

Covenant Christian soccer standout ready for a new role

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It's all about new experiences these days for Covenant Christian graduate Blake Leyden. This summer, Leyden joined the Carmel United club soccer team after eight years with the Pike Soccer Club's Indy Burn. Earlier this month -- after winning state club championships at Pike -- Leyden earned his first national title, helping Carmel United win the boys 17-18 division of the U.S. Soccer Federation Development Academy in Carson, Calif. This fall, things will get especially unfamiliar, as the reigning All-City Player of the Year goes off to play at Butler University. For one, Leyden -- a forward -- must adapt to a different role after scoring 27 goals last season for the Warriors and earning a spot on The Indianapolis Star's Super Team.

"It'll be a new experience not being one of the main guys on the team," Leyden said. "Obviously, no one in college, Division I, scores as many goals as you do in high school. It'll be a lot different not being the guy, not being the captain. But it's a role I'm ready to take on, just trying to contribute to the team." It could take a little while for Leyden to make that contribution. As a freshman trying to break through on a roster filled with underclassmen who helped the Bulldogs reach the NCAA top 25 last season, playing time might be scarce. Not that Leyden is unaware. "(Nearly) all of them have been there longer than I have," he said. "They feel like they have a chance to play too, so it's going to be a real battle."

Butler coach Kelly Findley is optimistic about his incoming freshman's chances. That's not to say Leyden will play right away -- but he could, considering all the talent he brings to the field. "The first thing is he's got a great engine," Findley said. "I think Blake could kind of go all day. He's got good feet, and he's very brave. And I think that's important for a goal scorer. They have to be willing to kind of do anything to get that goal." Findley also called Leyden "a good finisher" who "puts himself in the right spots," adding that his game-to-game consistency stood out during the recruiting process.

But above all, Findley loves Leyden's dedication. "I think he's going to maximize his ability through hard work, his commitment to his teammates," the coach said. "I expect him to improve tremendously, because I think he's the kind of guy -- like I said -- who will maximize everything he's been given." Off the field, Leyden will room with high school classmate Andrew Smith (an incoming freshman on Butler's basketball team). He also is enrolled in business classes, and is considering minors in Spanish and/or philosophy (he said he might be interested in teaching and coaching). In the meantime, though, the focus is on training for his next new soccer experience. "I want to be in shape," Leyden said, "and be able to play at the highest level I've ever played at for the new season."

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