

## JUNIATA MENNONITE BOYS SOCCER

# Rookie coach goes back to basics with young team

By **KENNY VARNER**

*Sentinel correspondent*

### AT A GLANCE

#### JUNIATA MENNONITE SCHOOL LIONS

Allegheny Christian  
Athletic Association  
Coach: Kurt Wagner

**McALISTERVILLE** — In his first season at the helm of the Juniata Mennonite boys soccer team, rookie coach Kurt Wagner is taking this team back through the basics after losing numerous players from last year's squad.

Half this season's squad will be seventh graders — a tough task for any coach, much less a first-year leader — but Wagner is excited with the chance of building the team.

The team is very young as it fields just a few players that are truly of high school age, and only one upper-classmen.

"We only have three students that are in 10th grade or above," Wagner said. "There are a couple of players I will look for in a leadership role. I am going to make our senior, Jessie Watson, our team captain. Then the 10th graders that are in there will be filling in as captains as well."

Having just taking over the head coaching position, Wagner knew that he lost numerous players but wasn't sure of specific names.

"I am coming in very, very blind to the situation," Wagner joked.

Wagner is pleased with the way his team has responded to the preseason workouts.

"They are improving very quickly. I can say that," Wagner said. "The younger players have been getting a lot of encouragement from the other players in terms of effort. Their running times are coming down. We're not an experienced team but I think this team has a lot of potential."

Wagner said the outlook for the team was an open one, that it was up to the team to decide its goals.

"I really didn't set any goals for the team. I asked them to make the goals," Wagner said. "They came up with that they would like to go at least .500 at home this season. Last year they didn't reach that goal."

Experienced leadership from the veterans is one of the things that Wagner sees as a strength going into the 2012 fall season.

"One of the strengths of this team I would say is the older, more experienced players are basically willing to basically take step back to help the younger player. That is probably the best strength of our team."

There are also some players that have caught the rookie coach's eye during the preseason.

"As far as younger players go, Nehemiah Courtney has done really well. He is a seventh grader. Also, Ashton Martin, I am expecting him to do well. We have a new goalkeeper, Jacob Metz, who is really coming into his own," Wagner said. "Garrett Hicks is a ninth grader and I will be putting him in as a sweeper. All the younger guys are coming along. Frank Allen, I will probably put him at stopper and that leaves Tony and Kalen King, the 10th graders — they all saw significant time last year."



Sentinel photo by BUFFIE BOYER

Members of the Juniata Mennonite School boys soccer team are, from left, front, Sam Taylor, Liam McCommons, Nehemiah Courtney, Ashton Martin and Clayton Smeltz; middle, Jacob Metz, Bradigan Davis, Caleb King, James Fuller and Tommy Allen; back, coach Kurt Wagner, Frank Allen, Garrett Hicks, Jesse Watts and Tony Gehman.

The Lions play in the Allegheny Christian Athletic Association. Wagner sees Northumberland Christian and Meadowbrook Christian as tough teams they will face this year, although Meadowbrook's soccer numbers could be affected by a cooperative program the Northumberland County school entered into that allows its boys to play football at Milton.

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