

Icers have no time to rest with season winding down

By Tom Kinslow
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

In the third period of Saturday's game against Rhode Island, defenseman Steve Thurston reared back and fired the puck from the blue line.

ICERS

The puck sailed through the air before making a sickening thud and ricocheting away. Left in its wake was forward Tim O'Brien, laying face down on the ice and writhing in pain.

O'Brien eventually got up off the ice and made it to the bench with only a bruise and the ability to laugh it off. However, those bumps and bruises add up.

With forward Dominic Morrone joining Dan Loucks, Chris Pronchik and George Saad on the injured list, there is no rest for the weary as the Icers continue down this stretch run of the season.

When asked about the prospect of a night off for some of the veteran players, Penn State Icers coach Scott Balboni was unwavering in his stance.

"No," Balboni said. "No chance."

While Balboni isn't limiting anyone's activity on the weekends,

during the week is another story. The team was given off mid-week a couple of weeks ago — a rarity for the team — and the coaching staff is finding other ways to limit the players' workloads.

Practice length varies anywhere from a half-hour to an hour, during which the coaches will have incentive-based contests, with the winners receiving rest and the losers skating.

Those factors, coupled with staying disciplined off the ice, is something the players see as beneficial with so many key moments ahead.

"Right now, I'm going to go home, get my work done and go to bed," goalie Teddy Hume said. "I think everyone has to have that same mindset."

The disciplined mindset of the Icers comes more and more into play as this season moves along. Penn State has been in full swing since October and after dozens of games and countless hours of practice, keeping the team mentally sharp has become especially important.

"The mental side is something we had a problem with earlier [in the season], and hopefully we can continue staying mentally focused like we have been week in and



Penn State will look to reverse its poor second-period play:
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week out," O'Brien said. "It is a long season, but if you can keep having fun, it's the main factor [in staying sharp]."

With the Icers needing only a point to clinch the ESCHL title, Saturday's contest against Drexel could become meaningless in terms of the standings, and veterans could have gotten rest if not for the injuries.

However, no matter how tempting a night off is, Penn State would rather just keep playing.

"I'd like to play myself," O'Brien said. "Keep your flow and keep everything going with your hands and your mindset and things like that."

But with that in mind, the junior forward sees the other side of the argument.

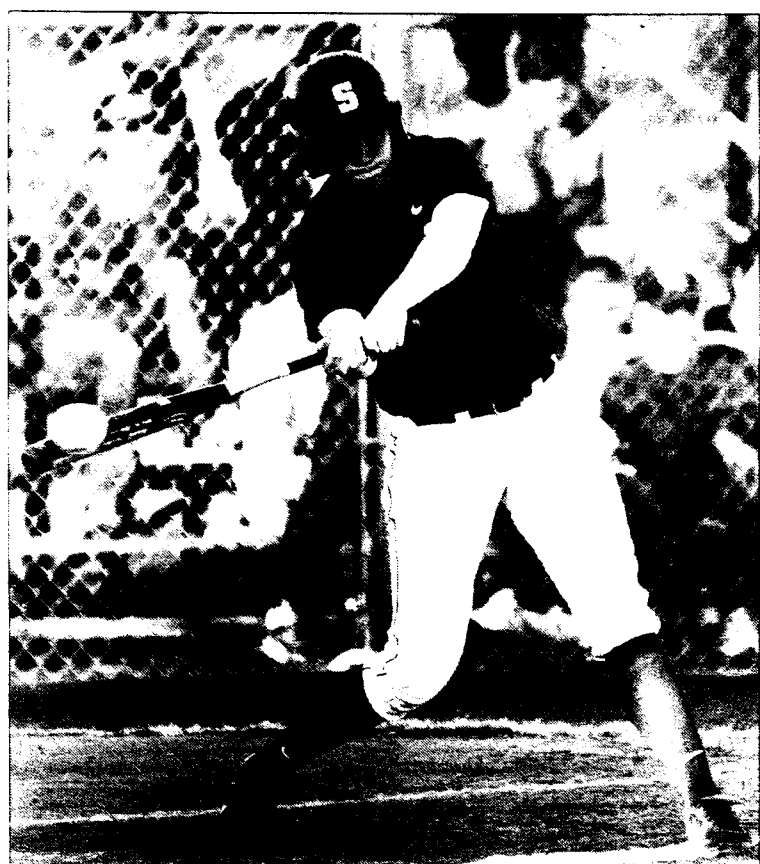
"It might not be bad to rest some guys and have them get an extra night off or not let them play 60 minutes and worry about them catching an injury the Saturday before nationals," O'Brien said.

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Senior forward Ryan Paradis (near) handles the puck in Penn State's 5-1 win against Rhode Island on Saturday. The Icers play a home-and-home with Drexel this weekend, starting Friday in Philadelphia.

Lions seeking first season-opening win since 2002



Junior Danee Collett connects with a pitch against St. Francis last April.

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Ashley Griffith just can't wait to feel the dirt again.

The senior can't wait to run out of the dugout and feel the grass under her feet as she sprints out to take her position in the outfield for her first game of the season.

She'll get that chance today as Griffith and the rest of the Penn State softball team head to New Mexico to take part in the Hotel Encanto Invitational.

The Nittany Lions will take on five teams over three days in their first road trip of the season.

But there are two teams that stand above the rest — New Mexico State and Nebraska.

The pair both received votes in the ESPN.com USA Softball Division I poll, and Nebraska gained recognition in the USA Today/NFCA Top-25 poll.

"It's a nice test to be able to go up against some of the better competition in the country," Griffith said.

"We get to see exactly where we're at, and we get to prove

exactly where we're at. We're an excited, new team.

"We've got a lot of young talent, and it's great to put us to the test right away."

Where Penn State is, is at the top of the Big Ten and ranked nationally, Griffith said.

Facing these two teams, however, was not by design.

Coach Robin Petrini said the team picks tournaments and is more or less at the mercy of the tournaments and who is selected, saying the Lions never know what they're going to get in terms of opponents.

Despite drawing opponents who are cracking into the national spotlight, Petrini believes she will know as much about her team by the weekend's end as if it had played lesser teams in its first action.

"Every time you step on the field, I think you learn," Petrini said.

"No matter what the competition is, you're focused on yourselves. And so some games you do good things and you win, and some games you do bad things and you win.

"And you learn every time you step on the field. The opponent



Right-handed ace Jackie Hill is bouncing back from an injury last year:
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gives us the opportunity to play, and then it's up to us on what we do with that."

As Penn State steps onto the field this afternoon against UTEP, it will do so without having won a season opener since 2002.

That doesn't sit well with Griffith.

"We are going to get that first team win," Griffith said definitively.

"It's time, and it'll set the tone for the rest of the year."

Griffith said she set that as a goal with fellow senior and pitcher Jackie Hill prior to the season.

While Hill is firmly focused on achieving that for the first time in her career, she also has one other thing she'd like to do this weekend.

"I can't wait to get out of the snow," Hill said with a laugh. "I'm just ready to get out of here, maybe see the sun once, see how that is."

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Last Chance to See the PSU Wrestlers!
TONIGHT vs. Michigan State @ 7pm
Autograph session with Cyler Sanderson & Team immediately following match

THE GRID	TIME	PLACE	TV	WHAT TO LOOK FOR
Men's Basketball vs. Michigan State	Noon Saturday	Bryce Jordan Center		Preseason All-Big Ten guards Kalin Lucas and Talor Battle square off as PSU looks for the upset.
Lady Lions at Purdue	2 p.m. Sunday	West Lafayette, Ind.		With only four games left, the Lady Lions make a late push for the NCAA tournament.
Men's Volleyball vs. Laval	7 p.m. Fri. and Sat.	Rec Hall		Canada's top-ranked team travels to State College for matches with the No. 9 Nittany Lions.
Wrestling vs. Michigan State	7 p.m. Friday	Rec Hall		The Lions look to improve to 5-2 in the Big Ten during their final home dual meet of the season.
Softball Hotel Encanto Invitational	Friday through Sunday	Las Cruces, N.M.		PSU goes up against New Mexico State and Nebraska, two teams trying to break into the national rankings.
Men's Lacrosse vs. Iroquois National Team	4:30 p.m. Sunday	Holuba Hall		The men's lacrosse team plays the second of two exhibition games before the season opener next weekend.
Women's Lacrosse vs. No. 14 Loyola (Md.)	1 p.m. Sunday	Holuba Hall		Looking to start the 2010 season right, the Nittany Lions host the Greyhounds.
Icers at/vs. Drexel	7:30 p.m. Fri., 3:30 p.m. Sat.	Philadelphia, Greenberg Ice Pavilion		The Icers need only one point next weekend to clinch their third consecutive ESCHL regular-season title.
Men's Track Tyson Invitational, Husky Invitational	All Day Friday and Saturday	Seattle; Fayetteville, Ark.		Mid-distance standouts Ryan Foster and Casimir Loxsom return to action.
Women's Track Tyson Invitational, Husky Invitational	All Day Friday and Saturday	Seattle; Fayetteville, Ark.		Watch for breakout distance races for Bridget Franek and Nicole Lord.
Women's Gymnastics at Pittsburgh	7 p.m. Saturday	Pittsburgh		The Nittany Lions try to improve on their first two sub-par road scores from the first two weeks of the season.
Men's Fencing Junior Olympics	8 a.m. Friday	Memphis, Tenn.		Certain fencers from Penn State will look to make a name for themselves at their Junior Olympic invitational.
Women's Fencing Junior Olympics	8 a.m. Friday	Memphis, Tenn.		Certain fencers from Penn State will look to make a name for themselves at their Junior Olympic invitational.
Men's Tennis vs. Buffalo, St. Bonaventure, Bucknell	Noon Sat., 9 a.m. and 2 p.m. Sun.	Sarni Tennis Center		The Lions look to improve their 5-1 start in the last matches for two weeks.
Women's Tennis at Wichita State, at Oklahoma	1 p.m. Sat., 11 a.m. Sun.	Wichita, Kan; Norman, Okla.		The Nittany Lions look to bounce back after two straight losses following a 2-0 start to the season.
Ice Lions at Kentucky	Midnight Sat. and Sun.	Lexington, Ky.		The Ice Lions conclude their regular season with a two-game set against the Kentucky Wildcats.
Lady Icers vs. No. 7 Massachusetts	9:15 p.m. Fri., 10:15 p.m. Sat.	Greenberg Ice Pavilion		PSU looks to further enhance its resume before the ACHA national tournament field is released next week.