

Tolen aims for national title

Central grad gets back on soccer field

By Drew Bruno Wednesday, July 22, 2009

EVANSVILLE — A recent trip to South Dakota and, this weekend, to Boston has Joe Tolen feeling back at home. The Central High School graduate and Indiana University soccer player's summer club team, the Pike/Indy Burn, won the Under-19 Region II Championship in South Dakota in late June, qualifying it for the US Youth National Championship tournament in Boston beginning Friday. The prestigious event and a trip to the east coast are just added bonuses for Tolen, who is happy to be where he's most comfortable; playing soccer games. Tolen redshirted his freshman year at IU. "Once I got back on the field this summer it's been awesome," he said. "I feel like a kid again almost."

For much of Tolen's childhood, his goal was to one day play soccer for the Hoosiers. After a standout high school career for the Bears, which included All-State honors his senior year in addition to multiple school records, he was awarded with a spot on the team — but as a true freshman, not a spot on the field. "It was definitely humbling for me," Tolen said. "It was great, though, in that it helped me so much to see the game from a different perspective, ... to see behind the scenes and the movement. "Definitely it was hard, especially in beginning," he said of sitting out (he will have four years of eligibility remaining starting this fall). "You don't see results when you don't play in games."

But Tolen is already seeing the results this summer with the Burn. A member of the Evansville Elite soccer club in previous years, he welcomed the opportunity to play with the Indianapolis-based team this year. The result has been a state cup title and, now, a trip to Boston and one of the most prestigious tourneys on the travel soccer circuit. "Even a few months ago I didn't know I'd be playing with them, so it's been a shock," he said of advancing this far. "It's amazing, I never dreamed of playing here." In addition to playing there, he knows his original dream, of playing for IU, still awaits. And while it's been a year of hard work and biding his time, and even as he takes to the field again this summer, Tolen says it's been well worth the wait: "Absolutely, probably even more than I expected," he said. "I always looked at the soccer aspect, but once I got up to school I realized it's about a lot more than just soccer. I've loved the academics and just being on campus and meeting new people. I couldn't have dreamed this."

