

U.S. Youth Soccer National Championships excites Jonathon "Yogi" Snider

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Almost three weeks later, former Brownsburg soccer standout Jonathon "Yogi" Snider still seemed overwhelmed by the fact that his club team of five years, the Pike Soccer Club Indy Burn '90 Boys Premier Eagles, won a U.S. Youth Soccer regional championship for the first time. "Ever since we won, I've been trying to think of a way to describe it," said Snider, a 2007 Indianapolis Star Super Team defender, who completed his freshman year at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. "The word that keeps coming (to mind) is it's just unreal. For me personally, this has been just a lifelong dream." And it's not over. The U.S. Youth Soccer National Championships are up next, with play beginning Wednesday in Lancaster, Mass. Snider's club will play a round-robin schedule against the nation's other three regional winners -- teams from Colorado, Georgia and Maryland -- with the two teams atop the standings then playing the title game on July 26.

Can Snider and company win it? "It's really tough to say what our chances are," Snider said, "(but) we're like a tight-knit family, and if we play well, we can beat anyone." Coach Isang Jacob, who has headed the club for nine years, is even more confident. "Timing is everything," said Jacob, who also is in his first year as an assistant men's soccer coach at Penn State. "We've been good the past three years, and good enough to have won it, but the only explanation is we've come (up) short, and I don't think it was the (right) time. I just think that this is the time."

One of the reasons for the team's success is that tight-knit nature. The squad's 19 players came from various high schools -- some from Central Indiana and others from outside the area and even the state. They now play at a variety of colleges. And with summer commitments filling everyone's schedules, the teams can't practice every day. But because they've been playing together for so long, they're "kind of on autopilot" in terms of chemistry on the field, according to Dan Kapsalis, Pike Soccer Club director. "We know each other -- we know what everyone's thinking," Snider said. "Quite honestly, we don't really have to practice with each other anymore. We've played with each other enough the past five, six, seven years that we know what we need to do, and we just go out there and do it." The players also are "extremely quick, extremely fast," Kapsalis said. Snider also pointed to the diversity of skills on the roster, saying, "each player brings something different." The depth and flexibility, too, are strengths, with Jacob saying it can go 18-deep -- defender Brad Foulke was injured at regionals -- and adding, "You can move guys around and still get the same result." The fact that the team is filled with star players but doesn't look it -- "There's no individual in this team," Jacob said -- also has helped the club get farther than ever. Now, it's about them going one more step. Snider certainly hopes that happens. "It's the last year that we can do it," Snider said, "and that we're finally doing it is just unreal, like I said. We could win the national championship, and I could die the next day, and I would be the happiest man on earth."

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