

levine's sports line

Rec Hall: Where Have All the Fans Gone?

By PAUL LEVINE
Collegian Sports Editor

Yogi Berra called it a long time ago. As usual, the old New York Yankee spoke in rather cryptic terms, but he called it just the same.

"If the fans don't want to come out to the ball park, you can't stop them," Yogi said.

At the time, the rotund little catcher offered his comment to explain why the Kansas City Athletics had more mules roaming the outfield than fans in the stands.

While Yogi was referring to professional baseball's attendance problems, his remarks hit uncomfortably close to home for Penn State—home being Rec Hall. Penn State's winter sports program, encompassing seven sports, is surely one of the best in the country. Currently, two winter sports, gymnastics and wrestling, could bring regional and even national titles to Lion Land. And yet, something is missing.

If you don't believe it, take a quick trip to a Wednesday night basketball game, a Saturday afternoon gymnastics meet or a Saturday night wrestling match. At every event there is a distinct lack of warm bodies.

A paltry, somewhat disinterested crowd of 3,400 showed up for last Wednesday's basketball game with arch-rival Syracuse. The undefeated gymnasts competed before 4,000 last Saturday afternoon and the wrestlers drew 2,400 for their

Saturday night contest.

Naturally, attendance is poorer at the less glamorous events. You can find more people gathered at the New College Diner any weekday at 4 a.m. than at a Saturday afternoon fencing meet.

There are some obvious reasons why the basketball team can't fill Rec Hall to its 7,500 capacity. The Lions are currently sporting a 7-8 record and this sort of team doesn't inspire wild throngs of exuberant fans. But there are 25,000 students at University Park, and enough should be interested to cover at least half the bare spots in Rec Hall's bleachers.

With the wrestling and gymnastics teams, however, it is a different story. The gymnasts are 5-0 and may be headed for another national championship. Even if the Lions aren't number one, they have some of the best individual gymnasts and most exciting competitors anywhere.

This weekend the gymnasts will find out if they are the best in the East when they meet undefeated Temple. State fans, however, won't get a chance to show their colors since the meet is in Philadelphia.

But wrestling fans do get their chance. Now 5-1 on the year, the wrestlers will battle for Eastern supremacy against Navy (7-0) in Rec Hall Saturday night. Besides being a test for the wrestlers, Saturday's meet could be a real test of the fans' loyalty.

If the crowd approaches the size of last year's 7,900-plus contingent for the Lehigh meet, doubts could be erased. But a mediocre showing by the fans who have been averaging 2,000 a meet, might even overshadow a winning performance by the wrestlers. Even worse, a small and quiet crowd could even hinder a winning effort.

"There's no question that a large and screaming home crowd helps us win," wrestler Vince Fitz

said yesterday. "I know that it has always helped me."

There is one possible explanation why attendance to date has been so poor. In the wrestlers' three home meets and the gymnasts' three home contests since Winter Term began, neither team has been the last bit pressed to win. The wrestlers inundated Springfield 31-12, Cornell 30-6 and last week breezed by Syracuse, 34-5.

In a sport where victory is sometimes decided by less than one point, the gymnasts have won every home meet by at least 15 points and last week defeated Syracuse by 65 points.

It wasn't always that way, and hopefully it won't stay that way for long.

"In 15 years, I've never seen anything like this," said State Athletic Director Ernest B. McCoy. "Ordinarily, we have plenty of competition. I'm utterly amazed that this year, many of the traditionally tough teams seem to have fallen down."

Gymnastics coach Gene Wettstone and wrestling coach Bill Koll agree.

"The teams in the East are having problems with their gymnastics programs," Wettstone said yesterday. "But some of them like Massachusetts and Pitt that are weak now will be on top in a couple of years. And other teams like Southern Connecticut will be challenging Temple and Penn State."

Koll is also confident that the weaker wrestling teams will improve.

"Generally, we have had a pretty representative schedule," Koll said. "Things go in cycles. A couple of years ago, Syracuse was the league champion. Now they're down. Usually, Cornell is the power of the Ivy League, and Springfield is the best in New England. This year, neither gave us much competition. But other teams are coming back. Pitt looks like it's going to be strong again, and little schools like Franklin and Marshall are coming along."

But Koll also feels that the caliber of opponents should have little effect on the size of the crowds.

"If people want to see a wrestling match, I like to think they'll come out to see the team no matter who we're wrestling," said Koll.

Some observers fear that a new era of spiritless Penn Staters may be abandoning Rec Hall. And, according to McCoy, it may not even be the students' fault.

"Every year there are more and more activities for students," McCoy said. "There are too many things to do and too little time to do them. And every year the classroom ordeal gets tougher. We'd love to get 7,000 people in Rec Hall for every event. But now, we're very pleased to get 5,000 to 6,000."

Gene Wettstone agrees.

"Students don't have the interest in sports that they used to," he said. "They have so many other things to do that they aren't captivated by athletics. The day of rah-rah college spirit is over."

While it is generally agreed that there is a lack of student support in the athletic program, no quick solutions are available.

"We've tried some things in recent years," McCoy said. "Saturday afternoon events have drawn well sometimes. But there are just too many things competing for students' time. I think it's all a shame but I don't have the answer."

Even Yogi would have had trouble with this one.



LEVINE



ERNEST B. MCCOY

Intramural Team Continues Streak

By DAN DONOVAN
Collegian Sports Writer

Undefeated Pittsburgh-Reading downed the Lawrence-McKean basketball team, 33-26, in Section B of the Dormitory League in intramural action last night.

Lawrence-McKean kept the game close up until late in the contest when desperation shots failed. Both teams used tight zone defenses which forced each other to shoot from the outside.

The game started with both sides having cold shooting nights. Then Mark Taylor of Pittsburgh-Reading and Rich Herskowitz of Lawrence-McKean led their teams in bombarding the basket.

Pittsburgh-Reading's play was sparked by the fine rebounding and all-around play of Hack Boskabic. He scored 8 points and controlled the boards for the victors.

Charlie Messner helped keep the hopes of the Lawrence-McKean team alive. Messner's 11 points and accurate passing played a major part in the team's offense.

Taylor took overall scoring honors, hitting 15 points for the winning side. Lawrence-McKean's duo of Herskowitz and Messner totaled 11 points apiece while Boskabic and Tom Horlacher each tossed in eight for Pittsburgh-Reading.

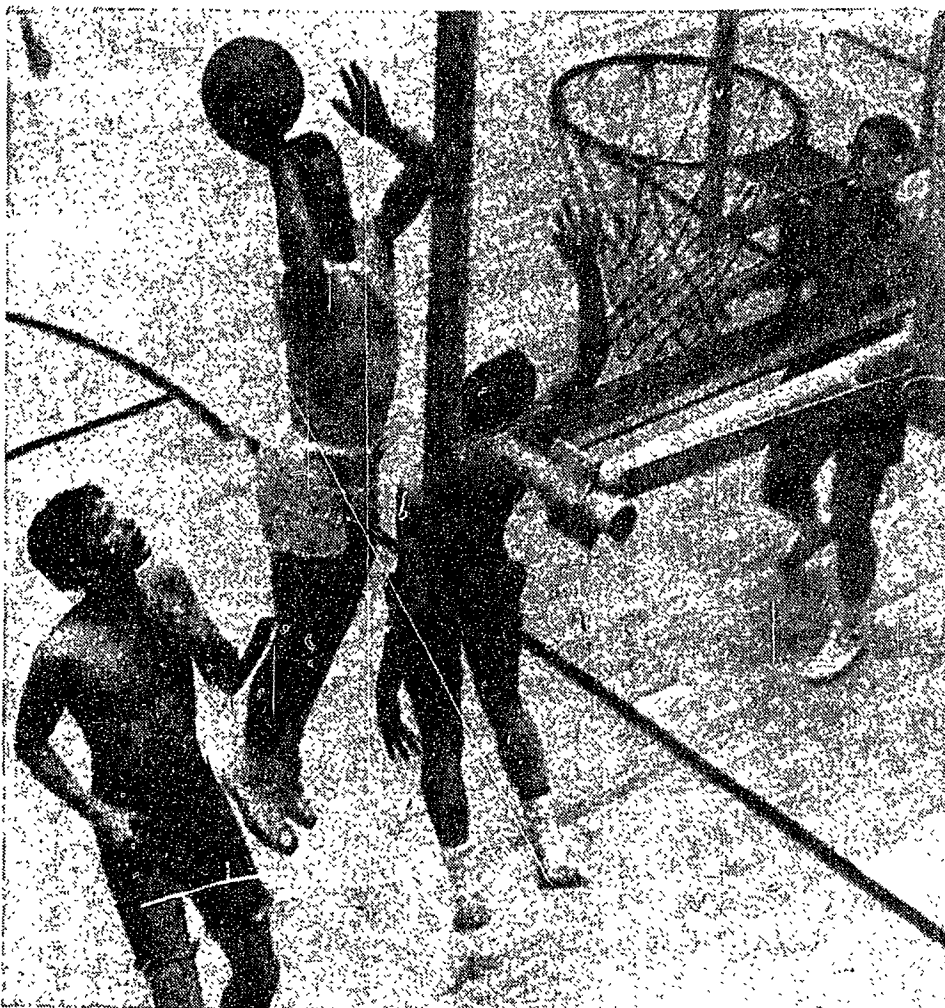
Other Action

In other League B action, an exciting game saw Somerset-Venango edge a determined Bethlehem five, 32-30. Bethlehem decided to use a collapsing box defense to try and thwart the scoring of Somerset-Venango's top shooter, Steve Hasenmiller.

Bethlehem was successful in holding the Somerset-Venango ace to only 12 points, but Hasenmiller's teammates Dave Denar and Rich Sokolowski took up the slack by scoring eight points each.

Bethlehem had its superstar, too, in Steve Lupin. Lupin's marksmanship accounted for 20 points in the losing cause, while support came from teammate Steve Karp, who tallied 8. The one basket Lupin wished he had made was a last minute desperation try which would have tied the game.

Montour-Pike won with a big comeback play in the second half. With his team down by 14-7 halfway through the contest, Carl Weiss came charging with 11 markers in the second period, totaling 14 for the game and giving Montour-Pike a 29-27 win over Snyder-Wayne. High scorer for the losers was Sam Dull with 9.



MARK TAYLOR goes up for two points for Pittsburgh-Reading in intramural action last night. Taylor scored 15 points and helped his team to a 33-26 victory over Lawrence-McKean. Charlie Messner of the losers looks on and Ted Davis tries to stop the leaping Taylor.

Two Still Unbeaten

It's 21 down and 7 to go for Houston and 17 down and 5 to go for St. Bonaventure, the only two all-conquering powers in the Associated Press' Top Ten rankings of major-college basketball teams.

Houston, led by a famed Big E, Elvin Hayes, maintained its grip on first place in the weekly poll with a 21-0 record while St. Bonaventure held onto fourth place with its 17-0 record.

Hayes' team plays Miami of Florida Thursday and the Air Force on Saturday, both at home, and then winds up its regular season schedule against U. of Texas-Simmons, Virginia Tech and West Texas State.

St. Bonaventure, with the lesser-known but able Bob Lanier as its star, travels to Seton Hall Wednesday for its only game of the week and then

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Americans Falter in Olympics Lady Skiers Up then Down

GRENOBLE, France (AP)—For one fleeting moment yesterday, a youthful band of American girls stood on top of the ski world. But disaster again overtook them and dealt the United States another heart-breaking blow in the Winter Olympics.

The U.S. girls—Judy Nagel, 16; Wendy Allen, 23; Rosie Fortna, 21, and Kiki Cutter, 18—stunned onlookers by grabbing four of the top six places in the first run of the slalom.

But France's Marielle Goitschel came along and snatched the gold medal as the Americans were shut out when three of them were disqualified for missing gates on the first run and Miss Nagel fell on the second.

Miss Goitschel, giving France its third

Alpine victory in the Games, had a combined time of 85.86 seconds, 19 ahead of runner-up Nancy Greene of Canada. Another French girl, Annie Famose, got the bronze in 87.19.

Americans also got off to a poor start in the men's figure skating as expected winner Emmerich Danzer of Austria took a narrow lead over countryman Wolfgang Schwarz after two of the five compulsory figures. Tim Wood of Bloomfield Hills, Mich., was fourth, Gary Vixconti of Detroit sixth and John Petkevich of Great Falls, Mont., 13th.

Toini Gustafsson of Sweden captured her second gold medal, winning the women's five kilometer cross-country ski race ahead of two Russians. No Americans were entered.

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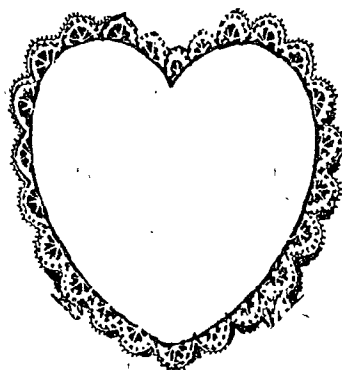
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