

Captain's Corner: Merrill, Ponsoll, Curren to lead Lions to the hardwood this year

by Justin Jennings
staff writer

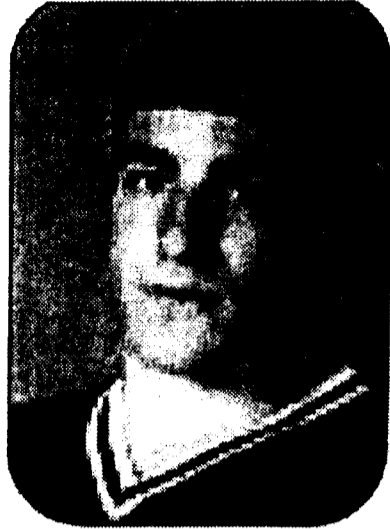
As the pre-season comes to a close and the start of the regular season rapidly approaches, the Behrend Lions men's basketball team is ready to make some noise in the NCAA. The Lions, who lose just one player from last year's squad, have a lot of experienced talent returning to the hardwood. With a strong recruiting class coming in, many freshmen could also see some significant playing time.

The progress the young guys make will depend on how well the upperclassmen help them along. Senior guard Steve Merrill, and Juniors Casey Ponsoll and James Curren, will lead the Lions this season.

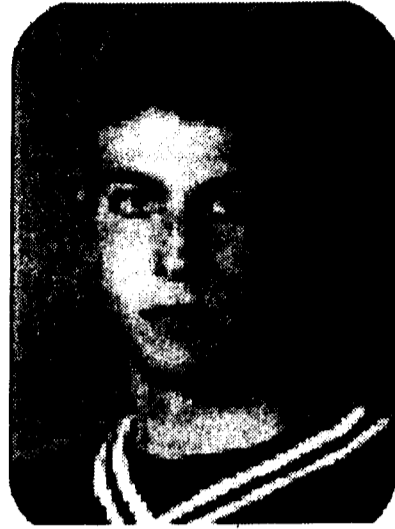
"We are very fortunate to have captains like Steve, Casey, and James," said ninth year head coach Dave Niland. "They are very good students and they work extremely hard. They always seem to remain positive in times of adversity."

Merrill, a 5-11 guard from Union City, is arguably the hardest worker ever to come through the Behrend program. As the team's lone senior, Merrill looks to hold up one of the guard positions and provide a lot of leadership both on and off the court.

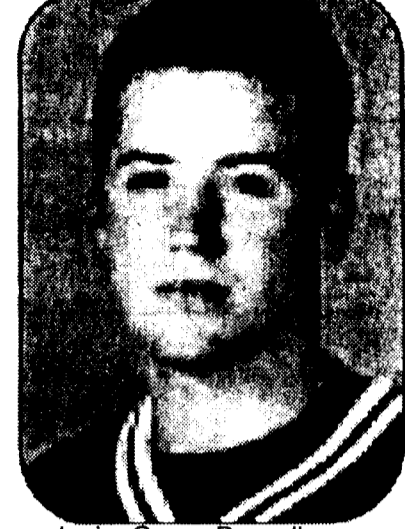
Last season Merrill was named All-Conference Honorable Mention, while leading the Lions with 110 assists. He also averaged 10.3 points per game and is one of the team's



Senior Stever Merrill



Junior James Curren



Junior Casey Ponsoll

top defenders.

"We are extremely blessed to have a guy like Steve Merrill be a part of this program," said Niland. "He has an incredible work ethic and it's to the point where sometimes I have to tell him to not work out."

Ponsoll, a 6-3 swingman, is a local product out of General McLane. All AMCC Honorable Mention as well, Ponsoll is always a threat from the perimeter. Last season he led the team in three point field goals made 45, while connecting on 42% of his shots from beyond the arc. Ponsoll, who averaged 11.0 points per game last season, will carry much of the scoring load this season.

"It's a great honor to be selected as one of the captains for this season," said Ponsoll. "There has

been a rich tradition of great players and leaders to have come through this program. I hope my name will someday be added to that list."

Curren, a 6-6 forward from Warren, is a two-time All AMCC member. "The Big Worm", as he is known to his teammates, is the heart and soul of the Lions. Sidelined throughout much of the preseason due to a broken nose, Curren looks to be back just in time for the first game.

"It was really devastating to have something like that happen to me just before the season started," said Curren about the injury. "But I'm glad it happened early and that I should be healthy enough not to miss any games."

Curren has been an offensive machine

throughout his first two seasons with the Lions, scoring 784 points. Last season, he led the team in both scoring and rebounds with 15.8 ppg and 7.8 rpg. With 'The Big Worm' back in game condition, the Lions look to be a force to reckon with this year in the AMCC.

"These three guys are going to be very successful when they leave Behrend," said Niland. "They treat others with respect, they are honest, they work hard and they are mature. You can't ask for much else."

The Lions will open the season on next Saturday, Nov. 23 against Hilbert College in the Behrend Tip-Off Tournament. Behrend will then face two non-conference opponents before beginning AMCC play at home against rival Pitt-Bradford.

That time of year: BCS and Heisman talk

Well, I can almost smell the turkey cooking now. I know that the snow will be falling soon and that finals are just around the next corner. However, for us die-hard sports fan, this also means it is time for college football fanatics to discuss the hated Bowl Championship Series (BCS) poll and the race for the Heisman. This year though, there is no clear cut winner for either of these topics.

Let us first start with the BCS. This has been scrutinized since its inception. The computer rankings and margin of victory and strength of schedule that go into the calculation are rather tough to comprehend sometimes. As we stand right now, Ohio State is atop the poll just ahead of Miami, despite Miami's year-long dominance of both other national polls. Currently Ohio State holds the advantage in strength of schedule with the 22nd hardest schedule while Miami has the 40th hardest schedule.

However this is soon to change as Miami will face a Top 20 ranked opponent in Pittsburgh in a week. The computer rankings show Ohio State with a slight edge, but the Buckeyes are getting points deducted in the ever popular quality wins category. Nevertheless, this is real easy. Ohio State and Miami have yet to lose, so they deserve the right to play for the title as of right now.

What happens if Miami loses to Pittsburgh in a week? This seems to be the big question. The Panthers have been playing well already knocking a team from the rank of the unbeaten in Virginia

Tech. Well the next team in line is Washington State, but they are way back in the pack. Oklahoma, Texas, Georgia, and Notre Dame would all still be in the running if one of the unbeaten would fall. How likely is that though?

Ohio State plays Illinois and Michigan, but the Michigan game is at home and no one really feels as though Michigan will pull through with a victory. It is hard for anyone to stop the amazing Maurice Clarett. Miami plays the Panthers, Syracuse, and Virginia Tech. That list of opponents is heavy with upset possibilities. Miami has been starting slowly and then hammering the teams in the second half. If any of those teams can hang around until about midway to go in the third quarter the Hurricanes could have a fight on their hands.

This year's title game is the Fiesta Bowl. I really think that Ohio State will be there, but I am not sure if Miami can get past Pittsburgh. I would not mind seeing Washington State and Ohio State in the championship game. It is something different.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot. There is always that one kicker that gets me. Does anyone know that Bowling Green is undefeated? I am not sure anyone does. They don't even show up on the map of the BCS Standings. It is such a shame. The only bowl they will get will probably be the GMAC Bowl, which is before Christmas. Give them their due and let them play on New Year's Day. This is where the BCS messes up.

Now, to the talk about the Heisman. No one is stepping up for attention. Miami quarterback Ken Dorsey has tradition on his side, as the last five winners of the trophies that played his position played in the national championship game. That could be the way he is heading. Still, he barely completed half of his passes this past week against Tennessee.

Dorsey has a lot of competition from other quarterbacks in the nation, but it is more by attrition than anything else. Brad Banks of Iowa only had to throw 10 passes against Northwestern, but he still leads the nation in efficiency. Marshall's Byron Leftwich is on the rise, despite a couple of losses and an ankle injury, but he plays for a smaller program. Washington State's Jason Gesser has 24 touchdown passes and seems to currently be leading.

Iowa State's Seneca Wallace and Virginia Tech's Lee Suggs have all but been wiped off the ballot. Quentin Griffin of Oklahoma fell flat on his face in the loss to Texas A&M. Onterio Smith and Chris Brown also have slipped out of the topic on ESPN. So who is going to take the Heisman?

It is a shame that the careers of the players cannot be used to settle any ties. A player appearing in

the national championship should not have an impact either but it always does.

Still the top two performers of late have been Miami running back Willis McGahee and Gesser. Both of these players could find themselves in the national championship game.

McGahee has outshined teammate Dorsey and broke the touchdown record at Miami with three games still to play. Gesser is leading an impressive list of quarterbacks from the Pac-10. Right now, Gesser has the advantage only because he isn't battling one of his own teammates for votes.

Still, what about Leftwich? He dominated in last year's bowl performance, throwing for more than 500 yards. He has a solid career behind him, and has had a productive year. He doesn't have the luxury of throwing to Randy Moss, as other Marshall quarterbacks. He has completed two-thirds of his passes and still maintains a positive rushing average despite the poor play of his offensive line. Still, Leftwich plays for a mid major team that doesn't have hopes of winning a national championship.

It seems to me like every year there is always one team ousted from the BCS that should have made it and one person not in contention for the Heisman that should be. I suppose that adds to the drama of the sport. It is fun to watch and follow, but it can be so frustrating sometimes.



Douglas Smith

SPORTS EDITOR

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GO LIONS!!!

Friday, Nov. 15th
Men and Women's
Swim Teams
vs. Fredonia State at 6:00

Saturday, Nov. 16th
Men and Women's
Swim Teams
vs. Buffalo State at 1:00
Win a Max and Erma's Coupon at either of these games!!!

Friday, Nov. 15th
Fan Jam
Men and Women's
Basketball Teams 7:00