

Indy Burn Eagles feel this is their best chance in regional tournament

Indy Burn Eagles have fallen short at regional tourney

By Paul Shepherd, Star correspondent

Sean McGrath has won seven consecutive Indiana Youth Soccer Association State Cup titles as a member of the Pike Township-based Indy Burn Eagles. Like his teammates, McGrath wants more. The Eagles will try to get more when they compete in the U.S. Youth Soccer Midwest Region II championships Saturday through Wednesday in Rockford, Ill. The collection of Indiana's finest 18-and-under players will face state champions from Michigan, Minnesota and Ohio in bracket play. One team will advance to Tuesday's semifinals for a chance to play in Wednesday's regional championship.

Despite reaching the regional tournament the previous six years, the Eagles never have made it out of their bracket. "We need to get a win," said McGrath, a recent Pike graduate who will attend Notre Dame in the fall. The team is composed of players from high schools throughout the Indianapolis area, including Brebeuf Jesuit, Brownsburg, Carmel, Cathedral, Covenant Christian, Lawrence Central and North Central. Nearly all of the team members will go on to play soccer in college. Two of the team's 20 players graduated last year and already play in college. There's a chance some players will reunite next year as 19-year-olds, which would be their final cutoff to compete in the tournament.



Blake Leyden (right) showed his soccer ball balancing skills to Indy Burn Eagles teammate Jonathon "Yogi" Snider on Wednesday at the Mary & John Geisse Soccer Complex. - Robert Scheer / The Star

Still, the players believe this is their best chance to advance in the regional, as most of them have played together at least two years and many have been together five or more. "We know we've always been able to do it, but we know this year is our last and best chance, so we want to do whatever it takes to win," said Jonathon "Yogi" Snider, a recent Brownsburg graduate who will play at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis with his former high school and current club teammate Taylor Rhodes. The players credit coach Isang Jacob, who has been with the team for its seven state titles, for their development. "It's a very unique program," Jacob said. "We've retained 75 percent of our kids. Most every kid on the team has played for the team for at least two years. "Academically, they're strong kids, as well as good soccer players, and . . . they're fine young men."

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