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Senior Center Thor Solverson A Sight For Sore Eyes

Solverson returns to the UIC line-up after missing the 2000-01 season as a medical redshirt.

Jan. 2, 2002

There has been plenty of hype surrounding the University of Illinois at Chicago men's basketball team and the arrival of sophomores [Martell Bailey](#) and [Cedrick Banks](#).

UIC head coach [Jimmy Collins](#), however, is even more excited about the return of fifth-year senior center [Thor Solverson](#) to the line-up after missing a majority of the 2000-01 season.

"Having Thor back is the stabilizer that we need to be successful in this program," Collins said.

Solverson suffered a second-degree sprain of his right MCL, a lateral tibial plateau bruise and a medial meniscus tear in the fourth game of the season against Northern Illinois.

"It was weird, when it first happened, it wasn't that painful," Solverson said. "It just kind of felt like cracking a knuckle on your finger, it felt like I cracked my knee.

"It was more scary because I knew my knee was not supposed to make that noise or bend that way."

The Flames struggled to a record of 11-17 overall last season, that included five losses of less than three points. Collins feels that Solverson's presence could have been the difference maker in those ballgames.

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Senior Thor Solverson is averaging 8.7 points per game for UIC this season.

"It certainly means at least six more wins," Collins said. "Having Thor back is just a blessing in disguise."

Solverson appreciated the compliment that Collins' paid, but the 6-11, 258 pounder, is looking towards the future rather than last season.

"It's nice to think I would have had something to do with that," Solverson said. "But I'm not going to worry about last year, that's in the past and there's nothing I can do about that."

"I'm just trying to focus on this year and get ready to win some games," Solverson continued. "We've had enough sub-par seasons so we're trying to get better and get some 'W's."

There was, however, doubt if Solverson would make his return for his fifth season. The Lake Zurich native was on pace to graduate, he had to go through rehab and wasn't sure if the NCAA would grant him an extra year of eligibility.

"I saw tears in his eyes when he thought he was going to lose that (redshirt) year without being able to participate," Collins said. "He worried a lot, because you never know what the NCAA is going to say."

"He worried that he wouldn't have a chance to accomplish the things that he wanted to accomplish on the floor," Collins continued. "Thor is a winner and to go down like he did and to see the team not win as much as we could have had he been there, really hurt him."

Solverson, however, would not go down without a fight.

"I was on pace to graduate last year, but I knew I was going to come back this year, so I picked up a double-major in management and finance," Solverson said. "After about three weeks to a month of rehab, I realized that I wouldn't be able to come back at full capacity until real late in the season and I didn't want to end my career like that."

"I have a lot of people I came here with like [Jordan Kardos](#), [Cory Little](#) and TJ Mixson," Solverson continued. "We all came at the same time, and if I would have graduated last year, I would have missed out on all this opportunity to play with them as well as the new guys."

So Solverson went through his rehabilitation with a reckless abandon.

"It was long and pretty tough," Solverson said. "It was painful for the first month and a half, but I got through it fine."

"The hardest thing, probably, was getting back into shape once I was able to move and run again."

Solverson is happy to be involved in this, his bonus season, as he and the Flames have already tallied wins over respected programs like Indiana State, Texas A&M and Southwest Missouri State.

"I'm pretty excited," Solverson said. "This is the first time we've had this many seniors since the year we went to

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the tournament and it's obvious we have more skill on this team than we've had in a long time.

"The biggest challenge is getting the team to play together and to play as one," Solverson continued. "We need to focus on the common goal, which is winning."

Collins believes that Solverson sets a good example for his younger players.

"Thor provides great leadership," Collins said. "He does all the things we ask of him. He stays extra to shoot. He rebounds the basketball. He leads by example as well as more in a verbal manner this year."

"They know they can lean on him in games to score for them, but not only that, they can go to Thor and talk to them and Thor will share knowledge of the game, of the coaching staff and of the league and the players that they will face."

Solverson equates his leadership role with having a sense of urgency.

"I'm a senior and it's my last chance so I think it's a little more urgent, and this is my last chance to really do anything about it," Solverson said. "I feel more confident saying stuff this year."

"I'm confident in what I do and what I know, so I'm not afraid to tell people how to do something."

There was a point in Solverson's career where he sought the senior leadership that he is dishing out to the younger players.

"We got into the gym when he was a freshman and he couldn't catch the ball," Collins said. "He had difficulty dunking, the ball would slip through his hands, he'd turn around for a jump shot and he'd almost knock the backboard down."

"The thing he has always been is aggressive," Collins said. "In our very first Midnight Madness, he dives on the floor several times for loose balls, he takes charges."

"Thor has always been aggressive in that manner," Collins continued. "People equate athleticism with how high you jump."

"Athletes can run, jump and real athleticism comes from the mind and Thor has always had that. He's been strong mentally as far as his approach to anything."

"But those first few weeks, I said 'you can teach a guy how to play, but you can't teach him to be 6-11 and aggressive like this guy is.'"

Collins will clearly miss Solverson not only on the court, but off the court when he graduates in May of 2002.

"I tell anybody that will listen that I have never, not only here, but at Illinois as well, have never had a young man who No. 1 is more coachable," Collins said. "I've never had a man who's developed to the point to where's he developed athletically and I've never had a man who does his classwork to the degree that he's done it."

"Thor has been a pleasure to coach and when he leaves, which I really hate thinking about, it will take a very, very strong student-athlete to come and replace him."

University of Illinois Chicago Men's Basketball

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