeman as Bulldogs with multiple goals. It was an all-out assault on the Mount Marty goal, which keeper Katrina Ilkow attempted to protect. But Freeman and company kept getting loose.

"She's a good talent for us," Henson said. "We look forward to her having a very good career. Tonight you saw some flashes of what she's going to be able to do in the future. That's definitely a bright spot for us."

The 12 goals scored were by far a season high for the Bulldogs. Not only that, the performance equaled a program record for most goals in a single game. Concordia also accomplished that feat in 2000 and 2004.

One goal apiece was notched by Rachael Bolin, Maria Deeter, Lauren Martin and Esther Soenksen. Bolin and Deeter both assisted two goals.

The Bulldogs will be back at home on Wednesday when Midland (9-4, 3-2 GPAC) pays a visit to Seward for a 5:30 p.m. CT game time. The Warriors, who triumphed over Dakota Wesleyan 2-0 on Saturday, received votes in the most recent NAIA national coaches' poll. Concordia hopes to duplicate the 2015 result that saw it defeat Midland 2-0 in Seward.



# FREEMAN NETS GOAL IN GPAC HOME LOSS

Oct. 12, 2016

**FINAL:** Midland 3, Concordia 1

## GOALS

44' - (M) Allison Buehring  
62' - (M) Kaitlyn D'Arcangeli  
78' - (M) Hannah Stewart  
81' - (C) Rebekah Freeman (4)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – For the first time since 2011, the Concordia University women's soccer team suffered a defeat at the hands of GPAC rival Midland. The Warriors outshot the Bulldogs by a count of 21-7 on Wednesday evening on their way to a 3-1 victory that kept them in front of Concordia in the league standings.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad fell at home for just the second time this season. The Bulldogs now stand at 7-5-1 overall and 2-3 in conference play.

"Hats off to Midland. They did a nice job of controlling the play," Henson said. "Today they were definitely the better team. We have to continue to work hard and do the things that make us successful. When we did that and got the ball on the floor and kept possession we created some dangerous opportunities. Just not enough to get the win. It's an opportunity for us to learn from our mistakes."

Concordia actually shut out Midland's leading goal scorer, Nayeli Rodriguez, who attempted four shots (two on goal). But the diversified Warrior attack got a goal apiece from Allison Buehring (44'), Kaitlyn D'Arcangeli (62') and Hannah Stewart (78') while building up a 3-0 lead.

On the plus side, freshman Rebekah Freeman has taken advantage of increased minutes over the past two games. She put the Bulldogs on the board in the 81st minute with a goal assisted by Esther Soenksen. Freeman has now scored all of her four goals in her last two contests.

Senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind faced plenty of challenges on a night when the Warriors put 11 shots on frame. Lind made eight saves. On the other end of the field, Concordia managed only two shots on goal. One of which was delivered by freshman Rachael Bolin.

The Bulldogs played for much of the night without top goal scorer Sami Birmingham, who has tried to play through pain. She came off the bench on Wednesday.

Midland (10-4, 4-2 GPAC) received votes in the national coaches' poll released on Tuesday. The Warriors' lone conference losses have come to the teams currently occupying the top two spots in the GPAC standings – No. 10 Hastings (6-0) and Northwestern (5-0).

The Bulldogs will hit the road on Saturday for a trip to Sioux Center, Iowa, to take on Dordt (6-6-1, 2-3 GPAC) in a contest scheduled to kick off at 1 p.m. CT. Last season Concordia toppled the Defenders, 1-0, in Seward.





# B'S STING DORDT

Oct. 15, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 4, Dordt 0

## GOALS

17' - (C) Sami Birmingham (12)

20' - (C) Rachael Bolin (6)

26' - (C) Rachael Bolin (7)

61' - (C) Jeannelle Condamine (2)

**SIOUX CENTER, Iowa** – Powered on the attacking end by the freshman duo of Sami Birmingham and Rachael Bolin, the Concordia University women's soccer team righted itself with a blowout GPAC road victory. Birmingham and Bolin combined for three goals as the Bulldogs knocked off Dordt, 4-0, in Sioux Center, Iowa, on Saturday afternoon.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad has now won two of its first three GPAC road games and has improved to 8-5-1 overall and to 3-3 in conference play.

"It was a tough game on Wednesday so it was nice to bounce back and get the win today," Henson said. "It's always tough to win on the road in this conference. It's been difficult for us in our previous encounters up here. We got three goals in about a 10-minute span to really put the game out of reach. It was a good performance all around for the team."

The Defenders (6-7-1, 2-4 GPAC) got stung by the B's on Saturday. Birmingham struck first with what turned out to be her fifth game-winning goal and team leading 12th goal overall this season. Bolin took it from there, finding the back of the net in the 20th and 25th minutes. The three-goal flurry came over a stretch of less than nine minutes.

The Bulldogs took a commanding 3-0 lead to the halftime break. For good measure, junior Jeannelle Condamine put away her second goal of the season and eighth of her career in the 61st minute.

Senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind saved all five shots that Dordt put on frame. She is now the second player in school history to reach 300 career saves. She sits 36 off of Ariel Harris' program standard.

Lind already holds the program record with 22 career shutouts. She had help from her teammates on Saturday. The Bulldogs held a commanding advantage of 21-9 in total shots.



"I'd like to see Chrissy break the record. At the same time, I'd like to see us hold our opponents under 36 shots," Henson said. "We want her job to be as boring as possible. As a team defensively, we want to limit the opportunities she sees to have to make saves. She's had a stellar career."

Birmingham returned to the starting lineup after having been limited by injury in the 3-1 loss to Midland three days earlier. She took three shots on Saturday. Bolin led the team in that category. She fired seven shots, including six on frame.

The Bulldogs continue conference action on Wednesday (Oct. 19) when they host College of Saint Mary (6-8, 3-3 GPAC). Kickoff is set for 7 p.m. CT from Bulldog Stadium. The Flames are in their second year as members of the GPAC. In last season's first Concordia-College of Saint Mary meeting as conference opponents, the Bulldogs won, 3-2, in Seward.

# BULLDOGS THRASH CSM IN PIVOTAL GPAC CLASH

Oct. 19, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 4, College of Saint Mary 0

## GOALS

14' - (C) Jordan McCoy (1)  
 19' - (C) Sami Birmingham (13)  
 67' - (C) Esther Soenksen (6)  
 81' - (C) Sami Birmingham (14)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – For the second-straight time out, the Concordia University women's soccer team steamrolled its opponent by a 4-0 score. The latest victim was College of Saint Mary, which left Bulldog Stadium on Wednesday evening as just the latest squad to struggle to contain the Bees – freshmen Sami Birmingham and Rachael Bolin.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's program has been a monster down the stretch the past couple of years. If the last two victories are any indication, Concordia may be gearing up for another thrilling finish. The Bulldogs are now 9-5-1 overall and 4-3 in conference play.

"I think we really rose to the occasion tonight. It was a game that really figures into the standings and how everything's going to shake out," Henson said. "Honestly, I think the first half was probably our best half of soccer this season. We did a great job of getting the ball on the floor, keeping possession and creating some dangerous goal scoring opportunities."

It took nearly 10 minutes before the first shots of the game were recorded. Then the floodgates opened up. Senior Jordan McCoy got things started with a strike that hit the crossbar and then crossed the goal line in the 14th minute. Less than five minutes later, Birmingham got loose and beat the opposing keeper in a one-on-one.

The Birmingham-Bolin combo has been deadly up front. Both of Birmingham's goals – Nos. 13 and 14 on the season – were assisted by her freshman counterpart. The final tally of the night came when Bolin skillfully played the ball behind her to a darting Birmingham, who slotted the ball past a drawn-out keeper. The pair has been tough to stop.

"At the beginning of the year we were kind of shy towards each other, but we've gotten closer throughout the year," Bolin said of her relationship with Birmingham. "We really like working up top together. We hang out on weekends and



stuff. We've gotten really close."

Esther Soenksen's 67th-minute goal, assisted by Birmingham, was as impressive as any on the night. She drilled a shot from roughly 25 yards out that left goalkeeper Morgan Dillon helpless. It was the sixth goal of the season for the Lincoln native.

Concordia got strong play from a starting back line that included Ashley Martin, Kristin Manley, Leah Shohat and Jeannelle Condamine. They helped limit the Flames (7-9, 4-4 GPAC) to two shots in the first half (eight for the game). Senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind, who recently recorded her 300th career save, made five more saves on Wednesday and secured the 23rd shutout of her career.

It seems the Bulldogs are peaking at the right time. Wednesday's win followed a 4-0 victory at Dordt four days earlier.

"If we continue to do the things that make us successful, we're a very dangerous team," Henson said.

The GPAC stretch run continues on Saturday when Briar Cliff (7-6-1, 3-4 GPAC) visits Bulldog Stadium on Saturday for a 5:30 p.m. kickoff. It will be Senior Day for Concordia, which will honor its group of six seniors. With a cumulative record of 46-23-9, the senior class has helped orchestrate the winningest four-year run in program history.



# WINNINGEST SENIOR CLASS CAPS HOME SCHEDULE WITH VICTORY

Oct. 22, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 3, Briar Cliff 0

## GOALS

46' - (C) Jordan McCoy (2)  
51' - (C) Jessica Skerston (5)  
54' - (C) Rachael Bolin (8)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – The Concordia University women's soccer team flipped a switch after halftime and buried visiting Briar Cliff with three goals in the opening nine minutes of the second half. That flurry lifted the suddenly dominant Bulldogs to a 3-0 win over the Chargers on Saturday evening. Fittingly, the winningest senior class in program history went out on top in its final regular-season home game.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad has now outscored its opponents by a combined total of 11-0 over its last three outings. Concordia improved to 10-5-1 overall and to 5-3 in league play.

"At halftime I just challenged them to come out and play the way we're capable of," Henson said. "We did a nice job in the first half of putting the ball on the floor and playing simple. We were just missing that extra little spark – that extra little run. Obviously coming out and scoring in the first 30 seconds of the second half is a game changing situation."

There were just eight combined shots taken in the first half of Saturday's game. But it took only 26 seconds after the break for senior Jordan McCoy to find the back of the net. Goals by junior Jessica Skerston and freshman Rachael Bolin quickly followed. The Bulldogs made several more threats that were narrowly held off by Briar Cliff in a stellar second

half. Concordia ended up outshooting the Chargers, 20-7. Only six of those 20 shots came over the first 45 minutes. The Bulldogs looked like a different team once they re-emerged from the break.

"We came out pretty slow and lethargic," McCoy said. "I don't know what was wrong in the first half. We came out and we scored and we scored and we scored again. That's what we needed. We needed some confidence."

McCoy is a central figure for the senior class that now owns a four-year record of 47-23-9. As sophomores, the current seniors helped the Bulldogs win the GPAC tournament title and advance to the national tournament for the first time in school history. All the seniors know is winning.

Chrissy Lind, another senior, recorded the 24th shutout of her career. She made three saves. In addition to Lind and McCoy, the senior class includes Rachel Brandt, Megan Brunssen, Leah Hoffmann and Kristin Manley.

"It's awesome. We've been through a lot together," McCoy said. "We established friendships and it's such a family. It's going to be really sad to see it end."

Briar Cliff (7-7-1, 3-5 GPAC) was coming off a 3-2 win at Northwestern. The Chargers have also defeated Doane and Dakota Wesleyan in conference play. Briar Cliff leading goal scorer Brooke Herbst was held without a single shot on Saturday.

The Bulldogs will close the regular season with a pair of conference road games next week. Up next is a short trip to Doane (2-10-2, 2-4-2 GPAC) for a 5 p.m. CT kickoff on Wednesday. Last season Concordia handled the Tigers in Crete, 3-0.



# SKERSTON STARS AS RUN OF DOMINANCE CONTINUES AT DOANE

Oct. 26, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 5, Doane 0

## GOALS

4' - (C) Jessica Skerston (6)  
 14' - (C) Jessica Skerston (7)  
 18' - (C) Rachael Bolin (9)  
 24' - (C) Jessica Skerston (8)  
 57' - (C) Sami Birmingham (15)



**CRETE, Neb.** – Less than 24 minutes old, Wednesday evening's game had essentially been decided already. The Concordia University women's soccer team banked four goals during that stretch and blew away host Doane, 5-0, in Crete. The Bulldogs have now won four-straight meetings with the rival Tigers.

Wednesday's contest was just the latest drubbing handed out by fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad. Concor-

dia has won four-consecutive games, winning them by a combined total of 16-0. The Bulldogs' dominant run has pushed their records to 11-5-1 overall and to 6-3 in conference play.

"It was another opportunity for us to come out and move up the standings," Henson said. "We wanted to come out and establish ourselves early and really put the game away. Doane's one of those teams that can become dangerous if you leave them in the game. We wanted to come out and avoid the miscues we had at the beginning of the game last Saturday. I thought we did a nice job of that tonight."

Junior Jessica Skerston feasted upon the Tigers (2-11-2, 2-5-2 GPAC) while recording the first hat trick of her career. The game got ugly with the help of two penalty kicks awarded to Concordia. Skerston drilled both of them to the left of the keeper. Her first goal came during the run of play and was assisted by freshman Sami Birmingham in the fourth minute. Birmingham also assisted on Concordia's third goal of the night, which was produced by fellow rookie Rachael Bolin.

Skerston now has 35 goals in her collegiate career.

"She's one of those players – a lot of coaches in the conference understand as well – that you give her the ball inside the 18 and most likely it's going to end up in the back of the net," Henson said. "She was very composed and had a quality finish on a great ball in from Sami to get her free."

Birmingham didn't want to miss out on the goal scoring fun. She surfaced with her team leading 15th goal of the season in the 57th minute to cap the night's scoring. Birmingham was also responsible for drawing both fouls in the box that led to Skerston PK's. The B's of Birmingham and Bolin have stung opponents for a combined 24 goals in 2016.

Clean sheets have become the norm of late for goalkeeper Chrissy Lind, the reigning GPAC defensive player of the week, and the Bulldog backline. Concordia has gone more than 372 minutes since it last allowed a goal. Concordia again thrived as a defensive unit on Wednesday, limiting Doane to just three shots. Meanwhile, the Bulldogs fired 28 shots – 18 on goal.

The Bulldogs will put a bow on the 2016 regular season on Saturday when they travel to play Dakota Wesleyan (1-13-1, 1-6-1 GPAC) in Mitchell, S.D. Kickoff is set for 1 p.m. CT. Concordia escaped Mitchell last season with a 1-0 double overtime win thanks to the game winner delivered by Skerston. Concordia currently sits in a tie for fourth place with 18 points in the GPAC standings. A win on Saturday would give the Bulldogs a strong chance of locking up the No. 3 seed in the conference tournament.



# BULLDOGS FINISH REGULAR SEASON WITH FIFTH-STRAIGHT CONVINCING WIN

Oct. 29, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 4, Dakota Wesleyan 1

## GOALS

43' - (D) Brittany Forsman  
53' - (C) Sami Birmingham (16)  
76' - (C) Maria Deeter (6)  
82' - (C) Jessica Skerston (9)  
86' - (C) Esther Soenksen (7)

**MITCHELL, S.D.** – It took a while, but the Concordia University women's soccer team eventually caught fire in time to end the 2016 regular season with another comfortable win. A quartet of second half goals carried the Bulldogs to a 4-1 victory at Dakota Wesleyan (2-14-1, 2-7-1 GPAC) on Saturday afternoon. Concordia has now won five-consecutive games.

Over the five-game hot streak, fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad has outscored opponents by a combined total of 20-1. The Bulldogs will take a 12-5-1 overall record into the postseason. With a final conference mark of 7-3, Concordia equaled a program record for most GPAC wins in a season.

"Dakota Wesleyan worked hard and made it difficult for us," Henson said. "It's always tough for us up here. We didn't have the same flow that we've had. We came out in the first half kind of like we did against Briar Cliff.

"We had a ton of opportunities in the second half before we finally got one. We were able to put it away from there. It's a good way to end the regular season for us. Being able to come from behind gives us some confidence heading into postseason play."

Goals seem to come in bunches for the Bulldogs. Three days earlier they put the game at Doane away quickly with four scores in the first 24 minutes of play. This time Concordia trailed 1-0 at halftime and waited until the second half before Sami Birmingham equalized with her team best 16th goal of the season.

The dam burst late in the contest when Maria Deeter won a battle in the box after a corner kick. Her goal gave the Bulldogs a lead that would only grow larger. Another corner kick from Jeannelle Condame resulted in a Jessica Skerston goal. Not long after, Concordia piled on with Esther Soenksen's goal that came off the assist from Birmingham.

The Bulldogs have earned a top-four regular-season finish for the third-straight year. Concordia has been dangerous in the postseason and is the only GPAC team to reach the conference tournament championship game each of the last two years. The program is right where Henson had envisioned it being.

"Our goal every year going in is to finish in the top four," Henson said. "We want the home field advantage at a minimum in the first round. I think we're a team that should be in the range every year. I think it showed a lot of resolve from our kids to be able to come back and earn that top-four seed after struggling a bit early in the conference season. It's great to come back with a five-game winning streak and five convincing wins."

Concordia will be the No. 3 seed at the GPAC tournament, which will begin on Tuesday, Nov. 1. The Bulldogs have earned the right to host Briar Cliff (9-7-1, 5-5 GPAC) in the quarterfinals. Tuesday's kickoff will be at 7 p.m. CT from Bulldog Stadium. These teams also met in last year's quarterfinals. Concordia won, 4-0, in Sioux City, Iowa, in that matchup.



# CONCORDIA LOOKS TO CONTINUE POSTSEASON MAGIC

**SEWARD, Neb.** – Something about the pressure of win-or-go-home brings out the best in Concordia women's soccer. The Bulldogs have advanced to the GPAC title game each of the last two years and have made it to at least the semifinals three years running. Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad will first have to get past Tuesday's conference quarterfinal matchup with sixth-seeded Briar Cliff (9-7-1, 5-5 GPAC) if it wants to make a return trip to the championship.

Kickoff from Bulldog Stadium on Tuesday is set for 7 p.m. CT. The contest will be a rematch of the Oct. 22 game in which the Bulldogs used a second half flurry of goals to topple the Chargers, 3-0, in Seward.

Led by freshman Sami Birmingham, Concordia has shown an ability to score goals in bunches. The Bulldogs rank 17th nationally with an average of 3.4 goals per game. During its current five-game win streak, Concordia has outscored opponents by a combined total of 20-1. With two more goals, the 2016 squad would have the second highest single-season goal total in school history. The Bulldogs finished October with a record of 7-1 for the month.

At 12-5-1 overall, Concordia has equaled a program record for the most wins during the regular season. The 2014 group also won 12 regular-season contests before blazing to a GPAC tournament title and national tournament appearance. Under Henson, Concordia is 4-2-2 in conference tournament games. Though officially counted as ties, postseason games that went to penalty kick shootouts in 2013 at Briar Cliff and 2015 at Hastings resulted in Bulldog

advancements.

Birmingham's 16 goals this season put her atop the team leaderboard and at No. 5 among GPAC players. She and Rachael Bolin have teamed up to form a stellar freshman duo up top. Birmingham also has eight assists while Bolin has chipped in nine goals and eight assists of her own. Three other Bulldogs have at least six goals: Jessica Skerston (nine), Esther Soenksen (seven) and Maria Deeter (six).

Concordia also has the advantage of having a battle-tested goalkeeper in senior Chrissy Lind, whose 25 shutouts are a program record. Lind has started all eight GPAC tournament games over the past three seasons. With Lind in goal, the 2014 team allowed just a single goal over its three-game run to the GPAC title.

The winner of Tuesday's matchup will advance to play in the semifinals on Saturday (see schedule below).

## Tuesday, Nov. 1 – Quarterfinals

No. 8 Dordt at No. 1 Hastings, 7 p.m.

No. 5 Northwestern at No. 4 Morningside, 7 p.m.

No. 6 Briar Cliff at No. 3 Concordia, 7 p.m.

No. 7 College of Saint Mary at No. 2 Midland, 7 p.m.

## Saturday, Nov. 5 – Semifinals

No. 1/8 winner vs. No. 4/5 winner (highest seed hosts)

No. 2/7 winner vs. No. 3/6 winner (highest seed hosts)

## Thursday, Nov. 10 – Championship





# WIN STREAK CONTINUES AS CONCORDIA SCOOTs TO SEMIFINALS

Nov. 1, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 5, Briar Cliff 1 (GPAC quarterfinals)

## GOALS

9' - (B) Taylor Beaulieu  
 15' - (C) Jessica Skerston (8)  
 32' - (C) Sami Birmingham (17)  
 71' - (C) Maria Deeter (7)  
 79' - (C) Jessica Skerston (9)  
 87' - (C) Sami Birmingham (18)



**SEWARD, Neb.** – It's like they'd been there before. The Concordia University women's soccer team never flinched after conceding a ninth-minute goal in Tuesday's GPAC quarterfinal tilt that resulted in a 5-1 victory over visiting and sixth-seeded Briar Cliff. The Chargers were the latest to run into a surging offensive force.

The Bulldogs have now advanced past the conference quarterfinal round for the fourth-straight season while under the guidance of fourth-year head coach Greg Henson. Third-seeded Concordia (13-5-1) will travel to Fremont on Saturday to take on second-seeded Midland (15-4) in the conference semifinals. Kickoff is set for 1 p.m. CT.

"It's really a matter of us settling in and not hitting the panic button," Henson said. "There was a lot of time on the clock (after Briar Cliff took the early lead). You just have to continue to play. We know the goals are going to come. Off the cornering kicks we were dangerous tonight."

Riding a six-game win streak after Tuesday's result, the Bulldogs have been a ticking time bomb of late. When one goal goes up on the board, the floodgates open. All it took on

this night was for a Jeannelle Condamine corner to find Jessica Skerston in the box for an equalizing header goal in the 15th minute.

Roughly 64 minutes later, Skerston helped put the finishing touches on the fifth GPAC postseason win during Henson's tenure. Skerston's penalty kick goal in the 79th minute gave her seven goals over her last four games.

The game winner was recorded by budding freshman Sami Birmingham, who netted a right place, right time goal to give the Bulldogs the lead in the 32nd minute. A deflected strike by Esther Soenksen fell in front of Birmingham, who drilled her then team leading 17th goal of the season. She wasn't done just yet. She tacked on her 18th score with the final goal of the night, which occurred in the 87th minute.

Steadying sophomore midfielder Maria Deeter, one of three team captains, also joined the fun with a goal that was assisted by Jordan McCoy in the 71st minute. Four of Deeter's 13 career goals have come during GPAC postseason play.

"There's a lot of confidence on our team," Deeter said. "This year we've found ourselves giving up silly goals and digging a hole, but we're pretty composed. We know that we have the firepower up top to get goals back so we don't get too frazzled."

The senior class, which includes the likes of Kristin Manley, McCoy and record breaking goalkeeper Chrissy Lind, has now won 50 games over four years as Bulldogs. However, none of the previous teams the seniors have been part of have possessed this kind of offensive prowess. The 63 goals scored by the 2016 team are the second most in a single season in program history.

Now Concordia gets ready to face the most recent team to defeat it. The Bulldogs and Warriors met in Seward on Oct. 12 when Midland came away with a 3-1 victory. The Warriors have been just as hot as Concordia. They defeated seventh-seeded College of Saint Mary, 2-0, on Tuesday and pushed their winning streak to seven.

"Midland's a good team," Henson said. "They've got a couple really dangerous players of their own that we have to contain better. It was the supporting cast that beat us in the first go round. We're a much better team right now. I told the team after the game – we're a better team today than the last time we faced them."

All of the top seeds held serve on their home fields in Tuesday's quarterfinal games. Semifinal winners will meet in the GPAC championship on Thursday, Nov. 10.

# MEETING THEIR GOALS



By Jake Knabel, Director of Athletic Communications

Led by a star freshman striker who played goalkeeper for her club team, the Concordia women's soccer squad is blowing away conference opponents like never before seen in program history. Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's bunch faced an early deficit in Tuesday's GPAC quarterfinal, only to bury Briar Cliff with another dominant performance that marked Concordia's sixth-straight win.

Even the 2004 team that pelted the back of nets with a school record 82 goals didn't have this type of offensive success against conference opponents. Neither did the 2014 GPAC tournament championship team, which averaged less than two goals per game.

Said sophomore captain Maria Deeter, "We're scoring goals left and right, which is awesome." When it comes to putting away goals, this team is an elite company, ranking 15th in the nation in goals per game.

"I knew we had a couple dangerous goal scorers coming in with (freshmen) Sami Birmingham and Rachael Bolin," Henson said. "They've really added some firepower for us. Then you have Jessica Skerston in the midfield. She doesn't

get quite as many looks, but she's still a focal point that other teams have to take care of. We have a bunch of other weapons as well with Esther (Soenksen), Deeter and (Jordan) McCoy. I knew we had the weapons to score goals."

It didn't take long at all for Birmingham and Bolin to adapt to the college game. The two have combined for 27 goals and 16 assists as rookies. The Killer B's sting – and they sting often. Birmingham's 18 goals rank as the second highest total ever for a Concordia freshman (Jennifer Davis had 23 as a freshman in 2002). A Johnston, Iowa, native, Birmingham has been a consistent force, scoring at least one goal in 12 of 19 games this season.

"Sami's a good player," Henson said earlier this season. "We knew that when she was coming in. She had a really good high school season this past spring and knew she was a proven goal scorer. We asked her to play a different role to start the season, but she wound up back up front which is really her natural position where she feels most comfortable."

The quintet of Birmingham (18), Skerston (11), Bolin (9), Deeter (7) and Soenksen (7) has combined for 52 goals alone. Eight GPAC squads haven't even reached that total as a team.



It's scary – for opponents anyway – to think of what could transpire over the next few seasons as Birmingham and Bolin wreak havoc on the attacking end.

"At the beginning of the year we were kind of shy towards each other," Bolin said of the connection between her and Birmingham. "But we've gotten closer throughout the year. We really like working up top together. We hang out on the weekends and stuff. We've gotten really close."

In Tuesday's GPAC quarterfinal victory, Birmingham tallied two more goals in what was her fifth multi-goal game of the season. Would you believe she played goalkeeper for her club team? It's true. It's also true that she's the fourth most prolific goal scorer in the GPAC this season.

"I just want to score and help my team out," Birmingham said after an early-season victory. "It's really different from high school. It's a lot of competition. I just try my best every day in practice and games and it works out well for me."

Amid the hoopla of the work of the freshmen, it would be foolish to forget about Skerston, who wasn't bad as a rookie herself in 2014. That season she notched 17 goals, including

the game winner in the GPAC tournament championship upset of Hastings. She's back on a goal scoring binge having netted seven goals over the past four games. The run included her first career hat trick in the road blowout of Doane.

Says Henson, "She's one of those players – a lot of coaches in the conference understand as well – that you give her the ball inside the 18 and most likely it's going to end up in the back of the net."

In conference games only, the Bulldogs have upped their average to 3.6 goals per game. They hope to keep the offensive surge going on Saturday when they travel to Fremont for the GPAC semifinals where they will meet second-seeded Midland. Both teams are red hot. The Warriors have won seven in a row. Meanwhile, Concordia has a six-game win streak.

The most recent Bulldog loss came at the hands of Midland, but Henson believes his team is playing at a higher level now. It will take a high quality performance to emerge from Fremont with a win, but the confidence and goal scoring ability are in place.

Said Deeter, "There's a lot of confidence on this team."



# SOENKSEN GOLDEN GOAL PUSHES CONCORDIA TO GPAC FINAL

Nov. 5, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 1, Midland 0 | OT (GPAC semifinals)

## GOALS

99' - (C) Esther Soenksen

**FREMONT, Neb.** – A year ago it was Esther Soenksen who clinched a GPAC semifinal upset of Hastings in a penalty kick shootout. Well, Esther's done it again. On Saturday the product of Lincoln Lutheran High School emerged with the golden goal to sink second-seeded Midland, 1-0, in overtime as part of a GPAC semifinal clash in Fremont, Neb.

For the third-straight season, head coach Greg Henson's program is headed to the GPAC tournament championship game. Even better, the Bulldogs learned they would host the title contest after top-seeded Hastings was bounced from the tourney by fourth-seeded Morningside.

Concordia now stands at 14-5-2 overall – one win off the program single-season standard set by the 2014 GPAC tournament titlist.

"Credit to our players. We're playoff tested," Henson said. "There wasn't any concern going to overtime in a semifinal game. I thought that helped us, just that experience of being there before. Chrissy (Lind) had another good game for us and another shutout. Our back four (Jeannelle Condamine, Kristin Manley, Ashley Martin and Leah Shohat) all did a great job defending. It was a great job all the way around."

Concordia and Midland (15-5) appeared headed for a second overtime before Soenksen decided enough was enough after just over eight minutes of overtime had elapsed. Freshman Sami Birmingham created the opportunity by playing a cross into the box from right to left. Soenksen corralled it and softly tapped the ball inside the left post to set off yet another postseason celebration.

In a game in which the Warriors outshot the Bulldogs, 23-10, Concordia needed exactly the clutch performance it got from its keeper. Lind has been in goal for every conference tournament game over the past four seasons. On Saturday she collected 12 saves, one of which came just 28 seconds into the overtime period. Lind, a three-time GPAC player of the week this season, notched her 26th career shutout.

The shutout was no easy task while going up against a team that entered the contest ranked 10th nationally in goals per game (3.58). Nayeli Rodriguez totaled 22 goals on the year,



but she misfired on all eight of her shot attempts on Saturday. Three of her shots were denied by Lind.

"I thought our back four especially really stepped up and had a good game today," Henson said. "The wind played a role today. Credit to Midland and what they did in how difficult they made it for us. I thought we had the better end of the play in the first half going with the wind. Second half we really struggled to get out of our end and maintain much possession. The overtime was the same direction, but I thought we came out pretty well and went at them."

Concordia has become a team that thrives come tourney time. The Bulldogs have taken down top-seeded Hastings in the postseason each of the last two years. The 2014 team, which earned the No. 2 seed in the tournament, celebrated the first GPAC postseason championship in school history.

Soenksen's heroics snapped Midland's seven-game win streak while also pushing Concordia's string of consecutive victories to seven. The Bulldogs have not suffered defeat since being dealt a 3-1 home loss to the Warriors when they met in the regular season on Oct. 12.

Thursday's championship game inside Bulldog Stadium will take place at 7 p.m. Concordia and Morningside also met in the 2015 GPAC title game that was held in Sioux City, Iowa.



# BULLDOGS 'STOKED' TO HOST GPAC TITLE FOR FIRST TIME EVER

**SEWARD, Neb.** – No more significant soccer game has ever taken place inside Bulldog Stadium and members of the Concordia University women's soccer team couldn't be any more excited. Says senior captain Jordan McCoy, "We were watching the Hastings-Morningside (semifinal) game (on Saturday) at my house and we were jumping on the couches. It was almost as exciting as when we beat Midland. Yeah, we're stoked."

On Saturday (Nov. 5) the higher-seeded teams failed to hold serve on their home fields, turning the GPAC tournament upside down. Concordia's 1-0 overtime victory at Midland, coupled with Morningside's 1-0 upset at top-seeded Hastings, has given the Bulldogs the right to host the GPAC tournament championship game for the first time in program history. Thursday's title game will kick off inside Bulldog at 7 p.m. CT.

"We've done our part to get there and earn that right to play in front of the home fans on Thursday night," Henson said at Tuesday's Bulldog Athletic Association gathering. "Morningside is a good team. We haven't won anything. All we've done is earn the right to play at home. We look forward to the challenge."

McCoy and company realize there's another game to be played, but it's hard not to step back and marvel at the program's recent postseason success stories. This will be the third-straight GPAC championship game appearance for Henson's program, which stunned Hastings in the 2014 title contest.

Concordia women's soccer has risen to a level of postseason excellence that begs for people to pay attention.

"I've gotten a lot of text message and social media stuff. Everyone's commenting on things," said senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind. "My statuses get a lot more 'likes' than they normally do. Everybody's just sharing stuff online. People have been saying congrats on the win."

The Bulldogs will not be the only team familiar with the feel of a conference championship game when play gets underway on Thursday. Morningside has been to three of the past four GPAC title games and broke Concordia's heart by putting away the game-winning goal in the final minute of the 2015 championship in Sioux City, Iowa.

The Bulldogs haven't forgotten. Henson even played a clip of that goal this week to remind them of how that moment felt. It's not something anyone wants to relive on Thursday.

"That was a big lesson for us," McCoy said. "We need to make sure the freshmen understand how big of a deal that was. We

can't just expect that we're at nationals already. It's going to be a tough game. We need to be prepared."

Concordia and Morningside met in the regular season on Oct. 1 when the Bulldogs came away with a 2-1 victory in Sioux City. That outing helped spark Concordia to go on a stretch of nine wins in 10 contests leading up to Thursday's big game. The loss during that timeframe came against Midland, but the Bulldogs avenged that defeat in last week's semifinal affair.

So much is on the line Thursday. A second GPAC title in three years. Another trip to nationals. A program single-season record-tying 15th win. An extension of a school record seven-game win streak.

But when 7 p.m. Thursday arrives, Concordia will try to block all of that out.

"I don't think it could ever get old," Lind said of playing for a GPAC championship. "I try not to think about it too much during the game. You try to treat it like a normal game. Once it's over, it's just incredible. There's so much adrenaline. Everyone's pumped."

The time to celebrate the opportunity to host a championship game ended when a new week came about. Now it's back to business.

"We were like, 'OK, we can celebrate,' but now it's a new week," McCoy said. "We need to buckle down and focus on what we need to, to win. I think we're focused now."

## **Concordia: 14-5-1, 7-3 GPAC (3rd)**

Head coach: Greg Henson (51-23-9, 4th season)

Goals scored/game: 3.20 (3rd in GPAC)

Goals allowed/game: 0.85 (2nd in GPAC)

Top goal scorer: Sami Birmingham (18 goals)

Goalkeeper: Chrissy Lind (.915 GAA, .837 save percentage, 87 saves, 6 shutouts)

Road to final: Defeated 6th-seeded Briar Cliff, 5-1, in the quarterfinals and 2nd-seeded Midland, 1-0 (OT), in the semifinals.

## **Morningside: 10-7-2, 6-3-1 GPAC (4th)**

Head coach: Tom Maxon (167-148-23, 17th season)

Goals scored/game: 1.47 (8th in GPAC)

Goals allowed/game: 1.32 (4th in GPAC)

Top goal scorer: Amy Grause (12 goals)

Goalkeeper: Niccole McGuire (1.325 GAA, .756 save percentage, 68 saves, 6 shutouts)

Road to final: Advanced past 5th-seeded Northwestern by winning the PK shootout that followed a 0-0 double overtime draw in the quarterfinals and defeated top-seeded Hastings, 1-0, in the semifinals.

# ELECTRIC BULLDOG STADIUM HELPS SPUR SECOND GPAC TITLE IN THREE YEARS

Nov. 10, 2016

**FINAL:** Concordia 3, Morningside 1 (GPAC championship)

## GOALS

27' - (M) Chloe Wetzberger  
36' - (C) Sami Birmingham (19)  
47' - (C) Rachael Bolin (10)  
83' - (C) Sami Birmingham (20)

**SEWARD, Neb.** – Live it up. This is the golden age of Concordia University women's soccer. For the second time in three seasons, the Bulldogs are champions of the GPAC tournament. In front of a raucous crowd inside Bulldog Stadium, the freshman duo of Sami Birmingham and Rachael Bolin ensured that a one-goal deficit was no big deal. Concordia avenged its conference championship loss from a year earlier by toppling Morningside, 3-1, in Thursday night's title game.

Postseason magic is alive and well for Concordia (15-5-1). While hosting a GPAC championship game for the first time in program history, the Bulldogs took the home fans on an

other thrill ride.

"We had a great crowd tonight. Thanks to all the fans and students that showed up to support the girls today," Henson said. "We couldn't ask for a better atmosphere to play soccer in. This is absolutely great. We rose to the occasion, especially in the second half. I'm really just proud of the girls today and all they've accomplished."

Two of its most reliable goal scorers all year helped rescue Concordia from a 1-0 hole. Even a stingy defensive unit that shut out top-seeded Hastings in the semifinals struggled to contain the Killer B's of Birmingham and Bolin. They teamed up on the equalizer in the 27th minute when Bolin played a ball behind the defense that Birmingham put away for her 19th goal of the season.

After being outplayed early on, Concordia settled in while playing in front of a crowd of at least 500 in number, something unheard of for women's soccer in the GPAC. Just 1:39 into the second half, Bolin displayed impressive flair by somehow tucking in a sharply angled ball just inside the left post for what proved to be the game-winning score. Bulldog







Stadium was on fire.

In the 83rd minute, Birmingham got loose with another goal assisted by Bolin. This was the kill shot Concordia had been looking for.

"Going in I was really nervous and I didn't know what to expect," Birmingham said. "Once we started playing and playing the game we know how to play, we took the lead. It was very exciting when the clock hit zero."

A potential postgame celebration was in doubt in the 27th minute when Chloe Wetzberger knocked in the game's first goal after a free kick struck by Ellie Freebern. In the chaos of the scramble in the box, Wetzberger went unmarked.

Concordia also found itself trailing 1-0 in the GPAC quarter-finals versus Briar Cliff. The Bulldogs won going away, 5-1. This is simply a confident group that knows how to deal with early deficits.

"I was nervous because obviously going down isn't fun," Condamine said. "But I knew that we had the capability of coming back to win this game."

Making her third career start in a GPAC championship game, senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind made 12 saves in a contest in

which Morningside held a slight 15-13 shot advantage. Lind made a particularly impressive save of a header in the second half. The Bulldogs were also fortunate not to get down 2-0 when a Mustang strike nailed the crossbar.

But for the most part, Concordia has made its own breaks in postseason play.

"We want to be playing our best soccer at the end of the year," Henson said. "The way our schedule sets up, our only shot to get into the national tournament is by winning the conference tournament. November is what we build ourselves for."

While the goal scoring was taken over by Birmingham and Bolin, the efforts of the back four and star midfielder Maria Deeter were again essential in Concordia's run to a GPAC tournament title. Not only has the 2016 team clinched a national tournament berth, it has also tied the 2014 squad for the most wins in a single season in program history.

Morningside (10-8-2) made its third GPAC tournament championship game appearance in four years. The Mustangs defeated Northwestern and Hastings before making their way to Seward.

National qualifiers and brackets for the national tournament will be announced by the NAIA via a selection show on Monday, Nov. 14. The opening round of the national tournament will be played at 15 campus sites to be determined.

**Over the last three years, Concordia women's soccer has accomplished the following ...**

- Win two GPAC tournament titles
- Claim the first two national tournament berths in program history
- Reach the GPAC tournament final every year
- Achieve a national ranking for the first time ever
- Post a combined record of 43-14-7
- Win a school record 15 games twice (2014 and 2016)
- Break the school record for most shutouts in a season
- Break the school record for longest winning streak





# CONCORDIA HEADED TO SOUTH FLORIDA FOR NATIONAL TOURNAMENT



**SEWARD, Neb.** – The crowd of players that gathered Monday in the Walz conference room on the Concordia University campus burst into cheers of approval upon learning that their journey will take them to West Palm Beach, Fla., for the opening round of the 2016 NAIA Women's Soccer National Championships. The Bulldog women's soccer team is set to take on Keiser University at 12 p.m. CT / 1 p.m. ET in The Sunshine State on Saturday.

The contest will be staged at the home of the Seahawks, Arrigo Vecellio Soccer Field, which features a grass playing surface.

"The goal for our program year-in and year-out is to compete for conference championships and earn a bid to the national tournament," said fourth-year Concordia head coach Greg Henson. "This is something we really strive for and look forward to. Once we achieve that, it's onto the next goal which is to get to the final site of the national tournament. We know have a tough matchup in front of us."

The high of winning the 2016 GPAC tournament championship will carry the Bulldogs into their second national tournament appearance in program history. The 2014 squad, also a GPAC tournament titlist, fell, 4-0, at No. 9 Benedictine College (Kan.) in the opening round of the national championships in what was the first-ever trip to nationals for the Bulldogs.

This time around, Concordia has a much longer trek to meet up with its national tournament opponent. Concordia and Keiser are separated by 1,652 miles. It's a journey that would take roughly an entire 24-hour day to make by automobile. However, the team is making preparations to fly out of Nebraska on Thursday. As custom, a ceremonial banquet will be hosted by Keiser on Friday night.

"It's definitely a long trip," Henson said. "There are a lot of logistics that go into play and getting a team from Nebraska down to the Miami area. It's a great experience and a great opportunity for our players. It's going to be the first time for





some of them to get on a plane as a program and fly down there. We've had some great Nebraska weather this year, but it will be nice to be in Miami."

Statistically, the 2016 Concordia team has been better in many respects than the standard-setting 2014 squad. This year's team has broken the program record for best goal differential in a single season. The high-powered Bulldogs average 3.19 goals per game (16th most in the nation) behind

first team all-conference freshman Sami Birmingham. Concordia's active eight-game winning streak is the longest in program history. Over that stretch, the Bulldogs have dominated their conference foes, outscoring them by a combined total of 29-3. Concordia locked up its national tournament bid by knocking off Morningside, 3-1, in the GPAC tournament championship game.

The Bulldogs have never played Keiser, a member of The Sun Conference. The Seahawks were ranked third in the latest MRPI rating. That's also where they landed in the NAIA coaches' poll released on Nov. 7. Keiser (17-1-1), guided by sixth-year head coach Mat Dunn, has lost just once all season. Dunn has helped the Seahawks become a national powerhouse. His career record is 97-19-8.

Concordia's postseason roster includes one Florida native: second team all-conference defender Jeannelle Condame, who hails from Winter Springs, which is approximately 176 miles from Keiser.

The winner of Saturday's game will advance to the national championships final site, Orange Beach SportsPlex in Orange Beach, Ala., where the 16 remaining teams will gather. The Keiser/Concordia winner will play either Reinhardt University (Ga.) or MidAmerica Nazarene University (Kan.) at 6:30 p.m. CT on Tuesday, Nov. 29.





# CONDAME HYPED FOR TRIP TO NATIVE FLORIDA

By Jake Knabel, Director of Athletic Communications

Junior Jeannelle Condamé is more than a thousand miles from home. But not for long. Condamé and Concordia women's soccer are leaving on a jet plane that will take them somewhere sunny and warm. It's the type of experience that doesn't come around often, sometimes never.

Condamé has reason to be especially pumped.

"I was in a piano lesson," Condamé said. "My phone just kept going off, going off, going off. My mom called me and my sister called me and everyone was calling me. My best friend Leigha McConnell was texting me like crazy. 'We're going to Florida. We're going to Florida.' When I opened my phone after I got out of my lesson, everyone was like, 'We're going to Florida. Oh my gosh. Are you so excited? You've got to get your family there.'"

Condamé's piano lesson occurred on Monday just as the NAIA made the announcement that the GPAC tournament champion Bulldogs were going to be sent to West Palm Beach, Fla., where they will play at third-ranked Keiser University at 12 p.m. CT / 1 p.m. ET in the opening round of the national tournament on Saturday. As the contest kicks off in four days, Condamé will be just 176 miles from the front door of her home in Winter Springs.

Named a second team all-conference choice on Monday full of good news, Condamé is the lone Florida native on the postseason roster. She arrived at Concordia in the fall of 2014 when her older sister, Annalisa, was a senior and also a member of the soccer team.

Though the Bulldogs will be 1,652 miles southeast of Seward on Saturday, they're counting on having at least a few fans in attendance at Arrigo Vecellio Soccer Field. Head coach Greg Henson jokingly told Condamé that it's her responsible to make sure Concordia has a following in West Palm Beach.

On Monday Jeannelle's mother, Kristi Oettl, tagged the Bulldog women's soccer team in a Facebook post that read, "Who wants to go to West Palm Beach to see Concordia and Jeannelle play Keiser in the first round of the NAIA national tournament??"

Said Condamé, "I'm sure my friends from church will come. I've been trying to get them all to come so that we can have a fan base. Coach told my mom to get a 12-passenger van and bring some people so we can have some fans."

Condamé has done nothing but drive excitement for a team already plenty amped about the idea of being in the Miami area. As Condamé rocked the piano on Monday, many of her



teammates were gathered in the Walz conference room on campus in anticipation of discovering their national tournament destination. After venturing to Atchison, Kan., for the opening round in 2014, Concordia players are ecstatic about their weekend plans.

No one's more excited for The Sunshine State expedition than Condamé. If time and money were limitless, Condamé would love to show her teammates around Disney World.

"For sure I wish we could go to the beach," Condamé said. "I would love for everyone to go to Disney World, but I feel like it's not possible. It's just my home. I want everyone to know that it's beautiful and sunny. Everyone thinks it's going to be super hot and we're going to die. Yes, it's going to be hot, but it's not crazy, crazy hot. It will be 75 to 80."

Oh yeah, there's a game to be played, too. Condamé has the right perspective. She believes she and the rest of the juniors and seniors that were part of the 2014 team have a better idea of what to expect. They want to make a more serious threat at an upset than they did two years ago in the 4-0 loss at No. 9 Benedictine College.

Says Condamé, "As Coach said, it's a business trip, not a vacation. We have to go and work hard and try to win, or it almost isn't worth it."



# PREVIEW: BULLDOGS EMBRACE NATIONAL TOURNAMENT CHALLENGE



The second ever national tournament game in the history of the Concordia women's soccer program will kick off at 12 p.m. Nebraska time on Saturday. As of Thursday (Nov. 17) afternoon, the Bulldogs were in the process of making their way down to south Florida for a trip that will cover more than 1,500 miles.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's squad is flying high after winning its second GPAC tournament title in three seasons. Though the Miami area may be unfamiliar to some, the intensity of the national tournament won't be lost on more than a handful of Bulldogs who saw action in the 4-0 opening round loss at No. 9 Benedictine College (Kan.) in 2014. Four current players started in that game: Jeannelle Condame, Chrissy Lind, Jessica Skerston and Esther Soenksen.

"I think it's definitely helpful, at least for me," said Condame of having past national tournament experience. "When we first went, we had never been there before. We're like, 'This is crazy. This is fun. We'll just show up and play.' As Coach said, it's a business trip, not a vacation. We have to go and work hard and try to win, or it almost isn't worth it."

Henson and his team are well aware of the challenge that awaits. The Seahawks, a member of The Sun Conference, are 9-0-1 at home this season. They are unbeaten (13-0-1) over their last 14 games played at Arrigo Vecellio Soccer Field, the site of Saturday's opening round contest. In September of 2015, Keiser hosted eventual GPAC regular-season champion Hastings and toppled the Broncos, 4-0. This year's Seahawk team has triumphed over four nationally-ranked teams and has outscored its 19 opponents by a combined total of 58-10.

On the other side, Concordia also has reason to be confident. It owns an active eight-game winning streak. During which,

the Bulldogs have outnumbered their foes, 29-3. The 2016 Concordia team is as dangerous as any in program history in terms of putting away goals. The Bulldogs' 67 goals are the second highest single-season total in school history. They rank 16th nationally in goals scored per game (3.19).

Johnston, Iowa, native Sami Birmingham has had little trouble adapting to the college game. She tallied four of her team high 20 goals during the GPAC postseason championship run and was named first team all-conference. Four other Bulldogs have at least seven goals this season: Skerston (11), Rachael Bolin (10), Soenksen (8) and Maria Deeter (7)

A sophomore captain and first team All-GPAC choice, Deeter put Saturday's matchup in perspective

"It's going to be a tough game, but I think as long as we're in the right mindset we can definitely compete," Deeter said. "We have the ability. You realize that they're going to be better in some areas because they're used to being in this position and have played against top 10 teams. We have to focus on the little things. I think we definitely have the ability to compete against them."

Formerly known as Northwood University, Keiser has been a women's soccer powerhouse for many years running. Sixth-year head coach Mat Dunn (97-19-8) has cultivated a program with national championship aspirations.

Slaying a giant won't be easy, but Henson and his squad are packing the sunscreen – and a positive outlook while making the trek to the Miami area.

"We know we have a tough matchup in front of us," Henson said. "Keiser has been ranked in the top five all year and is an annual favorite every year within women's soccer at the NAIA level. But it's a great opportunity to go out and play. The great thing about soccer is anybody can go out and win on any given day. We'll prepare our team to make the most of this opportunity."

Just for a moment, Deeter allowed herself to think about what a national tournament win would mean to the program.

"I think it would be a huge step. I think we're pretty close," Deeter said. "We just have to get over that hump. It's a good challenge. You just have to get the ball rolling. That's the next big step for the program."

# BULLDOG UPSET BID COMES UP SHORT IN NATIONAL TOURNAMENT DEFEAT

Nov. 19, 2016

**National Tournament:** (3) Keiser (Fla.) 2, Concordia 0

## GOALS

58' - (K) Johanna Engberg

61' - (K) Johanna Engberg

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. – Playing in her home state, Jeannelle Condamine nearly put the Concordia University women's soccer team in the lead going into halftime. However, her strike hit the crossbar and third-ranked Keiser University eventually broke the seal on the goal and avoided the upset. The second all-time appearance in the opening round of the NAIA Women's Soccer National Championships ended with a 2-0 loss for the Bulldogs.

Fourth-year head coach Greg Henson's program also reached the national tournament in 2014 when it fell by a 4-0 score at No. 9 Benedictine College (Kan.). This time around, Concordia (15-6-1) made a more serious run at an upset win while surrounded by palm trees at Arrigo Vecellio Soccer Field in West Palm Beach, Fla.

"I think we proved that we belong on this stage and that we can truly play with anybody in the country," Henson said. "We've talked about that in the past, but today our players went out and showed the heart and the grit that it takes to do that. I couldn't be any prouder of the way this team went out and performed today. We challenged them to come out early and take it to Keiser and not be afraid of the environment and just go play – and they did."

Keiser (18-1-1) had piled up a double-digit shot total before it finally got one to go into the back of the net. One of many Sweden natives on the Seahawk roster, Johanna Engberg got loose for the game's only goals in the 58th and 61st minutes. Keiser wound up with a 20-4 advantage in shots.

Condamine, who hails from Winter Springs, actually had two of the best scoring opportunities for Concordia. With the Bulldogs down 2-0 in the second half, another free kick by Condamine from just outside the 18-yard box went just over the crossbar. Freshman Rachael Bolin put the only shot on goal of the day for Concordia.

Goals have been difficult to come by all season for Keiser opponents. The Seahawks entered the national tournament allowing just 0.53 goals per game. The Sun Conference champion effectively stifled top goal scorer Sami Birmingham, who scored four goals during the Bulldogs' GPAC tournament title run. Birmingham did not fire a single shot on Saturday.

There will be no trip to Orange Beach, Ala., the site where the final 16 teams left standing will converge. While that dream scenario will have to wait for at least one more year, Concordia is in the midst of an unprecedented run. With the help of four seniors that started on Saturday (Megan Brunssen, Chrissy Lind, Kristin Manley and Jordan McCoy), the Bulldogs have won 43 games and two conference tournament championships over the past three seasons.

"The senior class has been tremendous," Henson said. "It's going to take a little bit to sink in. I don't know Concordia without the senior class. They just went out and continued to do what they've done throughout their careers. They worked hard and did all of the little things that we asked them to do. They've been with me every step of the way. I know they have tremendous futures in whatever's next in their lives."

Lind, a second team all-conference honoree, leaves Concordia as the school goalkeeping career record holder for games and minutes played, shutouts (26) and saves (345). She made five saves in her final game as a Bulldog.

The team took time after the game to visit the beach and swim in the ocean. They will spend Saturday night in Florida before flying back to Nebraska on Sunday.





# GPAC TITLE HIGHLIGHTS EXHILARATING 2016 SEASON



The spectacle of the Bulldog Stadium-housed 2016 GPAC championship game blew away all expectations. The bleachers on the east side of the stadium rocked and roared on a mild November night that saw the Concordia University women's soccer program host a conference title game for the first time ever. Students flocked in droves – not just for the free T-shirts – but to be part of history.

Says sophomore captain Maria Deeter, “It was crazy. I remember when we went to Morningside (last year), it was pretty intimidating being on the other side of it. I was really hoping the crowd would turn out, and it blew my mind. I didn’t expect that many people to come. It’s so fun to be able to play in front of all the people you know and all your supporters. To get the win makes it that much better.”

The mass of people in the bleachers spilled out onto the field when the clock hit zeroes and the scoreboard indicated a 3-1 Concordia advantage. For the second time in three years, head coach Greg Henson’s program claimed the GPAC tournament title and locked up another trip to the national championships.

Not only that, the 2016 team equaled the standard-setting 2014 group with 15 victories, the most in a season since the program got started in 1996. The 2016 GPAC championship

win over Morningside ranks right up there with the upset of Hastings in the 2014 GPAC title game when it comes to memorable moments in school history.

“It was easily the best atmosphere that we’ve played in during my four years at Concordia,” Henson said of the championship game that took place in Seward on Nov. 10. “It definitely trumped the past championship environments that we’ve experienced. It was a great opportunity for our players to play in front of such a large crowd here at home. I think that played a little bit into some jitters coming out. Unfortunately, we fell behind, but we saw the resolve of our players knowing they could come back.”

Just like the 2014 and 2015 teams, the 2016 Bulldogs were at their best when it mattered most. This year’s team sat at 7-5-1 overall after a 3-1 loss to Midland on Oct. 12. A switch flipped and Concordia then rattled off a school record eight-game winning streak, during which it outscored its opponents by a combined total of 29-3. Included in that stretch was a 1-0 GPAC semifinal overtime win at Midland that avenged what had been the Bulldogs’ most recent loss.

Junior Esther Soenksen played the part of the hero in downing the second-seeded Warriors with the golden goal. Then in the rematch of the 2015 GPAC title game, freshmen Sami



Birmingham and Rachael Bolin took over the goal scoring exploits. The Killer B's stung the Mustangs, beginning in the 36th minute with Birmingham's goal assisted by Bolin. Then Bolin added one of her own, assisted by Birmingham, who later put the cherry on top with an 83rd minute tally.

The additions of Birmingham and Bolin, coupled with the return of the likes of Deeter, Jessica Skerston and Soenksen, made the 2016 squad different than the ones that came before it. Birmingham finished with 20 goals (second most ever by a Concordia freshman) to spearhead an attack that totaled 67 goals. Only one team in program history (2004) has ever produced more goals.

"The name of the game is scoring goals," Henson said. "We had those abilities this year a little bit more than in the past because of the compliment of players that we have and the number of goal scoring options that we had. Once we got into the rhythm of the season they got more comfortable with each other. We weren't just settling for those 1-0, 2-1 wins. We were looking to put games away."

With the help of a solid defensive unit, the Bulldogs broke another program record with a goal differential of plus-47. Led by accomplished senior goalkeeper Chrissy Lind and a backline that typically included center backs Kristin Manley and Leah Shohat and outside backs Jeannelle Condamine and Ashley Martin, Concordia recorded nine shutouts.

Lind finished her career possessing nearly every major career goalkeeping school record, including games (79) and minutes played (6,956), saves (345) and shutouts (26). Her 10 shutouts in 2014 stand as a single-season record. This season she made a career high 104 saves and earned second

team All-GPAC recognition. Lind improved her game rapidly after having less than two years of soccer playing experience prior to arriving at Concordia in the fall of 2013.

"What we talked about throughout her career was the transformation of her game," Henson said. "She had to go from being an athlete to being a goalkeeper. I think she really did that well as she progressed each year. Having a fresh perspective (from goalkeeper coach Dan Ball) helped her blossom this year and have her best season. She fulfilled what her potential was as a goalkeeper. She's set the bar high."

With Lind in goal, this season's journey did not end until a trip to West Palm Beach, Fla., for the opening round of the national tournament. The Bulldogs pushed third-ranked Keiser University, playing them to a scoreless first half. The Seahawks eventually put two on the board in the second half and won, 2-0, ending another storybook year for Concordia, whose consolation prize after the season-ending loss was a trip to the beach.

Lind headlined a senior class that piled up 52 wins over four seasons. That group included three others that started in the national tournament: Megan Brunssen, Manley and Jordan McCoy. As Henson points out, every season and every team is different. But 2017 looks promising for a program that now has a well-ingrained winning culture.

"We're going to miss them," Henson said of the seniors. "They've been the heart and soul of the program for the last four years. Every year you start over. Each team has a new personality. We have to figure out who we're going to be as we move forward. We have a lot of quality players on this team and I think we're going to have a great spring season."





# LIFE OF THE PARTY

By Jake Knabel, Director of Athletic Communications

Concordia women's soccer wasn't invited to the party in 2014 in what amounted to a program changing season that altered the mindset within the locker room. A high school senior at Lincoln Lutheran at the time, Seward native Maria Deeter has a keen sense for the change in climate.

"Before I got here you got the feeling that Concordia wasn't expected to be there," said Deeter, who gave her commitment to the Bulldogs before the 2014 successes. "At the start of this year, I think everyone expected to be in that final game and expected for us to compete and get to nationals. Instead of it being a main goal, it's almost an expectation that we get there. If not, we have to fix things."

Deeter's comments are now representative of a program in the midst of an unprecedented three-year run orchestrated by head coach Greg Henson. An unexpected GPAC tournament title run in 2014 led into another conference championship game appearance in 2015 and then another post-season championship crown in 2016. The last three seasons have produced two national tournament trips, a national ranking as high as No. 16 and a total of 43 wins.

There have been many memorable moments along the way, perhaps none more unforgettable than the thrill that took place on Nov. 10, 2016, when the program staged the GPAC championship game for the first time ever. No member of the team was quite prepared for the crowd and electricity that would greet them that night. Bulldog Stadium roared in ways that shamed the gatherings at the 2014 title game at Hastings and the 2015 championship tilt at Morningside.

When the clock hit zeroes with the scoreboard showing a 3-1 Concordia advantage, droves of fans poured onto the turf. An on-field celebration that lasted well after the final buzzer was just getting started.

"It was crazy," Deeter said. "I remember when we went to Morningside, it was pretty intimidating being on the other side of it. I was really hoping the crowd would turn out, and it blew my mind. It was crazy. I didn't expect that many people to come. It's so fun to be able to play in front of all the people you know and all your supporters. To get the win makes it that much better."

The women's soccer program has been all about blowing away expectations. When Henson took over the program in the summer of 2013, Concordia had been coming off a



mostly forgettable 2012 season that ended with a 6-9-1 record after a brief stay in the conference tournament. Henson saw more than one eyebrow raise when he told players and parents at a 2013 preseason gathering that he believed conference championships and national tournament berths were on the horizon.

Henson didn't stutter when he uttered those words. He said them with the type of conviction that demanded his players buy in.

"That was one of the first things we talked about was competing for conference championships, then getting to nationals and what we had to do to make that happen," Henson said. "There were a few chuckles and a few strange looks on the players' faces like, 'This guy is a little crazy.' Quickly there was the buy in once we laid out what we were going to be about. It was a process. You have to learn how to win, which is definitely a skill and a talent."



There was no championship or trip to nationals in 2013 when Henson's first team went 9-9-2 overall. But the wheels were beginning to turn. The 2013 squad won three of its last four regular-season games (the lone loss was a 1-0 double overtime defeat at Hastings) and then advanced to the GPAC semifinals.

In retrospect, the 2014 team had more substance than anyone realized. A squad picked fifth in the GPAC in the preseason had an army of battle-tested seniors who were gritty, unselfish and unified. Above all else, the senior class, which included the likes of Meredith Hein, Rachel Mussell, Marcie Sindt, Ashlie Sklenicka and Melissa Stine, was heavy on leaders.

A first team all-conference performer at center back for the 2014 group, Mussell (now Sievert) said, "I think that offseason my junior year was really the turning point. We said, 'Hastings is no longer going to be the only team that runs the GPAC.' They're going to have someone that they need to watch out for every season. I think the girls have done that since my senior year on."

An unsuspecting Hastings squad, then 8-0 in conference play, paid a visit to Bulldog Stadium on Oct. 29, 2014. The Broncos had lost to Concordia only once, ever. That fact made this particular night even more special when Mussell and the Bulldogs celebrated a 2-1 upset of 16th-ranked Hastings.

"When we ended the game I think we were all a little in shock because Hastings had always been an opponent we could never get past," Mussell said. "I remember being in the locker room like, 'We just beat Hastings. We just beat Hastings.'"

Something big was happening. Perhaps for the first time in the program's history, it suddenly didn't seem so silly to think that Concordia had a shot at reaching the national tournament. Henson's words prior to the 2013 campaign had become prophetic.

Players quickly came to realize they could trust Henson, a St. Louis native who had previously helped build up the girls'

soccer program at Lutheran High School in St. Charles, Mo. If Henson says something, you can believe it. That quality is one of Henson's biggest strengths and something Mussell picked up on immediately.

"He just tells you how it is," Mussell said. "He wanted to take the program where it was supposed to be. I think it was really cool for him to come in and say, 'We're going to make this happen.' What he said, he did."

Peaking in November has become a hallmark of Henson's teams. Though midseason struggles have at times surfaced over the past three seasons, the Bulldogs have continually righted the ship on their way to the 'ship.

In the same season that Concordia may lose to or draw with a team of lesser talent, it knows it can come right back and beat a team like Hastings. That's been proven. The Bulldogs were disappointed to be a No. 5 seed making a road trip for the GPAC quarterfinals in 2015, but they never sulked or gave up. They blew away Briar Cliff in the first round and then clipped Hastings in a penalty kick shootout in the semifinals. There's now a pattern of November success.

"We have to be playing our best soccer in November," Henson said. "We have to make sure we're focused at that time. The nonconference is kind of an extenuation of preseason. We want to be playing our best soccer come conference time and then take it up another level for the conference tournament. The college soccer season's a grind. It becomes a job at times. Sometimes we've had that midseason lull where things haven't quite gone our way. It's just a matter of using those as learning situations."

What the entire GPAC has learned is that Concordia, no matter the regular-season standings, cannot be discounted come playoff time. The championship trophies that rest inside the Walz Human Performance Complex will serve as reminders of a special time for Bulldog women's soccer.

But it's the people that made it happen. There's pride in the program like never before. Though no longer in Nebraska, Sindt offered her support before the 2016 title game with a tweet that showed her dog decked out in Concordia women's soccer gear. Somewhere, Rachel Mussell and the rest of the 2014 senior class was smiling as a new wave of stars like freshmen Sami Birmingham and Rachael Bolin celebrated with a large throng of students on Nov. 10, 2016.

With that win came a trip to south Florida for the opening round of the national tournament. A moment at practice leading up to the second national championships appearance in three seasons brought a smile to Henson's face. Said one Bulldog player, "Thanks for taking us to Miami." Henson quickly responded, "You guys are taking me."

No longer the party crashers, Concordia women's soccer is the life of the party.



# 2016 HONOR ROLL

## ALL-GPAC

Sami Birmingham (First Team)  
Maria Deeter (First Team)  
Rachael Bolin (Second Team)  
Jeannelle Condame (Second Team)  
Chrissy Lind (Second Team)  
Ashley Martin (Second Team)  
Jessica Skerston (Honorable Mention)  
Esther Soenksen (Honorable Mention)



## SCHOLAR-ATHLETES

Megan Brunssen  
Leah Hoffmann  
Kristin Manley  
Leigha McConnell  
Leah Shohat  
Jessica Skerston  
Esther Soenksen

## NSCAA ALL-PLAINS REGION

Maria Deeter (First Team)  
Sami Birmingham (Second Team)





