League title and two consecutive national tournaments. But even as public accolades accumulated, Fucito's injuries grew worse. He has suffered a separated shoulder, a slipped rib, back spasms, and compartment leg syndrome (swelling that results from unhealed bruising). He has also had surgery to remove an extra ankle bone. He once spent a night in the cardiac ward after a ball hit his sternum hard enough to make his heart bleed. His hip had bothered him for six months when he finally decided to go in for surgery.

These injuries have not been freak accidents. Fucito admits that they are, at least in part, a consequence of how aggressively he plays. His greatest weapon is his speed, and he likes to run directly at defenders, the ball at his feet, rather than wait to receive a pass in the penalty area. When defenders “can’t keep up with me running,” he says, “they tend to kick me or drag me down in some way to try and stop me.” He separated his shoulder when he charged a goalie who was coming out to collect a loose ball. Fucito poked the ball into the net, but the goalie, barreling in a step behind, sent him flying. At only five feet, eight inches—small for a forward—he takes his share of abuse,” says Jamie Clark, Welch head coach of men's soccer. “But he probably gives out as good as he gets. You won’t find anyone physically stronger.”

His hip problems are not the result of a single, dramatic play. In soccer, the torque necessary for rifling a hard shot places an immense amount of pressure on the hips. Years of twisting his body before his bones had developed fully made them grow out of shape. His doctors had to repair torn cartilage, grind down a bump on his femur, and reshape his hipbone. “You never used to see these [kinds of injuries],” says Barlow (who left Harvard over the summer). According to her, young athletes used to play a different sport every season, giving their bodies a break from the particular rigors of each. But Fucito began playing soccer early (“as soon as I could walk”) and, after giving up baseball (he broke his wrist twice), devoted himself entirely to the beautiful but often brutal game.

As a young speedster in Westford, Massachusetts, Fucito (pronounced Jew-sey-toe) caught the attention of John Kerr, then head coach for both Harvard (he moved to Duke after the 2007 season) and the Boston Bolts club team. Fucito started for the Bolts during high school, then decided to continue playing for Kerr at Harvard. Because all the teams in the Ivy League are more or less evenly matched, says Fucito, each game is a “hard-nosed battle rather than a game of pretty soccer.” Without a year-ending tournament, a single loss can dash a team’s title hopes. In these conditions, Clark says, winning is often a matter of “finding one or two players who can pull you through tough games.”

It was Fucito’s toughness that impressed Clark when he was still a candidate for the head coaching job. “Mike was one of the guys I interviewed with,” he recalls. “He was one of the reasons I knew I wanted to coach here.” Clark had seen Fucito’s statistics but hadn’t known about the young striker’s dogged, competitive personality.

“I hate sitting out more than anything,” says Fucito. (After his night in the cardiac ward, he showed up the next day expecting to practice.) The hip operation in May left him unable to lie completely flat or sit up, but he went from being unable to pull on his socks to running almost full speed in three months. “He jumps back on the field so quickly,” Clark marvels. Fucito dreams not only of returning to top form in time for the season, but also of receiving an invitation to the Major League Soccer Combine, where professional coaches scout draft prospects.

“I think he’s pushing harder than anyone I’ve ever seen,” says Clark, not only to come back, but also “to make it a special season.”

—PAUL GLEASON

Fall Preview

Football

The footballers hope to repeat last season’s winning record (8-2; 7-0 Ivy), which culminated in head coach Tim Murphy’s fourth Ivy League championship in 14 years on the job. Though the team lost nine starters to graduation, 22 return to defend the title. A prospectus of the 2008 season appears at gocrimson.com.

Men’s Soccer

Head coach Jamie Clark is green, but his team, which was 12-4-2 (5-2-0 Ivy) last year, is not. Clark starts his first season at Harvard, and first as head coach, with nine of 11 starters returning from a team that went to the first round of the NCAA championships in 2007. Follow devastating scorers Michael Fucito ’09 (above) and André Akpan ’10 (see “Pow- ers of the Pitch,” September-October 2007, page 74) at gocrimson.com.

Women’s Soccer

The netwomen look to improve on last year’s 10-6-1 (3-4-0 Ivy) record with the assistance of sophomore sensations Katherine Sheeleigh and Gina Wideroff. The young team welcomes eight new players even as it retains all 11 starters from the 2007 campaign.