Heading into the 2004-05 season, the University of Southern Indiana women’s basketball team will have a strong foundation to build upon as it pushes for the top of the Great Lakes Valley Conference standings and a trip to the NCAA Division II Tournament for the eighth time in 11 years.

The Screaming Eagles were 20-10, 12-8 GLVC, in 2003-04 and returned to the NCAA II Tournament after a one-year hiatus.

USI started out last season winning three straight, before suffering its first setback to Bellarmine University.

The Eagles quickly rebounded, winning five of their next six games to improve to 8-2 by the new year.

That streak included a pair of wins in the Torneo Cancun de Basquetbol as well as dominating road victories at Kentucky Wesleyan College and the University of Missouri-St. Louis.

Despite suffering tough losses on the road to the upper division of the GLVC, the Eagles extracted revenge, posting double-digit victories over the University of Indianapolis, Northern Kentucky University, and Quincy University.

Back Row (R-L): Assistant Coach Randa Gatling, Nichole McDonald, Sabrina Brandon, Andrea Engleking, Ashley Green, Jessica Williams, Leah Stormont, Assistant Coach Casey Nations.

Front Row (R-L): Brittaney Oeth, Marshay Jolly, Emily Meier, Head Coach Rick Stein, Jamie Truitt, Jessica Minnick, Tiara Brown. (Not pictured: Kennitra Johnson)

With an NCAA II Tournament berth at stake, the Eagles performed when it counted the most. They won five of their last six games before solidifying their spot in the NCAA post-season with a 90-73 victory over Lewis University in the first round of the conference tournament.

Leading USI’s quest for its third conference title in five years is senior guard Jamie Truitt. Truitt was second in the GLVC a year ago with 16.5 points per game (ppg).

Truitt’s long-range capabilities toppled the opposition as she led the GLVC with a single-season school-record 84 three-pointers.

Because she has just one semester of eligibility remaining, senior guard Kennitra Johnson will have to sit out the first semester—which amounts to the first eight games of the season. Johnson averaged 9.4 ppg and 3.1 assists per game (apg) in 18 games last season.

USI will look to three players to fill the role of point guard with junior Tiara Brown, sophomore Leah Stormont, and freshman Nicole McDonald contending for the spot early in the season.

Brown is transferring to USI from Lake Land College where she averaged 12.3 ppg and 5.0 apg during her sophomore campaign. Stormont, who proved to be a strong defender, showed that she could handle the job during her freshman season with the Eagles.

McDonald was an All-Area and All-Conference performer as a senior at Portage High School.

Freshman Brittaney Oeth will provide depth at the guard position after leading Mt. Vernon High School in scoring as a junior and senior.
Two of USI’s biggest losses from last season occupied the forward positions. Last season’s senior class—Shajuan Lindsey and Shannon Wells—accounted for 30.6 percent of USI’s offensive output and 28.9 percent of USI’s rebounding output. Lindsey led the team with 5.3 rpg and Wells was USI’s second-leading scorer with 12.3 ppg.

Junior Ashley Green will bring added experience to the USI frontcourt. Green averaged 7.8 ppg and 4.7 rpg in 2003-04 and had a breakthrough game last season against Wayne State University, when she recorded a career-high 17 points and 10 rebounds.

Look for freshman Marshay Jolly to provide a spark at the guard/small forward position. Jolly, who averaged 10.8 ppg and 4.6 rpg as a senior at Merrillville High School, is an athletic player who scores, rebounds, and plays solid defense for the Eagles.

The Eagles will enjoy more flexibility in the paint as senior forward/centers Andrea Engleking and Megan Nelson will be joined by two newcomers and one freshman.

Engleking showed good signs during her first year with the Eagles, averaging 6.8 ppg and 3.8 rpg. She was named to the Cancun de Basquetbol All-Tournament team after averaging 15.0 points and 8.0 rebounds during the two-game stretch.

Nelson averaged 5.3 ppg and 3.9 rpg during her junior season, but averaged 8.0 ppg and 6.3 rpg in USI’s last nine games.

Freshman center Emily Meier sat out the 2003-04 campaign with a shoulder injury after averaging 13.3 ppg and 5.4 rpg as a senior at University High School in 2002-03.

USI also expects junior forward Sabrina Brandon and freshman forward/center Jessica Minnick to be key factors in the paint. Brandon averaged 11.6 ppg and 5.3 rpg at Parkland College in 2003-04, while Minnick averaged 20.7 ppg and 9.2 rpg as a senior at Carmi-White County High School.

The 2004-05 campaign tips off with Head Coach Rick Stein needing just two victories to reach 100 career wins. Stein, along with Assistant Coach Randa Gatling, is entering his sixth season at the helm of the women’s program.

USI starts the season on the road with the University of Alabama-Huntsville before returning home for a four-game homestand. The Eagles will have two three-game homestands and a pair of two-game homestands before closing the season with four straight on the road.