

Penn State gymnastics

Road trip proves teamwork

By CAMERON MCGAUGHY
Collegian Sports Writer

It was a tough week on the road for the women's gymnastics team over Spring Break. But with just two meets left in the regular season, the Lady Lions are hoping to finish with a flourish.

Penn State faced the most difficult stretch of its season over the break with a noticeable absence — sophomore Joanna Knox is still nursing a broken foot she suffered over two weeks ago.

In front of more than 10,000 spectators, Penn State (9-8, 3-3 Big Ten) lost to Utah last Friday in Salt Lake City. The defending national champions had no problem staying on top of the 196.250-193.625 decision.

"We left the meet feeling really good," junior Nicki Malinak said. "It was one of our best meets so far. We're finally putting it together — not entirely, there's definitely room for improvement. But we're getting there."

Freshman Missy Leopoldus placed second in the all-around competition, just ahead of teammate Janae Whittaker, who has stepped up in Knox's absence.

Penn State also received a strong output from the final member of its freshman trio, Ellen Casey. She tied a school record on bars with a 9.9 and also notched a career-best on the floor exercise with a 9.8.

"Ellen has been sick all season, and she had an incredible meet," co-captain Bridget Foley said. "I was really happy with her performance."

Also over the break, junior Leigh Cappello continued to be the team's top floor performer, earning a career-high 9.9 at Utah.

But most importantly, the Lady Lions posted a season-high team score. That was a welcome sign after a disappointing 191.950 at the Shanico Invitational, the team's first meet over the break.

At that contest in Corvallis, Ore., the Lady Lions placed fourth out of six teams, defeating Ohio State and Seattle Pacific but falling to host Oregon State, Minnesota and Michigan.

The Lady Lions were in second place entering the final rotation, the uneven bars. After an incredible performance on that event against Ohio State, the team was confident it could hit.

"I don't think people on the team

really realized that we were second — they didn't hear the score, but I did," Malinak said. "As a person who doesn't do bars, I had to sit back and watch and it was really frustrating. We expected to hit; it was a tough blow."

The Lady Lions counted three falls and placed fourth, finishing less than three-tenths behind powerhouse Michigan (192.225). Minnesota wasn't far ahead with a 192.450.

"We had one of our best meets going," Foley said. "We went six for six on vault, beam and floor. Then we went to bars, and we had a lot of problems."

At the Invitational, Leopoldus placed fourth in the all-around with Whittaker taking sixth in a field of 13. Malinak was the team's top beam performer, placing ninth with a 9.75.

"I don't think it was that much pressure," Foley said of the team's fall from second to fourth in Oregon. "People had been having problems with the things they were falling on in workout. We couldn't totally have expected to hit all our routines, but it was disappointing because bars had been our best event."

Gymmen need last two shots

By CRAIG YETSKO
Collegian Sports Writer

During the meet against BYU last Thursday, the Penn State men's gymnastics team not only had to compete against several teams but several gymnasts had to battle the flu bug.

Although the Lions posted a second place score of 222.5 in the quad meet, the focus was more on the ailing gymnasts. Freshman Tim Lashua did not compete and several gymnasts had to play through their sickness.

The biggest bright spot in the BYU meet was sophomore Roy Malka. He won the all-around and finished first in the pommel-horse competition with a 9.7 score. Malka said he did well in all his routines. "I did all my routines from start to finish," he said.

Junior Joe Roemer won the floor exercise with a 9.7 score and senior Brandy Wood took the parallel bar event with a 9.5

The Lions bounced back as they traveled to New Mexico Sat-

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— Randy Jepson
Lion gymmen coach

urday night. They posted another second place finish with a 225.575. Junior J.M. Michel said the team came back strong and put in a solid effort in New Mexico. "It was nice that everyone got healthy for New Mexico," he said.

In the all-around competition, Malka shined once again and finished in second place. He placed second in parallel bars (9.55) and third in pommelhorse (9.775). Wood finished fifth in the all-around with a 55.6. He took fourth place in both rings (9.55) and parallel bars (9.45).

Freshman Steve McSparran also performed strongly in the New Mexico meet. He won the floor exercise with a 9.85 score and the vault with a 9.4.

Michel said he was happy with the way he performed in New Mexico how the team bounced back. "We came together as a team," he said.

Coach Randy Jepson said although the Lions came back to put in better numbers in their second meet, the next two meets are the most important. "We have a lot of work to do," he said. "We're really going to have to score high in the last two meets."

Jepson said the team has to be more consistent and solid across the board. Upcoming meets against Michigan and Army will be important for them in terms of their ranking in the region. "We have to get our scores up to make sure we're in the top six in the region," Jepson said.

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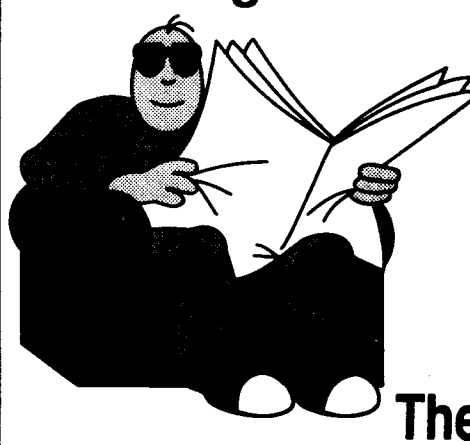
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