Students, alumni, and friends of University of Hartford athletics all gathered for the first home game of the season on Al-Marzook Field’s new all-weather turf. The women’s soccer team made it a perfect evening with a 2-0 victory over its opponent, La Salle University. The renovation of Al-Marzook Field marks the first completed project in the university’s Home Field Advantage campaign. Next will come an on-campus baseball field and a relocated softball field—both to be completed in time for the spring 2006 season.

Left: Before the first game, President Walter Harrison, Director of Athletics Pat Meiser-McKnett, and women’s soccer alumni passed soccer balls across the field to waiting members of the current team in a symbolic opening ceremony. Below: Sophomore Vicki Makkas maneuvers for possession of the ball.
To Italy, with Game

*by Jonathan Easterbrook ’87, ’90*

Four wins. Two countries. Countless memories. When the University of Hartford women’s basketball team headed across the Atlantic Aug. 19–30, it marked the first time that a Hawks Division I athletic team has competed abroad. With stays in Rome, Venice, and Lake Como, the group also had brief stopovers in Siena, Verona, and Lugano, Switzerland. On the court, the Hawks were a perfect 4-0, defeating three Italian teams and a Swiss squad.

The adventure began in Rome, where we toured the Colosseum, Spanish Steps, and Trevi Fountain. During a half-day visit to Vatican City, we stared in awe at the beauty of the famous Sistine Chapel and walked through St. Peter’s Basilica and its vast array of museums.

A gondola ride through the water-filled dream world that is Venice was a trip highlight for many. We dodged the pigeons in St. Mark’s Square and had ample time to explore the countless shops throughout Venice.

A steamer boat ride on serene Lake Como produced postcard scenes. After one final dinner and an abbreviated night of sleep, we headed to Milan’s airport for the return flight. The jet lag would vanish in subsequent days, but the memories would not.

Jonathan Easterbrook, radio voice of Hartford Hawks women’s basketball, accompanied the team on their Italian tour. He is also the director of marketing services at the university.

World-Class Soccer Coach Comes Home to Hartford

Dan Gaspar Joins the Hawks on the Soccer Field and in the Classroom

*by Michael Reardon*

Dan Gaspar, who attended the University of Hartford from 1974 to 1977, has enjoyed a long and distinguished career coaching world-class athletes on championship soccer teams in Europe. As one of the top goalkeeper coaches in the world, Gaspar helped lead European Champions FC Porto of Portugal to a World International Championship in Japan this past season.

Given his success on the international stage, it is perhaps surprising to hear him say that his return to Hartford as head men’s soccer coach is a long-awaited achievement.

“Every step I take on campus brings back wonderful memories,” says Gaspar. “My destination was always to come back home, especially to my alma mater. I’m very grateful to the athletics department for their vote of confidence.”

The South Glastonbury, Conn., native made history back in 1993 by joining Sporting Lisbon of the Portuguese First Division and becoming the first American-born citizen to coach full time in Europe. Two years later, he was the goalkeeper coach when Sporting Lisbon won the Portuguese National Cup.

More recently, Gaspar coached the Connecticut Wolves of the United Soccer Leagues’ Pro League from 2000 to 2002. He led the team to a New England Cup Championship in 2002, as well as the Third Division semifinals. Gaspar returned to Portugal in 2003 as goalkeeper coach for SL Benfica, which won the Portuguese Cup Championship.

While a student at Hartford, Gaspar was an outstanding Hawks goalkeeper until a severe knee injury sidelined him during his senior year. A member of the University of Hartford Athletics Hall of Fame since 2002, Gaspar helped lead the Hawks to NCAA Tournament appearances in 1976 and 1977, as well as an Eastern College Athletic Conference tournament berth in 1974. As a Hawk, Gaspar averaged 87 saves and 930 minutes a season, and a career goals-against average of 1.52.

Returning to the University of Hartford has another important meaning for the new coach. After the injury, Gaspar never completed his undergraduate degree. He now calls himself a “student-coach” and plans to finish the bachelor’s in business management he started 30 years ago.

On Sept. 13 the men’s soccer team played its first home game on the newly renovated Al-Marzook Field, and the Hawks posted a 1-0 shutout over Massachusetts. Gaspar recalled that he was a Hawks soccer player when Al-Marzook Field was originally opened in 1977. He said his 2005 team is thrilled to be playing at the new facility.