

# Taking it to the pitch

*Mueller  
marvelous  
for PG  
Croatia*

By CHRIS SIMNETT

Free Press staff writer

Tien Mueller knows how to score goals.

The 23-year-old striker for Prince George Croatia/Fred Walls in the North Cariboo Senior Soccer League was second in team scoring last season, but exploded during the play-offs.

Now, he's expected to lead Croatia, arguably the strongest team in the NCSL this season, in goals scored and to a title.

"I'm really looking forward to this season," says Mueller, who moved to Prince George from Terrace in 1986. "We've got some good new players this year."

Remco Insulation, last year's cellar-dwellers, folded during the off-season. While most of Remco's players went over to the Honda North/Citizen team, two went to Croatia.

Both Jacob Jensen and John Williams are expected to contribute to an already talent-laden squad.

But Mueller is still going to be the go-to guy.

"Tien, he is what you call a 21st Century player," says Croatia coach Nick Vukovic, who played a bit of semi-pro soccer in his

native Croatia when he was younger. "You can compare him to a guy like Maradona. He can play any position."

Vukovic expects Mueller to rise up and assert himself as one of the premier players in the NCSL this season.

"He can stop guys from scoring right on the goal-line and he can go down and score at the other end," says Vukovic. "He knows the game very, very well."

Mueller's natural position is striker, but with Croatia's four-four-two system, he ends up playing more of a thinking position.

Vukovic says with Jensen up front, Mueller is more valuable to the team as the



**Tien Mueller should prove himself as one of the top players in the North Cariboo Senior Soccer League this season.** CHRIS SIMNETT/FREE PRESS

second-striker, a goal-scorer who can set up plays as well.

"The kid is something else, no doubt about it," says Vukovic. "I would be surprised if he doesn't win a scoring title this year and becomes one of the top players in the league."

Mueller, in his typical shy/humble manner, plays down his importance to the team.

"This year it's more of a team thing," he says. "We're stronger this year and we have more of a will to win this year." Croatia had an excellent season last year, winning the league title. But they fell short in the playoff finals

against Quesnel Begbies/Champs Pub.

"We still had a good season," says Mueller. "You can't worry about one game. That's behind us now."

Despite the loss to Quesnel, Mueller played some of his best soccer that afternoon. He's hoping to carry that on over to this season.

"I just try and stay open and capitalize on chances," he says. "I'm a striker. I'm always around the net and get a lot of goals. I just keep

plugging."

Mueller learned how to plug in Kamloops, where he played a season for the University College of the Cariboo Sun Demons in 1992. He and Croatia teammate Tom Brkich led the team all the way to the national championship that year.

"This (NCSL) is competitive," says Mueller. "But it's a lot different than college.

"There, everybody has to earn a spot every game. Here, you don't have to do that."

Mueller credits college with helping him become the player he is today.

"It was an experience," he says. "It was nice to be there. I was in the best shape of my life then. I played soccer five days a week there. Here I only get three or four days of soccer."



Tien Mueller



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