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The University of Maryland women's soccer team is a work in progress but it is proving that after hitting rock bottom, the only way to go is up after concluding a historic season.

"A friend of mine told me about the scale," said Maryland women's soccer coach Ray Leone, "You lose big. You lose close. You win close. You win big. That's the four levels. So we were losing big. We lost close last year and this year we won close."

While the outcome did not favor the Terrapins in the first round Big Ten Tournament match against No. 3 seed Michigan on Nov. 3., Maryland continues to see improvement. For the first time since 2013, Maryland was able to make a postseason run and finish with a winning record of 9-7-3.

"It's hard to do something first anymore in this world," Leone said after qualifying for the first Big Ten Tournament in program history, "Us joining the Big Ten Conference, [this team] can put their name in the books forever, that they were the first team to get to the tournament. That matters."

Leone took over the program in January 2016 after Jonathan Morgan was asked to resign at the end of the 2015 season, where Maryland won only one conference game and finished last in the Big Ten, describing year one, the first level on the scale, as the "highest struggle you can imagine."

"I was practicing with nine players," the coach said. "I played a game with no subs. I borrowed a couple seniors... We literally played a game with 11 players."

The news of the coaching change came before high school recruits signed their National Letters of Intent so all six decommitted leaving Maryland with 12 returning players, including those who were injured. Needing at least 11 to field a team, Leone scrambled to build the roster. He was able to nab six transfers and several other athletes--including the backup goalie for the lacrosse team and the manager for the men's lacrosse program.

"I took it as a positive," he said. "I got to really work with those kids. They trained really hard... they were good kids. They wanted to get better so we gave it a go."

They hardly had any time to play together and it showed. Leone's 3-15-1 debut season with Maryland saw the fewest number of wins since 1989.

"I was really proud of the effort, but effort doesn't get you there sometimes," Leone said. "You still have to have experience, depth, more special talent that can score goals."

After spending four seasons together, struggling and growing, Leone and the team have worked to make small, consistent strides. Maryland has increased its number of goals, shots per game

and shots on goal. At the conclusion of the 2019 season, Leone is seeing off that first class he scrounged together.

Despite the departure of senior goalkeeper Erin Seppi and six other seniors, Maryland will return eight starters for the upcoming season and will add eight freshman to the roster.

“I’m hoping that this historic season was just scratching the surface of what we will do in the future at Maryland.” said Catherine DeRosa, a high school senior who is committed to Maryland.

According to TopDrawerSoccer, the Pennsylvania midfielder and the incoming class of 2024 are all standout players in their home states. This recruiting class also boasts nationally recognized players who have earned All-American honors.

Leone has high expectations for the incoming class. He thinks the program will be the deepest it has been in years, but Leone is most excited about having a deep bench of hungry underclassmen.

Maryland’s underclassmen contributed hugely to the strides made by the team this season. In 2019, redshirt sophomore Alyssa Poarch lead Maryland with 19 points and 8 goals scored. She ranked sixth in both categories in the conference and was named as a second team All-Big Ten selection—the highest selection for a Maryland player since entering the Big Ten in 2014.

With Poarch and other veterans setting the tone for the newcomers, Leone said a healthy, competitive, team atmosphere will push everyone to be the best they can be.

“My work is definitely cut out for me after the season they had,” DeRosa said. “I’m willing to do whatever it takes to break the starting lineup as a freshman.”