The Highline men’s soccer team will have to recruit some defenders if they hope to defend their NWAC West Division title.

Despite having 10 returners for next season, Highline is losing their starting back four and their goalkeeper.

Highline’s back four consisted of right back Tyler John, midfielder Alex Castillo, defender Colton Ronk, and midfielder Isidro Prado-Huerta. Highline’s keeper was Grayson Raffensperger.

All four players are moving on to play at four-year universities.

Prado-Huerta was one of the star players on the team last season, receiving the honor of West Region MVP and leading the team in assists with 11.

“Last year I had nine freshman starters, and several key players who all came back,” Highline Head Coach Steve Mohn said. “I didn’t have to sign or bring back a lot of players. That’s a lot of the reason I like it though. The goal is to help these guys move on and play soccer and get a degree.”

Given Highline is losing some key players, Mohn now has to assess his roster and figure out what is best for the team in the recruiting field.

“Losing the starting back four and the goal keeper, the majority of people we have coming back are attackers. A big emphasis [recruiting] is making sure we’re solid defensively.”

This past season, the T-Birds were denied a chance at a championship repeat, losing to Chemeketa in a shootout in the NWAC quarterfinals.

“We did have a good season going into that point,” Mohn said. “Chemeketa had a playoff game under their belt and we had a bye, but last year we also had that bye. Maybe it was some of the guys took it a little bit for granted, maybe it was just the mindset that we were going to win it again.

Highline finished with a record of 12-2-1 while leading the NWAC in goals scored with 59 and goals allowed with 13 on the year.

The T-Birds were also the top ranked team throughout much of the season in the NWAC coaches poll.

“Unfortunatley we came up a little bit short,” Mohn said.

For next season, the team’s goal still remains to win a championship.

“We set the goals to make the playoffs, win the division and win the championship. That’s my goal,” Mohn said.

Mohn said that although finding new players to help fill the voids left by starters is a difficult process, he has confidence that the new players will fit in nicely with his returners.

“We’ve signed 10 players to the NWAC letter of intent,” Mohn said. “I’ve got about five who have committed without signing a letter, [I’m] still recruiting some kids to finish out the roster. I think with the returners and the new guys coming in it will be a good mesh to get us in the right direction.

“All the guys I’ve signed are talented players, they’ve shined in high school. Early on we have to find a way to mesh and be on the same page.”

Mohn also stressed academic performance on top of on-field performance for his new recruits.

“They got to do well academically and on the soccer field in order to get a shot at the next level,” Mohn said.

Being a former player at Highline and eventually transferring to UW in his college playing days, Mohn knows how to connect with players on a relatable level, which also benefits him in the recruiting process.

“I like coaching here because this is where I grew up,” Mohn said. “The majority of the players we have want to play two years here and move on to the next level. If they have questions in the soccer aspect, I can give them perspective of how far they can go.”

Mohn is also the head coach of the men’s soccer team at Mt. Rainier High School, giving him a direct pool of players to recruit to Highline.

“There’s some guys coming in who I have talked to for a couple of years,” Mohn said. “There’s some kids coming in from Mt. Rainier so they know me.”

Mohn said the recruiting process for a two-year college is different than recruiting to a four-year university.

“The recruiting process is different,” he said. “We get guys through academic finances. [Also when] the player isn’t quite mature enough so they have to stay local. Our coaching staff and myself, we go out and watch club and high school games and we try to talk to players and get them on recruiting trips here, get them here and show them around a little bit. Having a good track record is definitely beneficial in the recruiting platform.”

Regardless of where Mohn gets his new recruits or how many returners he has from the previous season, he emphasized that the team coming together will be key.

“Team chemistry is a big factor to be successful on the field,” Mohn said.

Mohn said that an interesting experience for next year’s team will be going on the summer team-bonding trip, which in the past has been beneficial for members of the team to get to know one another.

“Every year we go on a team-bonding trip,” Mohn said. “It’s cool to see it all develop, that’s one of the pieces I really enjoy. It’ll be fun, it’s one of my favorite times at the beginning of the year.”

On top of the trip, Mohn said that the NWAC friendlies that take place in August will give the team some time to get experience playing with one another on the field.

“It’s a good time to assess where we are, how well we’ve done as coaches. We have three games [in the preseason]. Everybody is going to have some playing time,” Mohn said.

That playing time is going to be key for a T-Birds team that hopes to make a run toward another championship. Mohn said he only wants to recruit the players who are top notch.

“Every year we try to recruit the best possible players and have them mesh in with our returners to give us the best opportunity to win the division and win the championship,” Mohn said.

The bigger picture and prospects for next year usually becomes more clear for Mohn into the summer, however.

“Usually recruiting winds down in mid-summer and that’s kind of when you look at your roster and you can tell whether or not you have a good shot for next year,” Mohn said.

Mohn said that the good reputation of the Highline soccer program is what motivates him to keep driving the team forward on the recruiting front and on the field.

“The platform was laid pretty well for by the last coach, Jason Prenovost,” Mohn said. “I wanted to keep the success going.”