

Lady booters secure home game in NCAA Tournament

By JOHN GIBLIN
Collegian Staff Writer

Only hours after winning its first Big Ten Tournament in school history Sunday, the Penn State women's soccer team secured a first-round bye and a seventh seed in this year's NCAA Tournament.

"I wasn't sure if we'd make the top eight, but I'm psyched that we did," midfielder Jeannine Verdrager said. "I can speak for the whole team — we're all excited."

The Lady Lions (19-3-1, 10-1-1 Big Ten) will be at home for their first matchup at 1 p.m. Sunday against the winner of tomorrow's game between Wright State and Big Ten foe Indiana. If Penn State advances to

the third round, it will once again have home field advantage against its opponent.

The Lions defeated the Hoosiers at home earlier this season, 2-1, in the Big Ten opener for both squads. Although the selection committee tries to match teams in the first round, later rounds may breed long-distance matchups.

"There's somebody that we've just seen and have a familiarity with, so that's nice," Farmer said of potentially playing Indiana. "Some of the long-distance ones you have problems getting scouting done. No matter what happens — if we win our first game — someone from the south has to come up here. I hope it snows a foot."

Another advantage Penn State may have

— besides the extra time off and playing its first game at home — will be the time of the game. The Lions' early Sunday game follows Saturday's Penn State-Northwestern football game. Due to both games being played in State College, Farmer hopes it will create a Jeffrey Field crowd unlike any seen this season.

"We'll do a lot of wandering around Saturday trying to get people to come Sunday," Farmer said. "The more people in town, the better. There can't be a bad thing about that."

The Big Ten's dominance was once again reaffirmed in the NCAA selection process. Along with the Southeastern Conference, the Big Ten garnered six selections — tops

among all conferences. Besides the Lions and Hoosiers, conference foes Michigan, Minnesota, Northwestern and Wisconsin all received berths to the tournament.

"There's as many teams from our conference as from any other," Farmer said. "This is a hell of a conference, and I think this demonstrates that."

The main reason for Penn State's high seed, besides its recent success in the conference tournament, may be the strength of the Lions' schedule. Of Penn State's 23 opponents this season, 10 received berths to the NCAA Tournament.

"We played a really good schedule, and a really tough schedule on the road," Farmer said. "That's part of the (ratings points

index) that people don't understand."

During the selection show, something other than Penn State's seeding in the tournament brought liveliness to the room — Danielle Fotopoulos and the Florida Gators. The Lions lost their last regular-season game 3-1 to the Gators in Gainesville, Fla. The squad has used that loss as motivation and is looking for another chance at beating the tournament's No. 2 seed.

"If we do our job, then maybe we'll play Florida again — this time under different circumstances," Verdrager said. "They're a good team, and they outplayed us last time, but I don't think that we played on the top of our game."

Field hockey fates in hands of committee

With only a 16-team field and four seeds going to four regions of the country, NCAA tourney bids are hard to come by.

By MARK FITZGERALD
Collegian Staff Writer

Tomorrow the Penn State Lady Lion field hockey team will learn its fate.

After a season of bumps, bruises, cuts and broken collarbones, the Lions and coach Char Morett leave the future of the season in the hands of the NCAA Tournament Selection Committee.

"This year it is going to be very difficult to predict who goes where," Morett said. "Parity, upsets and everything that has gone on all season is really going to make it interesting."

Interesting is an understatement. Selecting 12 teams to compete for a national championship is downright mind boggling. Unlike the NCAA basketball Tournament, where the selection of 64 teams appears more clear-cut, the selection of only 12 women's field hockey teams can be a crap shoot.

"The important thing is getting in," Morett said. "In our case and in the case of all the top teams, the most important thing is placing the top four teams."

The most daring prognosticators would have sleepless nights preparing the four seeds and four regions. To understand the total complexity of this tournament, it is time for an introductory course on NCAA Tournament selection, often a death wish for the field hockey committee.

"There are so many automatic bids, making it even more difficult to select the few at-large bids," NCAA committee member and Penn State Assistant Athletic Director Sue Sheetz said. "The committee will spend hours and hours on this; it is not easy."

The bare-bone deciding begins with five basic regions: the Northeast, Mideast, Mid-



Atlantic, South and West. At least one team per region must be represented in the 12-team championship. Usually, most representatives come from the Northeast, Mideast and Mid-Atlantic regions. The additions of the South and especially the West have helped prevent extensive regionalism.

Two things are certain before tomorrow. One, Kent State will be the lone representative from the West region. Its performance in the Mid-American Conference Tournament earned it an automatic bid to the tournament. Two, Old Dominion and Connecticut are the only teams that will sleep well tonight. The Monarchs continue to be ranked No. 1 in the STX/NFCA national poll while the Huskies ran through the Big East Tournament without much trouble. No. 1 seeds are likely to be on tap for both schools.

After that, uncertainties abound. Who will the other top seeds be? As the dust settles on a weekend full of conference championships, three teams are vying for two spots. Ivy League champion Princeton, ACC runner-up Virginia and Penn State are all laying claim to the remaining two No. 1 seeds.

"We didn't really have a bad game all season," Morett said. "We've played a lot of teams while Princeton really has a soft schedule within their league."

It is natural to hear coaches stake their teams' claim, especially at this time of year. The significance of a top seed in some cases means a ticket to Philadelphia for the final four. The top seeds get a bye and then a game on their turf. The unlucky No. 5 through 12 seeds must travel to the higher-seeded team's home, if they are fortunate enough to win an opening-round game first.

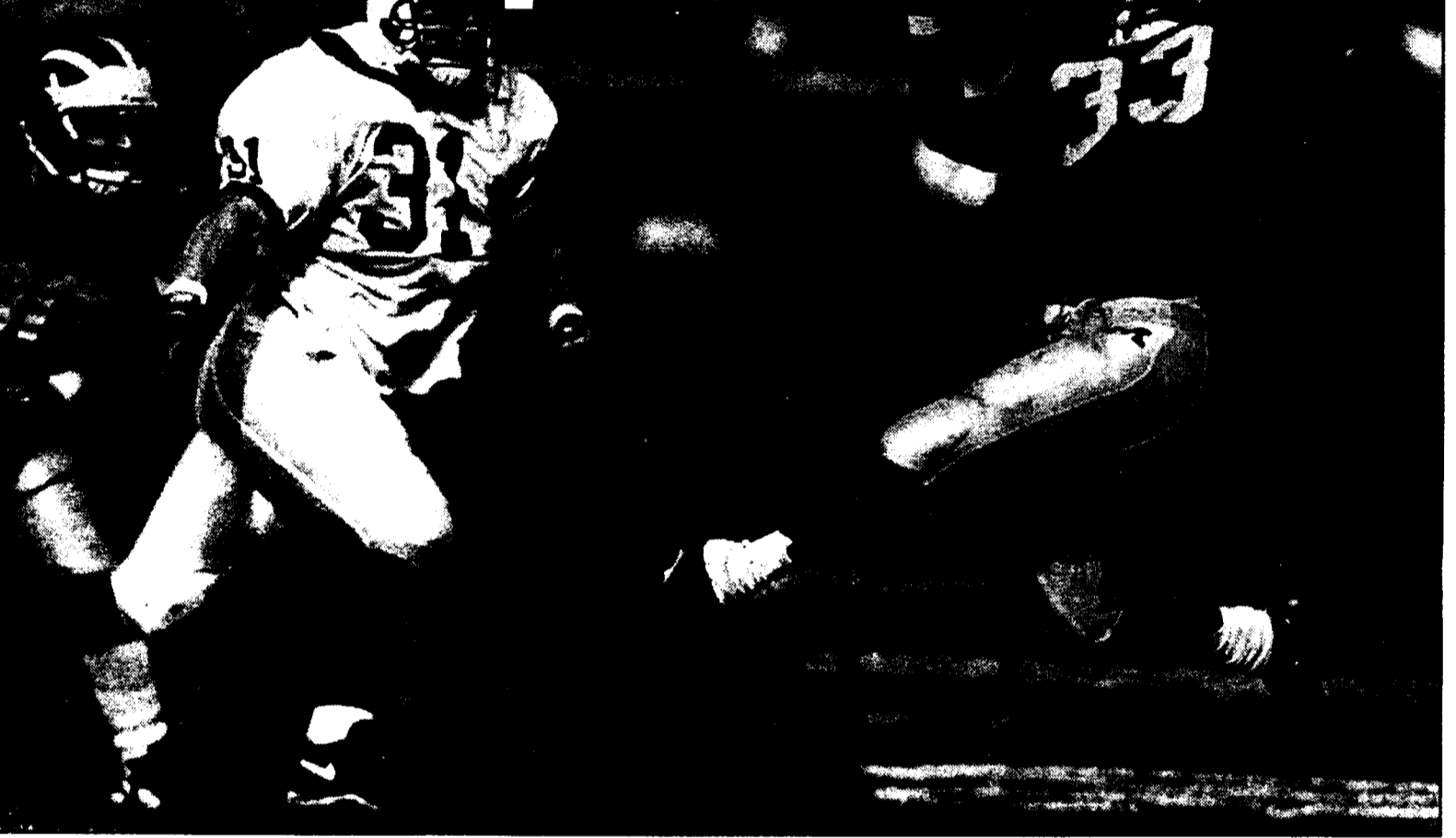
For some teams, though, it is just the experience of getting in. Boston College, a team on the sunny side of the tournament bubble, hasn't experienced

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Tomorrow's Cover Story:
The feasibility of a Big Ten women's volleyball tournament

Reaching for respect



Collegian Photo/Dan Saellinger

Michigan running back Clarence Williams leaps for a pass against Penn State Saturday. The Wolverines won the game 27-0, pushing their record to 7-2. The win, coupled with Ohio State's loss to Michigan State, gave Michigan a share of the conference lead with Wisconsin.

Wolverines rise and shine in win

By CHRIS MASSE
Collegian Staff Writer

No team is more dangerous in sports than a wounded one.

After starting the year 0-2 and struggling to beat Indiana and Minnesota, No. 15 Michigan had more cuts and scars than a man who just lost a fight to a porcupine.

Against No. 19 Penn State, though, the Wolverines reminded the entire nation why they are the defending national champions, annihilating the Nittany Lions 27-0. The win not only helped Michigan rejoin the top 20 but also solidified its Big Ten title hopes. With wins against Wisconsin and Ohio State the next two weekends, it once again will establish conference supremacy.

Not bad for a team written off after dropping its first two games to Notre Dame and Syracuse by a combined score of 74-48.

Michigan could do no wrong against Penn State, outgaining its conference rival 360-200 in total yardage. The Wolverines dominated from the game's outset, scoring on their first possession and building a 10-0 lead 6:16 into the first quarter.

"Nobody expected us to come in and play the way we did," defensive end Juquin Feazell

said. "Nobody believed in us except ourselves."

Especially after it barely defeated a 4-5 Minnesota team two weeks ago 15-10. Although the defense played well in the nail biter, the team that had built a reputation through the years of playing smash-mouth football ran for an atrocious minus-23 yards on the ground.

The performance earned the Wolverines the wrath of critics nationwide who said the defending national champions were nothing but a shell of their former selves. Despite six straight wins heading into the Penn State game, the Wolverines were only perceived to be the 22nd best team in the nation.

Hurt and angry by the lack of respect, Michigan went out Saturday and earned it, dominating the Lions in every facet of the game. The defense resembled the one that led the nation last year, while the offense finally awoke from its season-long slumber. After falling on its face against Minnesota, the running game came alive and produced 136 yards.

"We were sick of people saying we couldn't do things," quarterback Tom Brady said. "When you keep hearing you can't do things, that challenges you. We have a lot of guys who know what it takes to be a champion."

No series of plays better showcased that than a two-play sequence at the end of the first quar-

ter and beginning of the second quarter. Trailing 10-0, the Lions appeared ready to cut the deficit to three with a third-and-goal from the Michigan 2-yard line.

Eric McCoo, though, was stopped for a 1-yard gain on the next play, bringing up a fourth-and-goal from the 1-yard line. Rather than put three points on the board, Penn State elected to try its luck with Aaron Harris.

The Wolverine defense did not even let the burly 230-pound fullback get a glimpse of the end zone, stuffing him for no gain. Linebacker Sam Sword made the initial hit and was helped by a host of other swarming defenders led by Ian Gold and Tommy Hendricks. The stop killed Penn State's momentum and paved the way for another Michigan rout.

"It was a personal challenge," linebacker James Hall said of the goal-line stand. "We just lined up and played football. It was on us to make the play and we came up big."

As a result, while teams like Penn State and previously unbeaten Ohio State are scrambling for bowl positions, the Wolverines suddenly are smelling like roses.

"We wanted to show everyone that Michigan is for real," Sword said. "If we play four quarters of Michigan football, we're going to be a force down the stretch."

Journeyman wrestler Leykikh takes fantastic voyage to mats of Penn State

By CHRIS ANTONACCI
Collegian Staff Writer

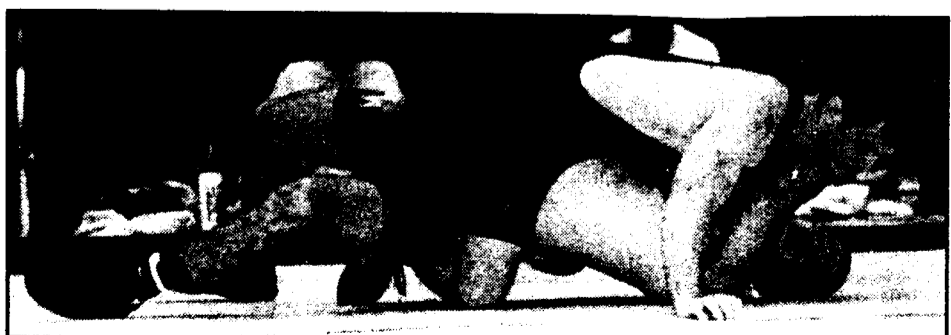
Alex Leykikh was born a ramblin' man. The 5-foot-10, 165-pound wrestler finally has reached his destination, but it was a long way in the making. Before he could step onto the mat at Penn State's varsity wrestle-offs Saturday in Rec Hall, he had to take the road less traveled.

Leykikh turned heads at wrestle-offs, especially the head of Penn State coach Troy Sunderland.

"Alex had a great day," Sunderland said. "We weren't sure what we would have (at 165 pounds), but we're more at ease with Leykikh's performance. His performance was a pleasant surprise."

His performance included a fall on red-shirt sophomore Jon Long, a decision on Dana Weber (8-3) and a decision on Brad Krushinski (7-5).

But perhaps Sunderland has not seen all that Leykikh has to offer.



Collegian Photo/Shawn Knapp

Penn State 165 pounder Alex Leykikh pins Jon Long during varsity wrestle-offs Saturday at Rec Hall.

"I was nervous," Leykikh said. "I was very cautious. I didn't open up as much as I could have."

Still, Leykikh wrestled well enough Saturday to qualify for the finals at 165 pounds — a position he will have to fight to

the finish for with Weber in practice.

"He's a good wrestler," Leykikh said of Weber. "He's quick and flexible. I just have to do what I did in the first match against him."

While that road has yet to be taken, he

already has left behind a gloomy path on his way to Happy Valley. During the summer hiatus, he declared Penn State would be his new home as he transferred from Virginia.

"It was a big decision for me," Leykikh said. "To accomplish some of my goals, I discovered I had to move on."

Leykikh was a two-year starter for the Cavaliers and the 1998 ACC champion at 167 pounds, but he was unhappy at Virginia due to turbulence in the coaching ranks. And when former Penn State coach John Fritz and assistant coach Hachiro Oishi showed interest in bringing him to Penn State. Apparently it was warranted.

"He has a very good attitude," Oishi said. "He's working very hard and he's a real gumby wrestler."

But he was thrown a curve ball when Fritz resigned as coach and accepted an administrative position. Still, he believed in the program and made his way to Penn State.

Leykikh's road has been a long one.

He wrestled at Central Connecticut State for two seasons, one as a redshirt freshman, then transferred to Virginia after the Blue Devils cut wrestling.

At Central Connecticut, he was a local talent from Hall High School, where he was an all-state wrestler, won the Connecticut State Open Championship as a senior and finished third at New England Championships. However, he was anything but local.

When Leykikh was in eighth grade, he and his family moved to the United States from the Ukraine to escape the pressures of discrimination. As time progressed, he and the other Jewish members of his hometown were having a tough time.

"We weren't being discriminated directly against, but it was starting to pick up," Leykikh said.

And, in spite of all his journeys, it just might be time for Leykikh to settle into his new home.