

Team bonds through adversity of loss

By Tom Kinslow
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

There were no words needed. As teammate after teammate found their way to the injured list, there was no panic.

No one frantically scrambled for answers. There was only calmness.

The Penn State Icers knew what they needed to do. Then, they went out and did it.

That led to a win streak that spanned parts of two months until last Sunday's 7-4 loss to NCAA

Division III Massachusetts-Boston. Once again, the Icers are faced with adversity.

Penn State needs to rebound. It needs to prove that last Sunday was nothing more than an anomaly. It needs to move on.

Once again, no words are needed.

As Penn State heads into its weekend set against No. 11 Delaware, the Icers are confident in their ability to put the past behind them and regroup.



Balboni

After all, it was adversity that brought them together.

"I think the couple road weekends helped," defenseman John Conte said. "I think it really helped bring a lot of guys together, especially because we have a lot of new faces. I think this weekend will help too. It's good to get away and have everybody get to know each other better and play with each other."

It's those experiences like losing captain Matt Kirstein to injury, like a third period comeback against Rhode Island on the road that Penn State is hanging its hat on at the end of the day.

Those moments are ones the Icers believe will make it easier to transition away from their first loss after 11 consecutive wins, a streak that brought the team closer together.

"It makes everyone not panic when we lose or something goes wrong and everyone just realizes that we just have to work harder and correct our mistakes," forward Paul Daley said.

While adversity has bonded the team, it has also created an underdog mentality, one that Daley has always enjoyed.

The sophomore said that being an underdog takes all of the pres-

sure off the team and puts all of the pressure on its opponents — making it more fun to play.

While Penn State may be reveling in the mentality created by its obstacles, Icers coach Scott Balboni stopped short of saying that his team thrives on constant adversity.

"I think we've started to face some [adversity]," Balboni said. "I think we'll start to face a lot more here as we get into the tougher league games, and we've faced a few situations, but there's certainly going to be more."

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Andrew Dunheimer/Collegian

Kurt Collins (15) moves the puck up ice during September's Blue-White Game. The Icers will welcome Robert Morris to the ESCHA next season while Drexel and Navy will leave for a new conference.

Icers recovering from injury bug

By Paul Casella
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Despite adding one to their loss column this past weekend, the No. 6 Penn State Icers were relieved to finally have a weekend in which they didn't add to their list of injuries.

With only three games left this semester before a four-week break, the Icers' injured list is dwindling and coach Scott Balboni expects to have a completely healthy roster after the break barring any further injuries.

"If nothing happens, we'll be fully healthy," he said, "and it'd be great because our schedule the second semester is a lot more intense. It'll be important for us to be healthy coming down that stretch."

In a season marred by injuries, Penn State has only eight players who have played in all 18 of the team's games.

To put that in perspective, three returning contributors from last year's team — Matt Kirstein, Taylor Cera and Carey Bell — have combined to play in only 15 games this season.

Kirstein, who was named a captain this year after a breakout, 17-goal season in 2008-09, has appeared in only four games and has not played since Oct. 10 at Ohio. The senior captain is practicing this week for the first time since spraining his medial collateral ligament (MCL) in a practice on Oct. 27 while attempting to come back from a groin injury suffered earlier in the year.

"Absolutely, the goal is to play this weekend," he said. "I feel good out there skating again, so the goal is definitely to play, and play well."

Although Kirstein has been cleared to play this weekend by the trainers, Balboni said he will

wait to see what kind of shape Kirstein is in before deciding whether or not to play him Friday night against rival Delaware.

The coach's decision is a little easier when it comes to Cera, who is likely done for the rest of the semester as he continues to nurse a sprained left ankle. It's possible Cera could be cleared to play before the team's Dec. 11 game against Niagara, but he likely will not see the ice again until January.

"We'll wait and see if Kirstein has enough conditioning to go this weekend," Balboni said. "If he does, he'll play, but we have to see how he recovers the rest of the week. But with Cera, even if he gets cleared I probably wouldn't play him just for one game at this point."

With all the injuries, Balboni has been forced to put every eligible player on the roster in the lineup at one point or another this season.

Of the 27 forwards and defensemen who have seen playing time, 24 have at least one point and nobody on the team has a negative plus/minus rating.

"We have guys all throughout the lineup who can play," Kirstein said. "I've loved it. I love to see us win, and anytime we pull out a win is obviously a plus. That's what we're here to do."

With so many players performing at a high level, Balboni will have a lot of decisions to make if he does end up having a completely healthy roster in the second half.

"It's that old coach's adage that it's a good problem to have," Balboni said. "I'd rather have everyone healthy and have to figure out who has to sit out than have guys missing games with injuries."

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Robert Morris strengthens conference for Penn State

By Tom Copain
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

By this time next year, the Eastern State Collegiate Hockey League (ESCHL) will have a much different look.

Drexel and Navy will leave the league to re-join the Eastern Collegiate Hockey Association (ECHA), while Robert Morris will enter and join Delaware, West Chester, Rhode Island and the Penn State Icers.

But while the ESCHL will be down to five teams for next season, the Icers are excited that their league could possibly become one of the most competitive conferences in the country.

"I think we've always had a strong league, but I think we obviously had some teams that weren't very strong and weren't ranked," Penn State coach Scott Balboni said. "Those teams aren't gonna be part of the league anymore. And with adding Robert Morris, it added a nice, strong team to the league."

Robert Morris has had a solid season so far in its Eastern

Collegiate Hockey League (ECHA) swan song, compiling a 14-6 record and leading the league by eight points over second-place State University of New York at Canton.

But the two teams RMU will replace have a combined record of 10-24 this season and are the bottom two teams in the ESCHL.

Instead, next year's conference could possibly feature five teams that all played in this year's ACHA nationals. Not only are all five teams ranked in the latest rankings, but none are ranked lower than 18th, and if the nationals started today, three of the five teams — Penn State, Rhode Island and Delaware — would end up in the tournament.

"It's good for us," assistant coach Bill Downey said. "It kinda gives a little different look to the conference with a team a little further west of us. But I think overall they've been trying to work hard with their program down there, and we need a team right now. So, geographically, they work."

Balboni said there will be no change with the scheduling of

conference games — there will still be two games at home and on the road with each conference opponent.

But with the Icers playing fewer conference games next year than the 20 they play this year, it does create an opportunity for more nonconference games.

Balboni said the nonconference schedule shouldn't be a problem because there are a lot of teams wanting to play Penn State, including the annual four games with rival Ohio.

But at least for sophomore forward Paul Daley the idea of having one of the toughest conferences in hockey is a welcome challenge.

"I like playing the strong teams throughout the whole year instead of playing a weaker team like Navy," Daley said. "I think it helps us in the long run. And come nationals, all those teams are there, it will make it a pretty interesting tournament and some very competitive games up there."

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Abby Drey/Collegian

Penn State's Kurt Collins lies on the ice after injuring his shoulder against West Virginia Oct. 31. The forward hasn't played since.

Players want more games, less days off in playoffs

By Ronald Blum
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

NEW YORK — Get ready for more postseason baseball games — and fewer off days.

Players would like to see the first round of playoffs expand to best-of-seven when their next labor contract starts in 2012. Michael Weiner said Wednesday in his first news conference since replacing Donald Fehr as the union head.

"There is a lot of sentiment for a seven-game division series," Weiner said. "I think a properly constructed postseason schedule could accommodate three seven-game series but still have it extend over a shorter period of time than what happened this year."

The first round has been best-of-five since it began in 1995.

Weiner hopes the length of the postseason can be shortened next year and was happy to hear com-

missioner Bud Selig say he will try to cut off days. Four extra days off were added in 2007 at the request of baseball's television broadcasters. As a result, the Angels and Yankees played just eight games in the first 20 days of the playoffs.

"Everybody's in agreement that the postseason schedule needs some adjustment," Weiner said. "I'm a hockey fan as well as a baseball fan, and the pace of play this postseason was more of the way you expect a hockey season to go than a baseball season to go."

Weiner was unanimously approved as executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association during the annual meeting of its executive board in Scottsdale, Ariz. The 47-year-old Harvard graduate was hired by the union as a staff lawyer in 1988 and was promoted to general counsel in 2004. He succeeds the 61-year-old Fehr, who had been in charge since December 1983 and in June announced his intention.

During bargaining in 2002 and 2006, Weiner was among the union's chief negotiators. He praised management for "a recognition that the union is a fixture in the game" but admitted some baseball owners may push for a tougher proposals in bargaining to replace the contract that expires in December 2011.

"If there are owners who misjudge or underestimate the resolve of the players this time, I think they'll be met with the same surprise that owners of the past have met with when they misjudged the resolve of the players," Weiner said.

Baseball owners have said intend to propose the amateur draft be expanded to include players from outside the United States who currently are free agents before they sign. The union is willing to agree.

"There was plenty of sentiment for saying that players from Texas should be subject to the same rules as players from the

Dominican Republic," he said.

But the union will resist attempts by management to institute a slotting system of fixed salaries for draft picks.

"This union has always stood for the proposition that, you know, players should have the right to bargain individually for their compensation," he said.

Similarly, players historically have been against having payroll floors for teams. Boston Red Sox owner John Henry, concerned that some clubs aren't spending revenue sharing money, has suggested that payroll floors may be necessary.

"If a club legitimately trying to compete has a plan that calls for them to be at a particularly low payroll for a given year as part of a longer-range plan to compete the following year or years after that, management should have that flexibility," Weiner said.

There also is another reason.

"Players historically have suspected that the request for a

salary floor is a precursor to a request for a salary cap," he said, "and you know what the position of this union has been on salary caps."

Weiner anticipates some change in the drug program for next year but didn't specify what they will be. Baseball does not test for human growth hormone because there is not a validated urine test.

"I think the testing policy is working great," he said. "Does that mean that it can't be improved? Of course not."

He also was unconcerned the annual report from the drug program's independent administrator showed 108 players had therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs) this year to use otherwise banned substances because of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

"The number of new exemptions is a far lower number," Weiner said. "A healthy percentage of applications for new TUEs were rejected."