

Dave Willis has a simple objective for his Northwest soccer team in 2010.

"I expect this team to score a lot more goals and give up a lot fewer goals," he said.

The third-year head coach may get his wish, thanks to an experienced batch of returning players, including sophomore Gino Bono, the Lions' leading scorer last year. "He's improved his skills this offseason by playing with the WC Arsenal club," Willis said. "He has grown mentally and physically; his speed and determination make him a difficult mark for any defender."

The supporting cast includes seniors Matt Strande, Michael Puglisi, Andrew Kaup-Breeden and Dylan Lee.

Northwest opened its schedule by hosting the southern half of the Northwest-Parkway West Invitational. The Lions held off Windsor, 2-1, and blanked Washington, 3-0, with Bono scoring both goals against Windsor and adding one against Washington. Goalkeepers Caleb Day and Joe Kuczka, both seniors, com-

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bined for the shutout of the Blue Jays.

In the final of the southern bracket in the tournament Sept. 3, Northwest defeated Fox, 3-1, behind goals by Bono, Strande, and senior Jake Cobb.

The Lions dropped their next two matches, both at home, 2-0 to Lafayette and 5-1 to Mehlville. As of Sept. 9, they stand 3-2 on the season. That's a positive start, especially considering Willis' team finished 4-16 last year and 0-8 in the Suburban West Conference.

"This team had a very successful off-season," Willis said. "We're returning 18 players from our district roster of last season, so we have a great amount of varsity experience.

"The 2009 team was young, with only three seniors," he said. "They were competitive, but made too many 'lack of experience' mistakes. We went from being a real young team to being an old team really fast.

"This team is full of leaders who work hard. They have their eyes set on winning a district championship."