

Minor adjustments key for PSU

By Bill Landis
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

For the Lady Lions, it's the little things.

It's the little things that led the them to win six consecutive games and 10 out of 11. And now it's the little things that have led to a six-game losing streak.

Despite losing its last six games, Penn State finds itself just two games out of second place in the Big Ten with three games left to play. Two of those games come against teams that are behind the Lions in the standings.

One of those teams is Michigan, which the Lions will host tonight at the Bryce Jordan Center. The Wolverines defeated the Lions on

Jan. 31 in Ann Arbor, Mich., which was the second game of this current skid.

To avoid a repeat performance against Michigan, Lions coach Coquese Washington said her team now needs to adjust a few of those little things. Those adjustments start on the defensive side of the ball.

"We need to play smarter," Washington said. "There are fouls that are good fouls and fouls that are sometimes questionable fouls that you can't do anything about. But we've had fouls that are just bad decisions. We have to eliminate those."

Perhaps the most glaring problem for the Lions during this skid has been the discrepancy in free-throw attempts. Penn State's opponents have attempted 156 free throws in the last six games, while the Lions have managed to get to the line just 84 times.

Washington said some of the bad fouls could stem from frustrations on the offensive end. But

regardless of why the fouls are happening, one thing is for certain — they need to stop.

To lessen the gap between attempts, Washington has placed an emphasis on playing smarter defense. But changes are needed on the offensive end as well.

During the six-game winning streak, the Lions thrived at getting to the bucket. Their guards would drive without fear and often draw extra defenders. The result was either a foul or an open look for a teammate.

Penn State has gotten away from this style of play as of late. The Lions have been the victims of too many empty possessions during this losing streak. Possessions in which players are opting for long jumpers rather than attacking the basket and drawing the attention of multiple defenders. For the Lions to turn things around, they feel they need to start protecting the ball more and start waiting for better looks. "We always wanna value the

ball and value each possession we have because you never know which one could be the determinant of a win or a loss," senior guard Tyra Grant said.

Washington acknowledged her players had a certain confidence or swagger about them when they were in the midst of their winning streak. She also acknowledged that some of that confidence has waned. But that doesn't mean the Lions have given up. The coach said her team is still just as focused today as it was at the beginning of the season.

With three games remaining until the Big Ten tournament begins, the Lions are running out of opportunities to show they are the same team that was in second place in the conference just three weeks ago. That opportunity starts Thursday, and Washington doesn't expect the road to be any easier than it has been thus far.

Washington just wants her players to realize that if they can execute the little things for 40 min-



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Tyra Grant (right) goes up for a shot against Minnesota Feb. 11.

utes, good things are going to happen.

"Every game is gonna come down to the last two or three minutes and being able to make smart decisions down the stretch," Washington said. "And sometimes you need a little luck to have the ball bounce your way."

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Lions' lack of rebounding frustrating Washington

By Alex Angert
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

After her team was out-rebounded in five of its last six games, Penn State coach Coquese Washington is now taking suggestions.

While the Lady Lions have struggled in many areas during their six-game losing streak —

committing fouls, getting to the free-throw line and closing out games, to name a few — the team's recent rebounding woes have been the most frustrating for Washington.

After being outrebounded 44-31 by Purdue during the Lions' most recent loss, Washington is open to any help she can get.

"We've just got to rebound."

Washington said at her mid-week press conference.

"So if you have any rebounding drills, e-mail them to me, and we'll put them in practice."

Nevertheless, the third-year coach is confident in her players going into tonight's game against Michigan, the only team Penn State out-rebounded during its losing streak.

Yet despite having confidence in her young team, Washington knows her players must get back to being "monsters on the glass," as they were when winning.

Back then, starters Meredith Monroe, Julia Trogele and Nikki Greene were grabbing rebounds at a much faster pace.

They patrolled the offensive and defensive glass while all averaging more than a combined 20 rebounds per game.

However, despite its recent struggles, Penn State has still pulled down 1,027 rebounds on the season while its opposition has only 973.

The coach said while certain players are averaging only a couple less rebounds per game, they add up and lead to eventual losses.

And while Washington attributes some of the lack of rebounding to the wear and tear of a long Big Ten season, she doesn't give it too much credence because she feels her team simply is not crashing the boards to the best of its ability.

In order to fix this, Washington has been stressing the importance of rebounding in practice.

"Rebounding, rebounding, rebounding and a little bit more

rebounding," senior Tyra Grant said about what the team has been working on.

"It all goes into who has more heart and what team is going to put forth more effort to go get that rebound and go get that loose ball."

When Penn State was winning 10 of 11 games prior to its current six-game losing streak, tenacity and heart were the Lions' strong points.

Players dived for loose balls and played with a physical edge in the post.

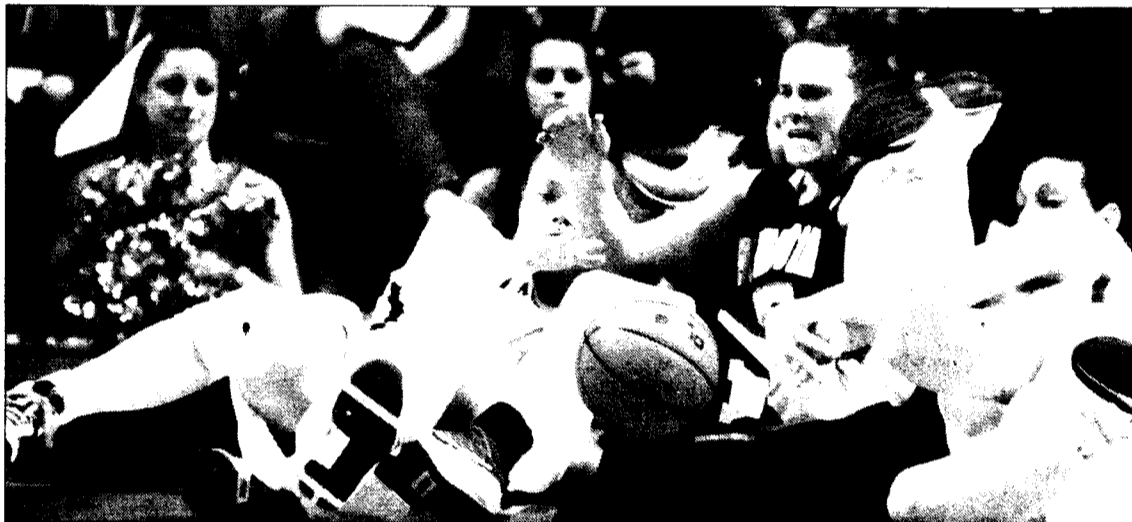
In order to get back to that point, Washington said the approach doesn't change.

Instead, she thinks the team just needs to work on getting better, and rebounding is where that starts.

"We need to work on trying to finish games out, making plays down the stretch and focusing on the big things, which are rebounding, attacking and getting that free-throw disparity back to where it needs to be," Washington said.

"If we can do that, then I think we can really turn this thing around."

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Kelley King/Collegian

Penn State's Marisa Wolfe (left) and Janessa Wolff (right) fight with a Minnesota player for a loose ball during the Lady Lions' loss to the Golden Gophers Feb. 11.

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