



Freshman Parker Raque performs on the vault against William & Mary Sunday. Penn State has a week-and-a-half before its next event Feb. 20.

# Break helps team prepare

By Kevin Kline  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

After a bye week this weekend, the schedule for the No. 5 Penn State men's gymnastics team gets a little bit tougher.

The Nittany Lions host No. 2 Illinois on Feb. 20, visit No. 6 Ohio State the next weekend, and then come home to host No. 7 Minnesota and No. 10 Temple on March 6 in their only home tri-meet of the season.

How the group performs during this critical part of the season will be important in evaluating where it stands among the rest of the country.

"Getting into the meat of the schedule just comes down to being scrappy and being tough," coach Randy Jepsen said. "That's what I'm looking to see us do, regardless of who we're against. Just to hit pretty good routines so we're maximizing our opportunities."

Through the first month of the season, the team is 2-1 in its dual meets, beating Army in the season opener, losing at now-No. 1 Michigan, then beating William &

Mary on Jan. 31 at Rec Hall. This past weekend, three gymnasts competed in the Winter Cup Challenge in Las Vegas, while the rest of the squad had those days off.

That, combined with this weekend's bye, means a long layoff as far as team competition goes.

When Penn State faces off against the Illini, it will have been 19 days since its victory over the Tribe.

But the long break comes at an important time, as it has allowed some gymnasts to recover from their nagging injuries just in time for the stretch run.

"It's a good break, and we need it," Jepsen said. "We're still not 100 percent with some things, but we're definitely gonna get some mileage and preparation with the time off."

With freshmen and sophomores comprising 14 of the team's 20 gymnasts, Jepsen knows his inexperienced group will be tested with the upcoming schedule.

"I told the guys yesterday, 'When you look on paper, we're out-manned, it's no doubt,'" Jepsen said. "We're young, and they've got real seasoned guys. But you don't win meets on paper, you win them in the gym and on

the equipment. So I told them just go in and do their job, what happens?"

Jepsen has stressed to his gymnasts the importance of relying on their own preparation for the upcoming opponents. "The opposition is the better team, there's nothing like that," he said. "About it, Jepsen said."

The squad has respected Jepsen's ideology, yet the stance of this crucial season is not lost on the group.

"Right now we're not getting everyone recovered, especially when we have to start everything on and start routines real well," said Miguel Pineda said.

The team can control its destiny as long as it stays clean and doesn't beat itself.

"A lot of times in meets it comes down to who has the edge," Pineda said.

"And that's what we need to make sure that we do, when it comes down to it, we know we can hit what."

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# Sophomore Ettl excelling on bars

By Jared Shanker  
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Luck has tried its best to end Natalie Ettl's career. It has dealt her two knee tears, a torn meniscus and multiple surgeries.

Despite all the injuries, the Penn State sophomore has fought back and is now one of the elite gymnasts in the nation.

In a meet against Illinois this past weekend, Ettl cemented her position in the top tier of gymnasts. Ettl racked up a career-high 9.950 on the uneven bars, just shy of the school record.

"The routine just felt great," she said. "Everything felt right — the handstands, the release move was huge, I stuck the dismount."

It's not Ettl's preference to perform only on bars, but the number of knee injuries she has suffered cost her a chance to compete in the all-around like she was accustomed to in high school.

In 2005, Ettl tore the anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) in her right knee for the first time. After a year of rehabbing, Ettl tore it again in the same knee in 2007 after returning to the gym just months prior. Then, as a senior in high school, Ettl had to undergo more surgery to repair a torn meniscus, causing her to settle for a career on bars at Penn State.

"There are times when I just want to go randomly do floor routine," Ettl joked.

Ettl has adjusted quite well, becoming one of the best bar specialists in the country. With the exception of the tri-meet on Jan. 30, Ettl's scores on bar have improved every week, culminating with Saturday's career-high against Illinois. That nearly flawless effort is the second-highest score recorded on bars in the nation this season.

Coach Steve Shephard was equally impressed with the performance, calling Ettl's routine "tremendous." However, it still isn't even the best he has seen from her since she arrived on campus in fall 2008.

In his 18 years as coach of the Nittany Lions, Shephard has trained a number of Penn State greats such as Katie Perret, who owns the school record on bars with a 9.975, and Katie Rowland, whose name is littered in the top 10 of nearly every school record. Even so, Shephard has never seen a bar routine as skilled as Ettl's.

"She's got a world-class bar routine," Shephard said. "In terms of difficulty, it's probably the most difficult routine we've ever had anyone do at Penn State on bars, and she does it very well."

That routine, though, hasn't been part of Ettl's repertoire in nearly a half-decade. Ettl, who ranks 13th in the country on bars, has not used that routine in competition since her sophomore year of high school, which ended with a third-place finish at club nationals.

The main component of Ettl's routine is a tough variation of a release move that most of the gymnasts on the team perform. Ettl performs a "Ray" release, named after 2000 Olympian Elise Ray. As she releases, Ettl keeps her feet on the bar, adding difficulty by slowing down the timing of the spin. Ettl also keeps her toes on the bar when doing her full pirouette.

It's those skills that lead senior Alexandra Brockway to believe that Ettl has the ability to earn several post-season accolades on bars this year. Brockway was the Lions' most consistent performer on the event last year and garnered a spot on first-team All-America. Brockway sees similar recognition coming Ettl's way in the near future.

"It's definitely obvious to tell that she earns her spot," Brockway said.

### WOMEN'S GYMNASTICS



Ettl



Midfielder Maria Valderas (10) evades LaSalle defenders in Penn State's scrimmage Sunday at Hobart Hall.

# Maryland influence spreads to PS

By Margaret McAvoy  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Maybe there is something in the water or maybe the state just breeds the talent.

In Maryland, girls start playing lacrosse when they are barely big enough to carry their own sticks, and the boys are so small they have trouble supporting the helmet resting on their shoulders.

And those Maryland-bred players have found their way to Penn State.

Fourteen of the 29 players on the Penn State women's lacrosse team are from the state of Maryland, and coach Suzanne Isidor is, too.

The growth of lacrosse has exploded in the last 20 years, and the core of its popularity resides just below the Mason-Dixon Line. Starting as young as 5 years old, children in Maryland are exposed to the game through youth leagues and associations that jumpstart interest in the sport.

Penn State women lacrosse players and coaches from around the country have noticed the trend in Maryland breeding top-notch players. They say because the girls are exposed to the game at such a young age, they develop skills faster than other children in different parts of the country.

"All I know is when I was growing up, every 7-year-old girl was playing," Penn State freshman and Baltimore

native Molly Fernandez said.

Fernandez said she was one of those 5-year-old girls running around with a stick a bit too large and she joked, "If you are from Maryland, you play lacrosse."

Ruthie Lavelle, the Maryland Youth Lacrosse Association's (MYLA) president and founder said the league has roughly 40,000 youth players and has produced many Penn State players. The recreational league is the largest and the most recognized in the state and is responsible for organizing leagues and games for young players ranging from 5 to 15 years old.

When MYLA started its first girl's league in 1988, Lavelle said there were about 200 girls enrolled. Since then, the numbers have increased to a new high. In the 2009 season, the number of girls registered was more than 20,000, making the number of girls in the league higher than boys. And this coming spring season, Lavelle expects a higher number of girls playing than ever before, she said.

But senior captain Margo Josephs didn't start playing lacrosse until seventh grade — much later than many girls. Josephs, of Reistertown, Md., said she thinks the reason behind many players starting so young is embedded within family tradition. Joseph's parents are not Maryland natives and that is why, Josephs said, she didn't start until later. Unlike Josephs, junior attacker

Jen Steadman has a long lacrosse tradition in her family. Steadman's mom played lacrosse through high school and played at Loyola. Steadman started playing in first grade and joked it was so long ago that her stick was actually made of wood.

Meanwhile, senior Maria Valderas comes from a family of lacrosse stars, but she picked up lacrosse from many kids in Maryland due to its popularity.

Valderas said Maryland's reputation for being a top-notch lacrosse region often attracts lacrosse players to the club level.

Penn State coach Isidor is from Annapolis, Md. native and Nittany Lion stand-in Isidor picked up playing lacrosse.

Isidor joked about how so many people in Maryland take state-wide-recognized sports like lacrosse, people have lacrosse hats, lacrosse shirts. The sport is just a part of the culture, Isidor said.

"People have bumper stickers, lacrosse is the unofficial sport of Maryland," Isidor said.

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The Crosse Fire blog uses the story on the growth of lacrosse in Maryland as its national outreach. ON THE BLOG: psucollegian.com

# Pair of goalies to split time to replace award-winning Adams

By Brendan Monahan  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

With only one scrimmage left before the start to the men's lacrosse season, no clear-cut starter has been announced at Hobart Hall.

### MEN'S LACROSSE

Instead, coach Glenn Thiel said the two contending goalies, Dave Baker and John Nichols, will most likely split time this season with a concrete decision possibly coming later in the year. Both Thiel and defensive coach Travis Johnson were pleased with their goalies' performances on Saturday.

Nichols said the coaches would

not know the starter until the first game Feb. 20 against Robert Morris.

"At some point, both of them are going to be playing," Johnson said. "That's just the way it's going to be with these guys."

Baker and Nichols have the task of filling the vacant spot left by Steven Rastivo, who transferred to North Carolina, and replacing last year's starter and Long Island Lizards' goalie Drew Adams. Rastivo, who could not be reached as of press time, was Adams' backup last year

before leaving for Chapel Hill.

Now, Baker and Nichols have to replace Adams, a three-time ECAC Goalie of the Year.

"At first, it's intimidating, looking at it from the outside," Nichols said. "Watching him play, I'm very comfortable knowing that I could do what he did."

Baker, a former Ice Lions goalie who walked onto the team, received the start against Hobart. Nichols backed him up, and freshman Conor Baucum also gained playing time. Thiel said both

Baker and Nichols need to improve on clearing attempts.

Baker emphasized the importance of the Iroquois National scrimmage on Sunday for deciding who has the edge at goalie. Baker said the coaches will decide who plays based on how each goalie performs leading up to games.

"Once a team realizes a weak point, the floodgates open," Baker said. "It's going to be really important for either Nichols or I to really play well."

Baker said he and Nichols don't have to be superstars. They simply need to block the outside shots and allow the defense to play its game — a comforting notion for Baker and Nichols.

Nichols said Baker will be able to make the big saves in one-on-one situations against opponents. But because of his Baker's first season in college lacrosse, Nichols feels he has an advantage in the experience.

Nichols believes he also has the advantage over Baker in blocking outside shots and being vocal with his defense. "Anything he may have learned from Adams, who, Nichols said, taught him everything about college lacrosse."

"I have to realize I'm playing for my team," Nichols said. "I'm not trying to play to prove that I'm as good as Drew Adams."

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Baker



Nichols