The 2007 Middlebury Soccer Campaign began full of promise and excitement with the opening of a brand new turf field. The inaugural game on the field proved to be a convincing 2-0 win over the Connecticut College Camels. Winning and shutouts would remain common themes throughout the rest of the season. The Panthers went on to have their most successful season ever, compiling an 18-2-2 record en route to NESCAC and NCAA Championships. The only blemishes on the season came with a 3-1 loss to an Amherst team they would later beat in the NESCAC championship game, and a 2-1 double overtime loss at Keene State.

The keys to this team’s success started in the cage with junior goaltender Brian Bush. Bush posted a .32 goals against average, the third best in the nation. The panthers also produced an astounding 17 shutouts on the season, living out the cliché that the other team can’t win if they can’t score. Bush garnered many accolades for his efforts, including a First-Team All-American selection and a feature in Sports Illustrated’s “Faces In The Crowd” section.

In order to win all those games, someone had to score for the Panthers and, more often than not, that man was Casey Ftorek. The senior forward re-wrote the record books. Ftorek finished the season with a staggering 17 goals and 39 points, which broke his own school record he set the previous year. He also racked up 73 points in his career at Middlebury, placing him fourth all time on the school’s list. Ftorek was a necessary component to the team, and was awarded First-Team All-American honors.

In between Bush and Ftorek, senior Alex Elias and junior Baer Fisher controlled the midfield. Both were excellent two way players whose defensive contributions were just as crucial as their offensive production. Elias earned First-Team All-NESCAC and First-Team All-American honors. Fisher, who received Second-Team All-New England honors, led the panthers in assists and also proved to be clutch with two game winning goals.

Bush had a lot of help producing those shutouts, none more important than Andrew Germansky. The defense was arguably one of the best ever in Division III history, let alone Middlebury. The defense didn’t allow a goal the entire NCAA tournament and only one at home the entire season. The senior was a First-Team All-NESCAC selection and Second-Team All-American.

Coach David Saward, who has been with the panthers coaching for 29 years, enjoyed his most successful season ever. Despite all the talent on the team someone had to put it all together, and Saward did this masterfully. The team ended the season on a nine game winning streak, which included double overtime games in the NESCAC and NCAA semifinals, and a National Championship win in PKs. The team’s success earned Saward National Coach of the Year honors.

A measure of a truly great team is how it responds to adversity and it’s ability to stick together and win important close games. The 2007 team embodied these qualities like few others in the history of the college. In the NESCAC semifinal against Williams, the team gained it’s first experience with postseason PKs. After a 1-1 tie in regulation, the Panthers dominated the shootout. Bush made two saves and another rang off the crossbar for the Ephs, and the Panthers blanked Williams 3-0. In the NESCAC Final, the Panthers would avenge their early season loss and win a highly contested battle 1-0.

The NCAA tournament run could be described as nothing less than magical. The Panthers had little trouble advancing to the Final Four, winning in the first three rounds 5-0, 3-0, and 2-0. The 3-0 win came over a Williams team that the Panthers had struggled with not too long ago. However this Panthers team was firing on all cylinders and coming together at the right time. The Panthers traveled to the Final Four at Disney’s Wide World of Sports confident, with one goal in mind.

The Semi-Final game against Loras was dominated by defense, and ended after double overtime at 0-0. Middlebury continued it’s PK success, with Bush again saving two out of three shots. Germansky, Stephen Hart, and David LaRocca all converted, allowing Middlebury to advance with a 3-1 PK victory.

Trinity of Texas played Middlebury to an even closer game in the championship. Once again, regulation ended without a goal being scored for either side. Middlebury was faced with the familiar situation of PKs yet again. Ftorek, Germansky, and LaRocca all converted for the Panthers, and going into the fifth round the teams were tied at 3-3. Trinity’s shot hit the crossbar, setting the stage for Brandon Jackson to be the hero. Jackson seized the moment and scored to make the Panthers National Champions.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XHVCUxbEK8w>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QZ0kOXZoB_A>

<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/sports/menssoccer/archive/2007-2008/news/node/115973>

<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/sports/menssoccer/archive/2007-2008/news/node/115971>

<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/sports/menssoccer/coach>

<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/sports/menssoccer/archive/2007-2008/news/node/115969>

<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/sports/menssoccer/archive/2007-2008/news/node/116005>

<http://www.middlebury.edu/athletics/sports/menssoccer/archive/2007-2008/news/node/116003>

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