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Photos by Tracy Dreslinski  
Auburn Hills Oakland Christian junior Caleb Stanko prepares to take on two defenders during a game earlier in the season. The Lancers were 4-0-1 overall, 1-0 in the Michigan Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, at press time.

## A lesson in hard work

### OCS new head soccer coach Caleb Combs stresses work ethic, leadership

By Sue Teggart  
C & G Sports Writer

AUBURN HILLS — During an Aug. 18 practice, Caleb Combs admitted he was a bit apprehensive when he signed on as the soccer new coach of the Auburn Hills Oakland Christian boys team.

“I was actually at a (youth bible) camp on Friday (Aug. 14) when I got the call that they needed me to be the coach,” Combs said. “I said, ‘I will be there Saturday ready to roll.’ I wasn’t hesitant. I found out Sunday that we had three games Saturday (Aug. 22), so I kind of freaked out then.”

As it turned out, there was no reason to “freak out” about anything, as the team has jumped off to a 4-0-1 overall record at press time, 1-0 in the MIAC.

Combs is a familiar face at OCS, as he also serves as the assistant coach of the varsity basketball team. He took over the soccer reins from Dick Harding, who led the Lancers for the past five years and amassed a 91-27-7 record.

“Knowing that I had big shoes to fill right away — and because we had won a state championship last year — and then jumping in knowing I only had five days before our first scrimmages, I was just like, ‘OK, here we go,’” Combs said.

Combs said he plans to use the experience he gained playing collegiate soccer at Grace Bible College — a National Christian College Athletic Association (NCAA) Division II school — to coach the Lancers.

“I will draw from my experiences, take some of the drills we did, but ultimately, it goes back to the work ethic,” Combs said. “I wasn’t the most skilled player, but I wanted to outwork my opponent, and I was going to beat you to the ball.”

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Combs' philosophy for success is grounded in hard work.

"Skill can only take you so far," he said. "You've got to outwork your opponent in every facet of the game, whether that be endurance or physical play.

"(Coach Harding) left a legacy of winning, but I want teams and coaches to see that these guys are working hard no matter what the score is," Combs continued. "They're not going to quit for the entire game."

Combs said he expects his returnees to carry on the winning culture. After graduating seven key players from the state championship squad, Combs said juniors Caleb Stanko and Mitchell Dale, and seniors Chris Perrin and Cameron Johns — all of whom shared in last year's success — would be the backbone of the team.

"We don't have that many starters coming back, but we have a lot of young players who are skilled," said Stanko. "If we can just work on our fitness and bond as a team, we'll be all right."

"I expect a lot out of them — to carry the load after so many seniors graduated — all are very skilled," Combs said about his core of veteran returnees. "About half the guys (on the squad) were a part of the state championship team, so they know how to win the close games, the high-pressure games."

Fans can catch the Lancers in action next at 4:30 p.m. Sept. 8 against Allen Park Inter-City Baptist at home.

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