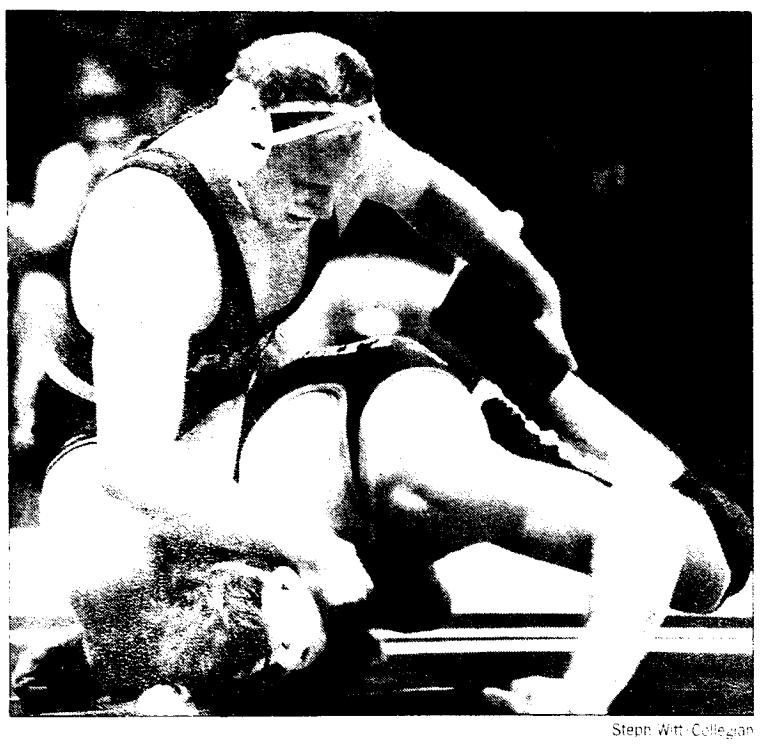
Weekend shows potential for NCAAs



Steph Witt/Collegian

Senior David Erwin (left) wrestles Illinois' John Dergo in a dual meet Jan. 22. Erwin beat No. 7 Phil Keddy and No. 16 Travis Rutt this weekend.

By Brendan Monahan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

WRESTLING

Heading into this weekend's road duals, assistant coach Troy Letters knew the competition would be a proper test for the ranked Nittany Lions before the NCAA tournament.

The question was whether they would pass that test.

In his post-meet radio remarks, Penn State coach Cael Sanderson was generally pleased with the Nittany Lions' performance against Wisconsin. With several key victories, some Lions proved their national tournament potential this weekend.

"Even the matches we lost," Sanderson said, "for the most part, they wrestled the whole time."

Frank Molinaro was one of the Lions who wrestled for a full seven minutes on Sunday. The 149-pounder responded after being pinned by No. 1 Brent Metcalf on Friday with a 6-5 win against No. 2 Kyle Ruschell of Wisconsin.

No. 13 Dave Erwin also showed his national tournament potential with wins over No. 7 Phil Keddy and No. 16 Travis Rutt. Sanderson said if it wasn't for Rutt's baseline defense, Erwin would have scored more takedowns — a sure sign Erwin has taken on the aggressor role.

Though Molinaro and Erwin showed their upside, the Lions said the matchups weren't make or break.

"Every Big Ten match is going to be a big match," heavyweight Cameron Wade said. "You don't want to lose any match."

Senior Adam Lynch hasn't had problems taking on that approach in the 141-pound weight class. Lynch's stock has increased with two wins over ranked opponents this past weekend. But with the NCAA tournament more than a month away, seeding will fluctuate based on every match.

Wade, Brad Pataky and Cyler Sanderson all responded with Sunday wins against three unranked wrestlers after losing their bouts Friday night. No. 8 Dan Vallimont was the only ranked Lion to lose both of his bouts: losses to No. 5 Ryan Morningstar and No. 1 Andrew Howe.

"We don't want to wait until the Big Tens to beat those guys," Cael Sanderson said. "He can beat them. We know he can."

Luckily for Vallimont, as teammates and coaches agreed, the weekend's matches weren't essential to deciding NCAA tournament potential.

"We just need to make a couple adjustments," Molinaro said. "There are a couple of positions we're getting beat in, but overall, it was pretty good effort."

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TWITTER

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Legend joins PSU staff

By Kurt Bopp
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

WOMEN'S LACROSSE

For the past four years, Hannah Nielsen has been practicing to beat everybody standing in the way of her team — including rival Penn State.

But after dominating the game of lacrosse for four years and establishing herself as one of the greatest women's lacrosse players ever, the former Northwestern Wildcat has joined the Nittany Lions this year as an assistant coach.

"We certainly are more excited about Hannah being here," head coach Suzanne Isidor said. "She brings the obvious playing resumé as one of the best players in the world. She's not only a great player — she's a great coach and a great role model."

Nielsen has been added to the coaching staff for the duration of the 2010 season. She'll replace Tara Hohenshelt — who will be giving birth this spring and move to director of operations — and will have a big focus on the attack, an area of the game the former midfielder mastered while in Evanston. Her experience and knowledge of the game will help a Lions team she beat all seven times she played them.

Nielsen finished as the all-time leader in points (398) and assists (224) at Northwestern and ranks third all-time for points in NCAA Division I history. She won four national titles and finished with an 85-3 overall record.

"I got to play against her last year, and she was really challenging to play against," sophomore midfielder Theresa Zichelli said. "I'm really excited for her experience."

Zichelli and many of her teammates were "shocked" when they found out but excited about the wealth of knowledge and experience Nielsen brings.

And both the players and coaches like the new arrangement.

"I much prefer it this way, having her on our side," Isidor said. "She was definitely one of the players we had to strategize the most against. We had to figure out how to minimize her points, not keep her scoreless. We're definitely excited to have her on our team now."

Nielsen arrived in State College a week and a half ago and has been adjusting to her new town. She hopes she can find her way around town quicker than when she played in Chicago.

"I chat with [the Wildcats] a lot," Nielsen said. "I'm good friends with one of the coaches out there. I think they know Northwestern will always have a spot in my heart. They're mostly excited for me to begin coaching."

The transition from player to coach has been tough for Nielsen, but she said she is just happy she can continue to be involved with the sport. And though she is even farther from her home in Adelaide, Australia, Nielsen has found a former teammate and friend in State College.

Freshman attacker Hayley Sofarnos of Williamstown, Australia, has played with and against Nielsen in the past. The two first played against each other in 2004 for their respective states. Sofarnos eventually played with Nielsen in 2007.

"When I got an e-mail from Sue that we had a new assistant, it was crazy that out of all the Australians to play lacrosse in the U.S., 20 or so, to end up at the same university at Penn State," Sofarnos said. "It was a surprise, very exciting, a little unexpected."

Penn State travels to Evanston April 11, and Nielsen said she is excited for the game.

"It'll be great to see them play," she said. "Obviously I want to see my alma mater play. It may be a weird experience in opposite colors though."

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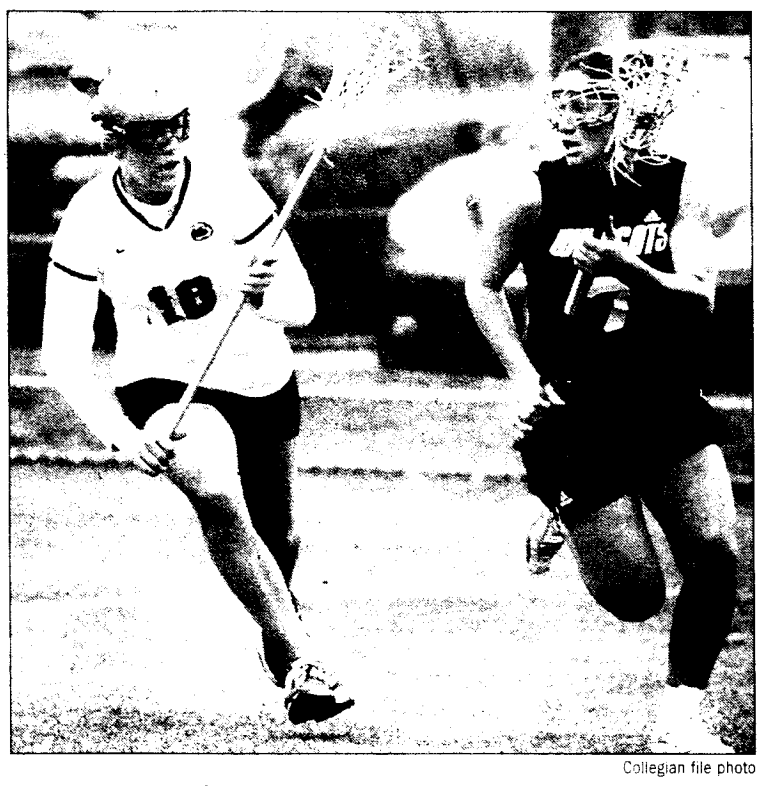
ONLINE

Siblings Earl and Ashley Ross are also both Penn State lacrosse players: **psucollegian.com**



Collegian file photo

Northwestern midfielder Hannah Nielsen (7) advances the ball against Penn State in a 2008 game. Nielsen, who ranks third in NCAA history with 398 career points, is now a Penn State assistant coach.

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