

Boxing matches go on despite weather

By Adam Bittner
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

As cleanup of the "Penn State Fight Night" boxing home show was under way Saturday night at the White Building, Penn State boxing coach Jack Rohrabough described the weekend's events the same way he described them during a Tuesday night practice: buying a pig in a poke.

"A pig in the bag. You don't buy it unless you see it," Rohrabough said.

"You don't know what the next

day is because it's still in the bag, right? Until it comes out, you don't know."

It was an appropriate summary of what club president Tyler Choura described as a "roller coaster" of emotions as the club managed to stage an evening of 11 bouts despite numerous cancellations because of snow.

Assistant coach Dave Vacco said the team lost five clubs over the course of the week. Georgetown canceled early in the week, Maryland and Shippensburg on Friday, and IUP

and West Virginia Saturday morning.

Vacco said he was continuously putting together replacement bouts, only to have them unravel within hours.

Ultimately, he ended up putting five fights between Penn State fighters and other schools and six intra-squad fights between Penn State club members, which displeased Choura at first.

"Our coach was talking about how Penn State was gonna fight Penn State, and I didn't know

how I felt about that," Choura said.

"I mean, we spar each other and everything, but to have to actually go on record and give someone a loss that you're friends with... But we had to put on a show for the fans."

Club treasurer and event coordinator Natalie Defelice said about 450 showed despite the weather conditions keeping some teams home.

"I think considering the circumstances, we got an excellent turn out," Defelice said. "The

snow storm in general didn't hold that many people back."

Penn State went 4-1 in inter-squad fights with Lock Haven and a late addition to the bout sheet from Mansfield, Mike Daverio, Derek Arnold, Amanda Montemore and Alexia Miller won their matches.

Choura, Anthony "A.J." Williams, Casey Barnett, Brad Stauber, Matt Roy and Mike Kowalski won the intra-squad matches of the evening.

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Westbrook

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on the 3-point line and Babb's hand in his face, he let the shot go.

"When things like that happen, you just got to give the player credit," D.J. Jackson said. "I don't think we could have defended it any better."

Jackson scored 18 points on Saturday and was crucial in the Lions' comeback from down six with just more than a minute to play. The junior forward and Battle sandwiched 3-pointers around a pair of Minnesota free throws to cut the Gophers' lead to two.

Freshman guard Tim Frazier then forced Westbrook into a jump ball, and a possession arrow that favored the Lions set the stage for Battle's tying bucket.

Despite the close loss, Jackson said nothing about the ensuing buzzer-beater made the defeat any more difficult to deal with than the other 10 conference losses, which include an overtime defeat at No. 16 Wisconsin and a blown 16-point lead at home against Michigan.

"Every loss is tough whether you lose by one or 20," Jackson said.

"It goes down as a loss. Yes it hurts, but all the losses we have hurt.

"We have to figure out a way to win these games down the stretch."

He said he was expecting a miss when Westbrook put up the final shot, saying it finally felt like the Lions' day when Battle equalized.

But Westbrook, like DeChellis and Battle, knew he had just dealt the Lions their 11th conference loss from the second the ball left his fingertips.

"I got it in rhythm and stepped back, which is one of my favorite moves," Westbrook said.

"When I let go, I knew it was going in."

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Losing

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the first Big Ten win for his coach.

"At this point, in the locker room I feel so bad for coach because he tries so hard," Battle said. "After a loss like this, there's not much he can say. I know he's getting sick of telling us we got to keep our heads up and continue to play because we are right there and can't get over the hump."

Battle said he stopped looking at the team's record or paying attention to the streak. Instead, the junior goes into every game with the mindset his team is 0-0 and it can compete with any opponent.

Jackson said Saturday's game was going to be "our day" after Jeff Brook's hustle play led to Battle's tying basket. Instead, Jackson could only watch as Lawrence Westbrook hit the game winner, another sequence in the Lions' season of falling one play short.

"We did find a way to win. We hit a couple of big 3s when we needed to, we made a steal in the end, we made a lay-up, and they just made one more play," DeChellis said. "It's kind of been the record all year — they make one more play, one more rebound, one more defensive stop, whatever it may be."

With no game until next Saturday, Jackson said it gives the players time to rest but also leaves them with the bad taste of a loss and the desire to go out and reverse their fortunes.

Battle isn't letting the struggles of the season affect his desire to play basketball.

"We are still basketball players, and we love to play the game," Battle said. "When you go out there and you expect to get steamrolled, you may as well quit. Being 0-11 now, that's like the worst feeling ever, but it gives you the stride to want to win."

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Shooting

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first 20 minutes, while Nikki Greene and Tyra Grant both went into the locker room with double-digit points.

The Lions' success carried over into the second half as well.

After Ohio State started the second half with a 3-pointer, Penn State forced a pair of turnovers and extended the lead to 14 off a Julia Trogele steal and layup.

But then Ohio State found an answer during the last 10 minutes of the game.

The Buckeyes cut down their turnovers, shut down Bentley and continued their lights-out shooting.

"The energy and the level of intensity that we were playing with the first 30 minutes of the game was hard to

keep up," Washington said. "Like I said, we just ran out of gas for the last eight minutes of the game."

Grant ended the game with 22 points while Bentley added 20. Ohio State's Lavender had 18 points and Prahalis finished with 26.

But while Penn State's players were struggling toward the end of the game, Ohio State's were just peaking.

The Buckeyes continued to shoot better than 50 percent, but Penn State's shooting percentage dipped from 52.6 percent down to 34.6.

"I think we just failed to execute on offense," Grant said. "We didn't finish what we were running. And I felt like maybe if we could have executed a little better down the stretch, the game would have probably been a lot closer than it was."

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Win

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recording 11 attack errors and six service blunders.

"Our second-team guys were in, and I don't think that they played very well," said returning All-American Max Lipsitz, who rested all of the second set in favor of the freshman Nick Turko.

"We've seen them play better in practice every day."

When the second set ended — on a Will Price attack error — the Springfield bench rushed the court and jumped up in celebration while a lone Pride fan donning a maroon sweatshirt stood on the top of the

stands and began screaming and waving his hands with rejoice. The depleted Lions, meanwhile, exited to the locker room quietly, most bowing their heads — none of them talking.

But Lipsitz said his team's frustration had nothing to do with a record lost.

"We were all very unhappy and disappointed to how we played in set two, but that had nothing to do with the streak being over," Lipsitz said.

"We were just disappointed in the way it went."

Lipsitz said most of the guys didn't even hear about the streak until somebody mentioned it at the very end of last season.

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Football

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"And I chose my college based on academics."

But Johnson loved football. He had played team sports since grade school and wasn't quite ready to let go. So when he enrolled at Penn State for summer session 2007, he decided to take a chance and devote himself to doing everything possible to play for one of the nation's most prestigious programs.

Penn State football — its roster full of touted high school standouts with full scholarships — became Johnson's obsession. He began a rigorous training regimen, lifting weights almost daily. He stopped going out on weekends and monitored his diet. He spent hours doing research on fitness, learning about alternative recovery methods, speed enhancement drills and new stretching techniques. It paid off for Johnson, who now sits on the Lions' 122-man roster.

Tonight, the Penn State football team will hold a tryout at Holuba Hall for those won't-give-up dreamers, all with the same goal of wearing Nittany Lion blue and white come fall 2010.

They all want to beat the odds. They want to feel the same exhilaration a walk-on safety did when he received that call last spring.

They want to be the next Kyle Johnson.

demie scholarship and joined the track team in the spring of 2006.

"I had some DI-AA and DII offers for football out of high school," Adewumi said. "But I chose track because that's what I was better at. It was a safe option, for sure. But now I have matured and realized life is all about passion and doing what you love. Football is my first love, and I want to pursue that."

Adewumi walked away from Penn State and the track team after one semester. He had joined the team late — Adewumi had deferred fall semester to work for the nonprofit organization Youth With a Mission — and found it difficult making the adjustment as "the new kid." He also had trouble at home. Adewumi's mother has bipolar disorder, causing a tumultuous home life for a teenager.

Adewumi spent a year in the army, then moved to Baltimore with a few friends where they founded a social-network Web site called Heekya, dubbed "a Wikipedia for stories." Now, he is back at Penn State, where he is studying Spanish and international politics. And he's been training to try out for the football team. He has gained 55 pounds of muscle in the past six years, now filling out his 5-foot-11 frame at 200 pounds.

"My life experiences, those have shaped who I am today," Adewumi said. "And they have made me a better person. But at the end of the day, at tryouts, the football coaches will be looking for football skills. And I hope to be ready for that."

Third time's a charm

Alphonso Newsuan sees the Penn State football players walking around campus, and he can't help but feel intimidated.

"I look at them, and they're just so big, so accomplished," Newsuan said. "They're who I want to be."

Newsuan isn't too shabby himself. At 6-foot-2, 285 pounds, he was a star lineman and All-District wrestler at Milton Hershey High School. But even that might not make the grade at a storied program like Penn State.

"All my life, I have tried my hardest and that was good enough to do well," Newsuan said. "And for the first time in my life I'm in a situation where I can try as hard as I can, but that might not be good enough. That's scary."

So scary that it took Newsuan a year to actually come to tryouts. Twice, Newsuan attended the general interest meetings — once last spring and once this fall — and twice he withdrew before actually getting the chance to showcase his talent in front of the Penn State coaches. Newsuan said his nerves weren't the type that could be measured. His knees didn't shake. His voice didn't quiver. It was more of a feeling inside that told him he wasn't emotionally ready.

"One time I didn't even go as far as handing in my physical," Newsuan said. "I just looked at the guys in the meeting and got really nervous. I just couldn't do it. I thought I needed to do more preparations."

Now, Newsuan believes he is ready. He has found solid support in friends who have encouraged him throughout his training. Newsuan said they believe in him, and that motivates him to try harder than ever before to reach the ultimate goal.

"I want to play for Penn State because it's the ideal football school," he said. "I want travel the country and play the best competition in the country, with the best team in the country for the best coach probably in the history of the game."

A journeyman returns home

It's taken David Adewumi a while to get to Holuba Hall for tonight's football tryouts. Actually, it's been a journey that spanned almost six years, five states and two countries. Since graduating from State College Area High School at age 17 in 2005, Adewumi did missionary work in the Dominican Republic and Amazon jungle, ventured for a while into the business world, and also served a stint in the army as an airborne infantryman.

As a high schooler in the shadow of Beaver Stadium, Adewumi played for the Little Lions' football team but shined in track. Miami (Fla.) heavily recruited him as a sprinter.

Yet he chose Penn State, where he was awarded an aca-

An unrequited love

It started with a Facebook message.

Shortly after Johnson made the football team in 2008, he received a note in his inbox from Ryan Curran, whom he'd never met.

"I just said, 'Hey, I heard you walked on the team, and that's always been my dream,'" Curran recalled. "And I asked him for some tips on what I should be doing to get better."

Johnson couldn't decide if he was more surprised or flattered by Curran's outreach.

"To this day, I have no idea how Ryan found me. Man, that kid is resourceful," Johnson said. "But it also shows how he is persistent and how much he wants this."

Curran wants it badly. After graduating from Solanco High School in 2007, Curran attended Penn State-York for two years while playing for the York County Silver Bullets, a semi-pro football team. He transferred to University Park in August and attended the fall tryouts, where the roster is essentially set. He didn't get the call.

Historically, spring tryouts are more competitive, with few spots actually open. And tonight, Curran feels he's completely ready.

"It is like I've been training for this tryout for three years," Curran said. "It's all calculated, all part of the plan. Ever since I fell in love with the sport, Penn State football has kind of been my thing. And I am going to do whatever it takes to be a part of it."

That includes making serious sacrifices. Curran — an aspiring linebacker — has put close to 20 hours a week into training, and his grades have taken a hit.

"As much as I hate to say it, I'm putting in as much time as a DI player with my training," Curran said. "It's my priority, my life right now. And it's my sole focus."

Athletically, that dedication has paid off. The 5-foot-11 Curran has gained 15 pounds since the last tryout — 40 since high school — and now stands at a muscular 210 pounds. His training regimen is intense and obsessive. He regularly sneaks into Holuba Hall — Penn State's state-of-the-art indoor training facility — after football practice ends. Some nights, he straps on a 30-pound vest and runs sprints along the 80-yard indoor turf field. Other nights, he goes to the weight room for two-hour stints.

Before all workouts, he carefully wraps his big toe with a specialized black bandage. Shortly after the fall tryouts, Curran was diagnosed with turf toe because he trained too hard.

"I don't think anything will stop me from trying out again and again," he said. "At this point, I'm 100 percent Penn State. I'm here. I'm in college. What else do I have to lose?"

"I might as well just keep working hard to achieve my goal because I can't even imagine myself playing

in another uniform. I'm all blue and white."

Curran receives encouragement from Johnson, who has been working out with him on weekends. Even one of Curran's idols has given the Lion hopeful more hope. Sean Lee — the standout linebacker and 2009 team captain — has been training for the NFL Combine at a facility in Lancaster, the same gym Curran works out at when he's home.

Over winter break, Curran saw Lee and approached him.

"He was such an inspiration," Curran said. "He told me, 'Keep working hard. I know you'll get it.' After that, I was just like, 'Wow, I can do this.'"

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