

The departure of the eight-member senior class leaves the program with several open roles. Gone are the players who scored 77% of the team's 48 goals in 2007. The group also represented 56% of the minutes played, as Florida collected its second consecutive Southeastern Conference title and advanced to the 2007 NCAA Round of 16. Looks like 2008 is a rebuilding year.

Or is it a year of opportunity?

This is an opportunity for talented newcomers and gifted returners to combine on the field and form a Florida team that will challenge for its ninth SEC title and an NCAA berth.

Gator head coach Becky Burleigh, the only coach in the program's 14-year existence, offset the loss of the 2007 seniors with the second-largest signing class in UF's history. The 16 signees rank among the nation's top-10 classes for 2008 and contains many players expected to make immediate contributions.

Five starters, along with a slew of personnel who saw considerable playing time last season and in the spring, are back in 2008. Two of the returners spent part of their spring playing with U.S. National Soccer Youth teams. Florida's minutes leader from the last two seasons is back after earning All-America honors in 2007. Both goalkeepers, who split time in goal in 2007, are back. There will be times when the inexperience shows, but Burleigh is excited about the 2008 Gators' potential.

"A lot of teams will think that because we lost eight seniors, this is a vulnerable year, but I believe this is a year of opportunity for us because we have a lot of fresh, talented newcomers, as well as good leadership returning," Burleigh said. "Anytime there's competition for open positions, it energizes a team and that's exactly what we have this year. The competition has spurred individuals to a higher level.

"The one thing you can never be sure of is how freshmen will react in stressful situations. We have a young, young team and sometimes young teams are naïve and don't know what to be worried about. It really depends on how our team reacts to new situations and adversity. I think the big picture is very bright for us. It depends on how quickly we can get this team to come together."

Preseason training is the first opportunity for the Florida coaching staff to see the freshmen in action. This is the time when players step up to fill various roles.

"What happens in October may be very different than what we see early on. We want to see them on the field and how they mesh together. Having so many options is a great problem. It's not a case of hoping something works out, it's a case of us having a lot of talent and versatility. It's a matter of who settles into what position," said Burleigh.

GOALKEEPER

Both goalkeepers who helped Florida post the nation's fourth-lowest goals-against-average of 0.468 in 2007 are back. **Katie Fraine** is a redshirt sophomore who turned in five solo shutouts last season. She also shared eight shutouts with sophomore **Meghan Berlingo**. Both keepers are tall and athletic, giving Florida a strong presence in goal.

There are two goalkeepers among the freshmen class - Brooke Chancey (Middleburg, Fla.) and Kelsey Kern (Portland, Ore.). Chancey played in goal for St. John's Country Day School's 2007 and 2005 Florida High School Athletic Association (FHSAA) Class 2A championship teams. Her 22 shutouts as a junior tied for ninth all-time on the high school national list. Kern is a three-time 6A all-league selection for U.S. Grant High School and was part of two state championship club teams.

Burleigh says:

"Katie Fraine and Meghan Berlingo did a great job last year for us. We expect them to continue to develop as they both played extensively over the summer. Meghan has very good reaction time and a presence in the box. She had some big saves in big settings for us, while getting lots of experience as a freshman last year. Katie is really outstanding in the box and commands her penalty area. She's one of the nation's strongest keepers in the air.

"Brooke Chancey is a little different than our other goalkeepers. Her strengths are her quickness off the line and experience playing at high levels for her high school and club teams. Kelsey Kern has a powerful frame and strong presence in the box. I feel confident with our situation in goal."

DEFENDERS

Three of the four backline starters from a year ago are now gone due to graduation. The lone returner is junior All-American **Lauren Hyde**. She has led the Gators in minutes played the last two seasons and provides UF with a steady presence at center back.

There are several players vying for the open backline spots. Junior **Tricia Townsend** and sophomore **Nicky Kit** both saw playing time last season, with Townsend starting five matches and Kit starting two. Junior **Caitlin Howard** also saw her minutes grow as the 2007 season progressed.

Several newcomers are expected to challenge for defensive starts. **Kathryn Williamson** (McKinney, Texas) is a past selection for U.S. Youth Soccer Association Olympic Development Program (ODP) national team pool and played on McKinney Boyd High School's 2008 4A State Championship team. Another Texan, **Jazmyne Avant** (Coppell, Texas), was a past member of the U.S. National Youth teams and was named to the past two



Katie Fraine (above) and Meghan Berlingo (below) split time in goal, combining for 16 shutouts during the 2007 season. In the final 2007 national rankings, UF was No. 3 in shutout percentage (0.64) and No. 4 in goals-against-average (0.468).





Lauren Hyde led the Gators in minutes for the second consecutive season, averaging more than 91 minutes per match on the Florida backline. She earned NSCAA All-America third-team honors in 2007.

Dallas Morning News All-Area soccer first-teams.

Sarah Chapman (Silver Spring, Md.), **McKenzie Barney** (Sammamish, Wash.), **Katie Kadera** (Boca Raton, Fla.), **Ericka Miller** (Melbourne, Fla.) could see time on the backline or at midfield. Barney participated in the 2007 National

Development Camp in Stockton, Calif., and is a two-time Washington Class 3A All-State first team selection. Chapman is a 2008 Parade All-American and part of the 2007 and 2008 U.S. U-18 National team player pool. Kadera earned spots on the 2007 Palm Beach Post and South Florida All-Area teams and also was part of Florida's ODP team. Miller's club team, RSL Florida, won the 2008 U-19 Florida state title in May.

Lindsay Williams (Pensacola, Fla.) has been a part of the Florida ODP team since 2003 and member of third-place team at the 2006 National ODP Championship held in Texas.

Burleigh says:

"The backline is our area with the most turnover. We lost Melanie Booth, Shana Hudson and Shelley Lyle, but we return Lauren Hyde who we feel directs the backline. We have our anchor of the backline returning, but we definitely will have new faces. Fortunately, we have returners who have quite a bit of experience playing on the backline. Caitlin Howard, our right back, played in a lot of our matches last fall and spring. Caitlin's played against the top competition we've faced and she just doesn't get beat defensively. I think her offensive game has improved each of the last two years. We're expecting her to step up this year and really take an active role at that position."

"On the left side, Tricia Townsend and Nicky Kit are returning. Both played a lot last year because of Melanie's absence at the World Cup. Nicky and Tricia both have tremendous left feet and are both very attack-minded. Both have the athleticism and quickness to defend as well. They also have playing experience against the top teams we've faced."

"Our open center back position will probably be the one that's most up for grabs."

We have some candidates coming in to hopefully fill some holes. We have several players who have experience playing on the backline with their clubs. Kathryn Williamson is coming off an ACL injury, but is an outstanding center back who gives us more athleticism, is very tough and we expect her to make immediate contributions. Jazmyne Avant and Kathryn were club teammates. Jazmyne can play left side, right side or centrally. She has a lot of versatility and great athleticism. Jazmyne also likes to get into the attack out of the back."

"Sarah Chapman is a really, really gifted distributor, she's confident and smart with the ball. She is another player who we'll see where she settles, but will probably play a major role at some point. She also has experience with the national team, playing right back. She's a good attacker, good defensively, good in the air and is very comfortable on the ball."

"Lindsay Williams is a central defender who has also played center mid, so she has a lot of experience handling the ball. We ask our center backs to do what other teams ask their center midfielders to do, which is handle the ball a lot. She's very comfortable with that role. She could play center back or center mid, but is equally adept at either."

"McKenzie Barney is probably one of the fittest players on our team. She is perfectly suited to play outside back, although she has versatility to play other positions. The outside backs are our team's workhorses and she certainly fits the role very well."

"Katie Kadera has experience playing in the back and could compete for that spot as well, probably centrally. She is good on the ball and a confident decision maker. Ericka Miller can play midfield or defense. She is one of our more fit players, so it's more of a matter of what role she settles into."

MIDFIELD

Two 2007 All-SEC performers who were tapped for U.S. Youth National Teams during the spring return to the Gator midfield. Senior **Ameera Abdullah** earned All-America honors as a sophomore, but the early part of her junior season was slowed by an injury suffered in the third match. She finished the season with a two-goal performance in UF's SEC Tournament final win over then-No. 13 Georgia and is Florida top returning points contributor from 2007 (4 goals, 5 assists, 13 points). Junior **Ashlee Elliott** scored a goal in each of Florida's final three matches of the 2007 regular season and is UF's second-leading returning points contributor (4g, 4a, 12pts). Abdullah was part of the U.S. U-23 National Team that played three matches in Spain in February and also traveled to Germany in May for three matches. She and Elliott spent their Spring Break in England with the U.S. U-23 team, playing a pair of matches versus the England U-23 team. Elliott also was a part of the U.S. U-20 National Team that won the Four Nations Tournament in La Serena, Chile in February.

Senior **Liz Ruberry** has adapted to an attacking midfield position after playing on the backline. Her great understanding of the system gives the Gators a coach on the field. Junior **Jessica Eicken** appeared in 18 matches last season, scoring her first collegiate goal versus USF. She possesses a high fitness level and showed development as a holding midfielder during the 2008 spring season. Another junior, **Angela Napolitano**, made major strides as an attacking midfielder during the spring season. Sophomore **Vanessa Rangel** saw limited time last year. Rangel missed much of the fall and spring with injuries, but is back training with the team.

One freshman isn't a newcomer to the Florida team. **Laura Ray** (St. Augustine, Fla.) graduated early from high school and



Three players on Florida's backline finished their collegiate careers in 2007. Three returners that have backline experience include juniors Caitlin Howard (Left), Tricia Townsend (Middle) and sophomore Nicky Kit. (Right)



Senior Ameera Abdullah is Florida's top returning points contributor, turning in four goals, five assists for 13 points in 2007. She is a two-time All-Southeastern Conference selection and traveled the U.S. National U-23 team to three events in the spring of 2008.

enrolled at UF for the spring 2008 semester, allowing her to play and train with the Gators. As a sophomore at St. Augustine High School, she was runner-up for the Florida Dairy Farmers Soccer Player of the Year after setting a county record of 55 goals.

Tahnai Annis (Zanesville, Ohio) is a two-time National Soccer Coaches Association of America (NSCAA)/adidas High School All-American and picked up Ohio's Gatorade Soccer Player of the Year as a senior. Part of the Region II ODP pool since 2004, Annis is expected to make immediate contributions for the Gators. **Brooke Patterson** (Glenview,



2007 All-Southeastern first-team selection Ashlee Elliott turned in four goals and four assists as a sophomore. She competed for the U.S. National U-20 and U-23 teams in the spring of 2008.

Ill.) is a three-time selection to the Illinois ODP team and has attended national ODP camp. She was part of the 2006 U-20 Joga Bonito world title team at the finals held in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Gainesville native **Allison Bullard** is UF's third local to join the Gators. She earned The Gainesville Sun's Big School Player of the Year honor as a senior. Her club team reached the Florida State Cup semifinals four times since 2003.

Danielle DeLuca (Lake Mary, Fla.) is a four-time all-metro selection while with Lake Mary High School.

A pair of freshmen with the same first name - **Lindsay Thompson** (Bradenton, Fla.) and **Lindsay Williams** (Pensacola, Fla.) - will look for playing time at midfield. Thompson is a three-time player of the year selection by the Bradenton Herald and was a two-year member of the Region III ODP team. She attended U.S. U-18 National Camp in May of 2008. Williams was a part of the Florida ODP team since 2003 and was a member of Washington H.S.'s team that reached at least the Class 4A region semifinals the last three years, including a state semifinal appearance in 2006. Chapman could also play midfield, utilizing her distribution skills.

Burleigh says:

"Ashlee Elliott returns at the holding midfield position. She has totally dominated that position, not only on our team, but among teams that we play. We expect her to really step up as a leader this year. She is respected by opponents not only for her offensive prowess, but also defensive anchor.

"Another possible holding midfielder is Jessica Eicken. She made major strides at the position in the spring. She's excellent in the air - just like her role model Abby Wambach (former Gator and current U.S. National Team member). She is very fit and has really developed her leadership persona. Sarah Chapman also will be evaluated for that position due to her ability to distribute and her strength in the air. It is a position that has options. Anybody who plays centrally for us could also play there, including Lindsay Williams and Lindsay Thompson.

"A player every team respects is attacking midfielder Ameera Abdullah. She really blossomed last year after her injury, came back strong and is somebody who can play anywhere in attacking midfield. She is feared because of her speed, plus her scoring and her technical abilities. She makes good decisions and is a very complete player. Ameera has always been a leader by example, but has emerged as a vocal leader. Both she and Ashlee had opportunities to play with U.S. National Youth

teams last spring and the experience they gained will help further their games. "Liz Ruberry made the transition to attacking midfield from defender. She's very good at knowing what we're trying to execute. This is her final season and her leadership is really going to be important. Liz makes players around her better. She's great at involving other teammates and knowing what we're trying to accomplish tactically on the field.

"Angela Napolitano has been on the verge of a breakout. She scored some terrific goals this spring. Angela's a very strong 1v1 player and she's gaining confidence. I think we're going to see big things from her this year.

"Vanessa Rangel sat out all of this spring with an injury, but we're hoping she'll be back. She's got a great long range shot. She understands things tactically and makes good decisions on the ball. "Tahnai Annis is one of our most talented freshmen. She is small, but very, very tough.



Liz Ruberry is an attacking midfielder for the Gators. Her tactical eye keeps the execution of the Florida game plan in focus.

2008 OUTLOOK

Tahnai is great on the ball, dangerous 1v1 and a great distributor. She will definitely make an immediate impact.

"By graduating early, Laura Ray got extensive playing experience this spring. She proved that she can score goals and be dangerous 1v1, as well as creating combinations with different players.

"We feel like Brooke (Patterson) is a really talented player. She has similar qualities as Stacy Bishop (former Gator All-American) - strong on the ball, good in the air and a good distributor. Allison Bullard is a local Gainesville product known for her work ethic and leadership abilities. We expect those traits to carry through to her college game. Her strengths on the field are her work ethic, plus she knows how to defend and attack. She's not afraid to mix it up.

"Lindsay (Thompson) can play attacking midfielder or as a forward. She has a very dangerous shot that she is not afraid to use. She is a physical presence, strong and fit. I think she will make an impact right away. She is someone who is hard to keep off the field because she's so dangerous offensively. Danielle DeLuca possesses great size and athleticism. She has spent a lot of time improving and developing her technical skills and I think that will translate into getting more opportunities."

FORWARDS

Senior Megan Kerns appeared in every match last season, starting 18. She possesses an accurate shot, but often is looking to bring the Gators around her into play. Kerns has been held back with injuries in past seasons, but enters her final campaign healthy.

Redshirt sophomore Jenny Taylor missed the last two seasons recovering from knee injuries. The 2008 spring season gave Taylor the opportunity to gain some playing time and she showed that she has the ability to score goals.

Three freshmen will vie for playing time on the Gator frontline. Marsha Harper (Denver, Colo.) played on the Real Colorado team that claimed the 2006 US Youth Soccer U-16 National Title. She also was a part of Kent Denver School's 2006 and 2007 3A Colorado State Championship teams, earning the MVP honor for her play in the 2006 state final. Ray played midfield and at forward for UF in the spring season. Thompson also is an option at midfield or forward. As prep players, Ray scored 148 goals, while Thompson turned in 127 goals.

Burleigh says:

"Megan Kerns is one of the most sophisticated players at her position in the country. She really understands the game, makes

great decisions on the ball and always involves players around her. She's very unselfish, but also has a terrific shot. We know she's going to be a strong leader both on and off the field.

"Jenny had a terrific spring. She's had injuries in past seasons, but if she can stay healthy, she can be an impact player. Jenny's very good in the air, very aggressive and not afraid to sacrifice her body to score goals.

"Marsha is a true target player and is very good at holding the ball under pressure. She is excellent in the air and has a dangerous shot. She's coming off an injury and is working hard to gain back her fitness, but has been cleared to practice.

"Lindsay Thompson is so dangerous because of her size, shot and her presence. Laura will provide us a different look as a forward. She's quick, smart and good 1v1. Both Lindsay (Thompson) and Laura could see time at midfield or at forward."

"I THINK THIS IS A YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY FOR US BECAUSE WE HAVE A LOT OF FRESH FACES AND TALENTED PEOPLE COMING IN, AS WELL AS GOOD LEADERSHIP RETURNING. ANYTIME THERE'S COMPETITION FOR OPEN SPACES, IT ENERGIZES A TEAM AND THAT'S EXACTLY WHAT WE HAVE THIS YEAR. THE COMPETITION HAS SPURRED INDIVIDUALS TO A HIGHER LEVEL."

Becky Burleigh
Florida Head Coach

Megan Kerns started 18 matches in 2007, turning in a goal and four assists.

