

## UMBC Men's Lacrosse Outlook, '09

The UMBC men's lacrosse program is riding the wave of the most successful period in its Division I history. The Retrievers have earned three consecutive trips to the NCAA Tournament and were ranked No. 6 in the nation in the final USILA poll last season.

With eight starters and 25 letterwinners returning to the fold and a highly regarded freshman class in the mix for the 2009 season, expectations are high both inside and outside The Loop.

But head coach Don Zimmerman takes a down-to-earth tone when assessing what his team needs to do to achieve a successful season.

"We are still UMBC," Zimmerman said. "What identifies our program is that we have good kids, scrappy kids, who work hard, are well-conditioned, fundamentally sound and play together as a team. That remains consistent. It doesn't matter about rankings. We need to remember who we are and what makes UMBC lacrosse what it is."

The 2008 season was extraordinary because the team had to overcome adversity nearly every step of the way to earn its status. The chemistry was challenged throughout the course of the season as the Retrievers awaited their new locker room facility to be completed. UMBC opened the campaign with a pair of lopsided losses and the specter of nationally ranked teams such as Denver, Johns Hopkins, Ohio State and Maryland on the horizon.

The Retrievers passed those tests and swept the regular-season games in America East play. In the league championships, semifinalist Binghamton and finalist Albany appeared to be poised to deliver a knockout blow to the team's playoff hopes. But, somehow, the black and gold had a one-goal advantage when the final horn sounded on both evenings at UMBC Stadium.

"We can look back and gain strength from those type of experiences, but that doesn't mean that history will necessarily repeat itself," Zimmerman said. "We've come back in the past, so that can give the kids confidence. But there is a fine line between confidence and overconfidence, so we have to stay on the right side of that line."

There were many questions regarding the 2008 UMBC attack as Coach Zimmerman and his staff had to replace the entire, very productive unit of 2007. However, the new group flourished, led by newcomer **Ryan Smith**. Now a senior, Smith (29g, 14a) quickly established himself as UMBC's primary ball carrier in 2008. The All-American scored three goals in his Division I debut and posted multiple-point games in all but three contests. But he suffered a torn ACL in the first minute of the America East title game and had to watch from the sidelines as UMBC staged the miraculous rally to win that game and also observe the NCAA Tournament game at Virginia.

Smith is expected to be ready when UMBC opens the season at Delaware on Feb. 14. If he is not, junior **Chris Jones** may take on more quarterbacking responsibilities. Like several of his teammates, Jones (9g, 6a) went from a limited role in 2007 to a more prominent one last season and gave the Retrievers solid production. A member of the league's All-Academic team, he showed his versatility on the field, with a three-goal effort vs. Denver and a three-assist night at Binghamton.

Another junior, **Matt Latham** (29g, 4a), gave the Retrievers a solid inside presence in 2008. He earned Second-Team All-Conference honors and finished second in goals per game in conference contests, scoring an average of three per outing. But Latham is being challenged this spring by senior **Eric Gurnsey**. After multiple knee surgeries, Gurnsey is at his healthiest level since coming to his hometown school and is pushing for increased playing time.

Junior **Tim Anderson** and sophomore **Dan Scott** give the team good depth at the position, but a trio of freshmen could really push the incumbents for playing time. Red-shirt freshman **Christian Daly** started the first two games last season before a shoulder injury sidelined him for the rest of the campaign. Highly touted rookie **Rob Grimm** has displayed great natural instincts as an inside attackman, while classmate **Shane Ryznar** is UMBC's lone southpaw and has impressed the coaching staff with his high motor.

Despite the program's tremendous recent success, the 2009 Retrievers have the potential to put together their deepest midfield units in this era. Seniors **Alex Hopmann** and **Peet Poillon** and juniors **Kyle Wimer** and **Maxx Davis** should be featured prominently on the top two lines. Hopmann (13g, 8a), a two-time captain, is the team's active leading scorer with 59 career points, and has scored a school-record nine points in four NCAA Division I Tournament games. Poillon earned All-America honors in his lone season at Ohio State, as he registered 32 goals in 2008. He has fit in extremely well with his new teammates in his return to Maryland after two outstanding seasons at Howard Community College.

Wimer (19g, 17a) is a blue-collar player who may be the team's most well-rounded midfielder. He produced a dozen multiple-point games in his sophomore campaign and posted seven goals and three assists in three postseason games. Davis (10g, 13a) literally burst onto the scene in '08, leaving impressions on top programs as he delivered multiple-point efforts against Johns Hopkins, Maryland, Albany and Virginia.

Displaying the team's depth across all classes, sophomores **Jamie Kimbles** and **Bobby Stockton** are angling to compete on the top midfield units. Kimbles (5g, 2a), a high-energy player, made his mark by scoring the game-winning goal in the America East title game. Stockton (4g, 1a) is starting to harness his tremendous raw athletic ability and attempting to become a more consistent contributor to the squad.

Senior **Mike Burch**, sophomore **Kevin Coholan** and freshman **Rich May** could be plugged in if any of the aforementioned players falter. Burch has the most experience, seeing action in 35 career games, and he also has been utilized in clearing situations. Coholan earned playing time in 12 contests last year, while May stepped in for an injured Wimer in the fall and impressed the coaching staff with his poise.

“We have good depth at midfield, but we must find the right combinations,” Zimmerman said. “We are going to tinker and might continue to do so all year.”

UMBC’s increased depth is no more in evidence than at the defensive midfield position. Juniors **Mike Bryan** and **Jordan Pierce** are the incumbents and seek to reprise their roles in 2009. Bryan garnered 44 ground balls last season, while the hard-working Pierce is very good in starting the Retrievers in transition. Another junior, **J.D. Harkey**, has experience and is one of the team’s better-conditioned athletes, while classmate **Lance Diamond** gives the group a more physical presence. Sophomore **Ryan Shields** has also been well-schooled as a defensive midfielder, and freshman **Travis Crane** has displayed a tremendous desire to start his career in this role.

Taylor Marino attempted 86 percent of UMBC’s face-offs over the past two seasons, and it appears that no one player will step into his former role. Seniors **Matt Curtin**, **Ethan Ledley** and the aforementioned Diamond and Harkey have some collegiate experience, and freshmen **Sean McKenna** and **Justin Radebaugh** were standouts at the prep level. Ledley had an outstanding fall, but the coaching staff is still looking for a player or players to step forward and win the job this spring.

With the ACL injury to tri-captain **Bobby Atwell**, junior long-stick midfielder **Mike Camardo** has been elevated to a team captain. Camardo earned America East All-Rookie Team honors in 2007 and a slot on the all-league second-team last year. He tied Atwell for the team lead with 11 caused turnovers last season and collected 31 ground balls. The Altamont, N.Y., native is always one of the top-conditioned Retrievers, but Coach Zimmerman still feels he can take his game to a higher level. Junior **Sam Eitel** is expected to serve as Camardo’s back-up.

The Retriever defense will be captained by starting goalkeeper **Jeremy Blevins**. He has responded extremely well to his new role as a team captain, and the loss of the vocal Atwell will put more responsibility on his shoulders. Blevins enters his senior campaign as the nation’s leader in victories (32), and he is fifth on UMBC’s all-time saves list with 476. He has started all 47 games as a Retriever, and the 2008 All-American is well-prepared for his final season between the pipes.

Junior **Kevin Kohri** is Blevins’ back-up, while freshmen **Matt Holman** and **Brian McCullough** give the team good numbers in the cage.

On close defense, the loss of Atwell, an All-American, is difficult to endure, but UMBC does have the benefit of experience as a unit. Senior **Kevin Goedeke** and junior **Matt Kresse** return as starters, and both have the physical tools to play solid team and individual defense. Senior **Steve Settembrino** and junior **Brian Schneider** may help comprise a four-man rotation in front of Blevins. Settembrino has played extensively on the man-down unit for three seasons, while Schneider was slated for a prominent role last year before a preseason concussion halted that plan.

Juniors **Tim Eagan** and **Lance Ophof** could muscle their way into more playing time. Eagan, a converted attackman, and Ophof, one of the team's best athletes, should figure prominently on the man-down unit. Freshmen **Tim Shaeffer** and **Aaron Verardi** are excellent prospects who will learn the craft of close defense in their first collegiate seasons.

The Retrievers will be challenged for all dozen weeks of the 2008 campaign, beginning with the Feb. 14 opener at Delaware. UMBC again has a preseason top-15 strength of schedule rating with games against four NCAA Tournament teams from 2008, a list that does not include 2009 opponents Princeton, Towson and Albany. The America East coaches have recently deemed UMBC the team to beat in 2009, as the Retrievers edged the Great Danes for the top slot in the preseason poll.

“Our expectations are high, regardless of how we are ranked,” Zimmerman said. “Yes, we have a lot of returning players and a talented freshman class, but this group hasn't done anything yet. We have to continue to develop the sense of urgency that has been our trademark and allowed us to be successful in the past.”