

PSU ready for nationals

By Tom Kinslow
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The last four weeks were no fluke.

When Penn State Icers' coach Scott Balboni sat down to draw up their schedule, there was a reason he lined up Ohio, West Chester, Delaware and Rhode Island all in a row down the home stretch.

He wanted his team to be ready for nationals. Now that Penn State has gone through its toughest stretch of the season with a 6-2 record, the Icers believe they are rounding into shape for the most important part of the season.

"I think we're playing well and our game's coming along pretty well," Balboni said. "Right now we're a little banged up and nicked up, so I think if we can get rested up and we can get guys healthy, we'll be in good shape. Our game plan right now is going along pretty well for what we want to do for the year."

Not only was Penn State tested,

it also had to hit the road to face some of its toughest tests.

The Icers went into West Chester, a place that has caused them problems earlier this season and were able to emerge with a victory. A week later, Penn State traveled to Delaware, the site of the ASCHL playoffs, and was able to walk away with a split.

It's those experiences the Icers believe will help in the postseason.

Not only did those road trips help bond the team further through their experiences away from home, it helped acclimate Penn State to foreign environments, something it will have to get used to in the coming weeks.

"I know we split [at Delaware], but getting a split on the road is something positive," forward Tim O'Brien said. "As the season goes on, whenever you have these late in the season road games when your team's banged up and injured and not healthy and you can persevere and come out with a couple of wins — it's always something to look forward to and something our team's done well lately."

With the Icers responding well to these tough tests under adverse circumstances, Penn State believes it's now a more focused team than it was earlier in the season.

In the beginning of the year, the Icers struggled with putting together complete games and weekends, but now, looking at themselves going forward, the Icers believe they are reaching their peak at the right part of the season.

"It's always good to be playing at your top level against your top competitors as the season goes on," O'Brien said.

"Especially later in the year when every team you face at nationals is someone who is looking to take you out and every game can be your last. Every game, things like that, and other little things that go along with the nationals mindset are things we've been preparing for a lot lately."

Even though Penn State feels like it is hitting its stride as a unit, the Icers are quick to point out that there's still plenty of work left



Steph Witt/Collegian

Chris Cerutti (left) attempts a shot against West Chester Jan. 23.

to be done between now and nationals.

Over the next three weeks, the Icers face Drexel, have ESCHL playoffs and take on Robert Morris (Pa.) before heading to Chicago to compete for a national title.

Penn State plans to use that time to shore up the little things and get into a defensive mindset right before hitting the road one last time.

"I think we need to realize that we're not a team that's going to

show up and beat teams 7-0," goalie Teddy Hume said.

"We're a team that's gonna show up and grind out a team 3-2 and 2-1."

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Rich O'Brien and Steve Thurston enjoy anchoring the blue line together.
psucollegian.com



Abby Drey/Collegian

Penn State's Matthew Mackrides (left) dodges through a group of Saint Joseph's defenders during the Nittany Lions' win against the Hawks last season at Jeffrey Field.

Lions fighting through pain

By Mike Still
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Titanium metal poles smashing into wrists and forearms. Bodies hurled at each other and shoulders lowered into chests — it's a nasty ordeal.

And it's all to pick up just one white, rubber ball smaller than a fist.

Picking up a groundball in lacrosse is one of the most brutal aspects of the game: however, the Penn State men's lacrosse team is keeping in mind that it's also the most important.

"It's something I learned when I first started playing the game," sophomore attackman Matt Mackrides said. "The winner of the groundball battle always wins the game, easily."

This week in practice, head coach Glenn Thiel has his squad working on perfecting the fundamental, making sure it has it down when the Nittany Lions open their schedule next week against Robert Morris. During the past few weeks, especially during its scrimmage against Hobart last

Saturday, the team has noticed a serious need to work on groundballs.

"We're losing a lot of groundball battles, and that results in the other team picking it up, taking it down the field and scoring on us," junior middle Colton Vosburgh said.

In practice, the Lions are working on the skill in a variety of different situations. The team simulates a lot of pressure situations where one player tries to pick the ball up off the ground while four or five guys do whatever they can to stop him. Thiel has also implemented scramble drills that involve him rolling a ball into large group of offensive and defensive players fighting for possession.

"It's like 'rumble fumble' almost," junior longpole Matt Bernier, who was third on the team last season in groundballs, said of scrambles. "Everyone's going after one another and knocking people to the ground."

Because of the drills' physical nature, Thiel uses it in moderation. "You don't want to get hurt," the coach said.

"When you practice groundballs

too much, sticks start swinging a little too much. We just want to get things structured and get our communication down."

Thiel's concern with his players' health when working on the groundballs is real and serious. The fight for the ball can get very intense, Bernier said. There's usually one big pile of a bunch of guys fighting for the ball at all costs.

"Everyone goes after it like their lives depend on it," he said. "If you get it, you know you're gonna pay for it. You just have to stay low to the ground, pick it up and run as fast as you can until you don't feel anyone on your back anymore."

Despite knowing pain is a given when going after the ball, the Lions are more concerned with winning the battles and, ultimately, winning the game.

"You know you're going to get hit when you go in there," Vosburgh said.

"But you don't really feel the slashes during the game. You just keep in mind that picking up that groundball's gonna help your team win."

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Lesnick, Steadman power offense

By Kurt Bopp
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

It took only 20 seconds for Penn State to find the answer to one of the preseason's burning questions.

Shortly after the opening draw in Sunday's scrimmage, mid-fielder Laura Lesnick found attacker Jen Steadman for the early opening goal, giving the Nittany Lions the lead and a glimpse at the potential future of their offense.

The Lions enter the season without two of their top three scorers from last season. But Lesnick and Steadman quickly showed Penn State that generating goals shouldn't be a problem.

"They're a great combination," coach Suzanne Isidor said. "They work well off of each other. They both have great game sense and knowledge of the game. Lesnick

attacks a little bit more from the top, and Jenny is good at finding her. They're a good duo."

Lesnick and Steadman combined for five of Penn State's first six goals. Steadman finished with four goals on the day while Lesnick finished with two goals and the assist to Steadman. Steadman also had a team-high four draw controls.

The juniors were fourth and fifth on the team in points last season, with Steadman (24) barely edging Lesnick (23). Steadman finished fourth overall despite missing time with an injury and starting only two games. Lesnick finished her sophomore season third in goals (22), eight of which came in the final four games. Isidor expects Lesnick to be an even bigger factor this season.

"She came back even stronger," Isidor said. "As a junior, she's come back the fittest she's ever been and very, very confident and really taking on a leadership roll."

Steadman said Lesnick hustles every time she's on the field and playing with her makes other players want to play better.

The Maryland natives have experience playing against each other in the past, and both have enjoyed playing together.

"It's awesome to play with her," Lesnick said. "We know each other well enough to know what to look for in each other."

The lethal threat of Lesnick and Steadman is charged with the task of replacing Marisa Lozano and Kerry Shea, who finished first with 44 points and third with 27 points, respectively. But Lesnick expects the entire offense, not just her and Steadman, to step up and score goals.

"I think we have a lot of threats," Lesnick said. "You saw it [Sunday]. We had a lot of people scoring. It wasn't one person we were looking to go to. We can work around our plays."

As the Lions prepare to open



Marissa Gutherz/Collegian

Jen Steadman (left) picks up a loose ball Sunday against LaSalle.

their season this Sunday, Lesnick and Steadman will likely be leading the way.

"They're two of our leaders as juniors," Isidor said. "They played in a lot of games. Both of them

played their freshman and sophomore years significant times, and I think they play really well together."

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Men's LACROSSE

AT HOLUBA HALL

vs. Iroquois National Team
Sun, Feb. 14, @ 4:30 pm

Men's TENNIS

AT THE INDOOR TENNIS COMPLEX

vs. Buffalo
Sat, Feb. 13 @ 12 pm
vs. St. Bonaventure
Sun, Feb. 14 @ 9 am
vs. Bucknell
Sun, Feb. 14 @ 2 pm

Men's WRESTLING

AT REC HALL

vs. Michigan State
Fri, Feb. 12 @ 7 pm

Senior Day

Lady Lion BASKETBALL

AT THE BJC

vs. Minnesota
Thurs, Feb. 11 @ 7 pm

Nittany Lion BASKETBALL

AT THE BJC

vs. Michigan St.
Sat Feb. 13 @ 12 pm

Men's VOLLEYBALL

AT REC HALL

vs. Laval
Fri, Feb. 12 @ 7 pm
SOUTH BAY
Sat, Feb. 13 @ 12 pm