Defense focus for Penn State

By Tom Copain COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

It's almost four days after Saturday's season opener for the Penn State men's lacrosse team, and the ugly statistics still linger:

MEN'S 24 goals on 40

LACROSSE

shots. It was the most Penn goals

State's allowed in 17 years and the most goals the Nittany Lions have ever allowed in a season opener one more than the 23 they allowed against Maryland in 1966, when ceach Glenn Thiel was a team

But now for Penn State, the focus is off the season opener and toward a meeting with No. 3 Notre Dame this weekend. And despite Thiel saying Saturday Penn State's defense didn't play that bad against Robert Morris, defender Matt Bernier said the team spent almost all of practice Monday working exclusively on detensive drills.

"After watching film, we would tender whether that is junior John ing last weekend's loss.

get into different plays, and guys wouldn't really know where they were going, like middies and younger guys," Bernier said. "So the focus right now is 100 percent

defense against a Fighting Irish team that was ranked No. 9 in the preseason USILA Coaches Poll before beating then-No. 2 Duke on the road. That win included a hat trick from junior midfielder Zach Brenneman, who was named to the Big East honor roll for his performance last week.

The Irish also feature midfielder Grant Krebs, who was named to the Inside Lacrosse All-America second team.

"We're putting in a couple of different things," senior captain and midfielder Brian Shea said. "A lot of it is gonna be communication. just knowing where people are at all times, and that's pretty much all we can do.

Shea added the Lions could possibly play zone defense to take the might have come in the way the pressure off the starting goal-



The Lions are looking to connect on their offensive

opportunities: ONLINE psucollegian.com

The focus will need to be on Nichols or redshirt freshman Dave Baker. Thiel said last week the team wouldn't use zone much but also said the team might not be as aggressive early on as it was last vear.

And while Bernier said the team will try to get the midfielders involved more so they can be informed if the team goes to zone. the defense does have its draw-

"When you play zone, you have to realize you're going to be giving up a lot of outside shots," Bernier

'That's pressure on the goalie. too. That's pressure saving outside shots. So I think we are gonna focus a little more on zone.

But perhaps the best defensive strategy for the Lions this week players felt just moments follow-



Ryan Ulsh/Collegian

Dave Baker (32) attempts to block a shot Sunday at Holuba Hall.

This week, we gotta forget to play catch-up. It's just not about it." Nichols said Saturday. gonna happen against them.' "They're gonna be tough too. We can't start out bad like this and try

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Covello

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Covello may never see regular playing time in his Penn State career — both he and Goas, last VEHU'S EIVA Newcomer of the Year, have sophomore eligibility. Despite this, Covello has made invaluable contributions to the Lions, though it won't be found in stat sheets or highlight films. The 6-foot-4 Covello — blonde hair, blue eves and seldom seen without a smile — has embraced the role of second-teamer, dedicating himself to pushing Goas and the rest of the starters to reach their potential. And usually with a little fun along the way.

Despite his lack of playing time. Covello maintains a gung-ho attitude. He comes to practice early every day to work with Goas and assistant coach Jay Hosack on what Covello jokingly calls "the fundamentals of setting." In all seriousness. Covello said his work with Hosack has improved his game immensely, and the time the trio puts in together has benefited the setters in both technique and game sense. Covello keeps up the intensity at practice, where he animatedly challeages the starters to play stronger. Junior captale Jesse Wagner said every time Covello records a block, he has a genuinely unique cele-

Assistant coach Colin McMillan said Covello will freeze his arms and hands after he makes a block. Then the sophomore will slowly back up and begin plodding around, almost zombie-like, arms still outstretched in the air.

"At first we thought he was just confused, like he didn't know what he was doing." McMillan said. "But then we realized that's just Tor. That's what he does.

Covello forever keeps a smile on his teammate's faces. On the 10-hour bus ride home from Lovola-Chicago earlier this month, he created a hammock out of a Snuggie and napped between the seats. When the team is together, Covello is often the center of attention, captivating the guys with one of his signature impersonations also has perfected a mimic of soft-spoken junior Thomas Pereira — or creating a new one on the

Everyone on the team has a different personality." Covello said. "I mean. I guess I'm funny if everyone says it. I just like to keep the mood lighthearted.

Pavlik doesn't take that lightheartedness lightly and appreciates Covello keeping the team in good humor. Yet the coach said Covello is mature enough to know when it's not appropriate to crack a joke. He is a presence, even without the punchline. Covello has a class once a week that forces him to leave practice 45 minutes early. On those nights. Price said the atmosphere is quieter and less competitive.

'He's probably good enough to start at a lot of schools." Price said. "But he's here, working hard for all of us and this program, which is a testament to his character. He just loves his life, loves volleyball, loves hanging out with us and being a part of the team.

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Spoiler

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2-12. Penn State still has a chance to impact the race for the regular season conference crown.

In their last four games, the Lions host No. 9 Ohio State Wednesday and Northwestern on Sunday, travel to No. 14 Michigan State on March 3 and finish at home against No. 3 Purdue on March 6. Purdue is currently first in the Big Ten but leads Ohio State and Michigan State by just a hall-game.

Junior forward D.J. Jackson said the challenge of playing the top teams in the conference is exciting. Having been in the race for a high tournament seed last season, the players can embrace taking on the role of spoiler this year.

By winning some of its remaining games, not only can Penn State impact its conference rivals, but its own place in the conference standings. Though in last place, the Lions trail Iowa and Indiana by one game

could change their seed going into the Big Ten tournament with a few

"No one sees us as winning," forward Jeff Brooks said. "Everyone sees us as an underdog, and we don't mind taking that role. If everyone wants us to be the underdog, we just have to come in and get a win."

Stealing an upset win over a ranked opponent would only boost the team's confidence. Head coach Ed DeChellis thinks having that confidence could allow Penn State to enter the tournament with a chance to make a run.

For now, DeChellis will watch and see how his team handles its role as the underdog and potential spoiler.

'It's the first time we've had that [role] in a while, so we'll see how we relish the opportunity," DeChellis said. "I think for our kids, we just want to win more games and have some confidence and some consistency going into the Big Ten tourna-

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Wright

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interaction has helped Wright believes Wright is taking full adjust to the new coaching staff and the different techniques and sees improvements in his the national tournament. By they've introduced. Assistant teammate Like Wright, Erwin then, he'll be a year removed coach Troy Letters said Wright redshirted his sophomore year, from his freshman success at is like a sponge in the wrestling going 14-2 after a successful NCAAs, but Wright is excited to room because he's always ask- freshman campaign in which he face the best competition next ing questions and taking in what the coaches tell him.

The coaches have worked with Wright on leg attacks and turning opponents while on the mat.

"He showed he's capable of doing what we've worked on in Edinboro's Chris Honeycutt in things in store for his future." the open tournaments." Letters the semifinals of the Nittany said. "Quentin is a guy we knew Lion Open on Dec. 6. His hopes To e-mail reporter: rml5138@psu.edu

would make improvements.

Dave Erwin, the Lions' current starter at 184 pounds, next opportunity to take the advantage of his redshirt year went 23-8. Erwin, now a senior, year. When that time comes, said the redshirt season is a Erwin believes he'll be special good time to grow up and to watch. mature as a wrestler.

focuses on his lone defeat to a lot of them. He's got good

jumps and for another chance to wrestle Honeycutt never came, and the Lion redshirt now awaits his mat. Wright said he'll begin freestyle competitions following

"There are big expectations Though Wright's year has for him next year," Erwin said. been filled with victories, he still "I think he'll meet and succeed

Pitching

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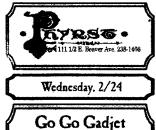
the past and should inject new life into Penn State's starting rotation this season. Despite not having a set role last season. Ignas was selected late relief, middle relief and closing duties. Wanamaker — the team's ace before his injury — was named leading the team in starts, wins, Now both pitchers are being called what happens. upon to lead Penn State's rotation, bility of doing something special after not playing together last sea-

"It's going to be exciting," Wanamaker said. "We're going to be able to do a lot of good things. [Ignas] has been coming around real well.

The senior added that, watching from the outside, he has seen a lot of progress from Ignas from last year to now, and he is interested to see how the two of them do as the team's top two starters. Ignas has also seen similar improvement from his teammate as Wanamaker is third-team All-Big Ten as a freshman coming out of the bullpen for injury to regain his spot as the team's No. 1 pitcher. And now that Ignas and Wanamaker are in their set roles. Wine has the luxury of second-team All-Big Ten in 2008, trotting out two pitchers with All-Big Ten accolades under their belts, and strikeouts and earned run average. both pitchers are anxious to see

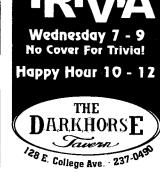
"With the one-two punch, I think it and each is excited about the possi- would be pretty good if he gets back and we can do that Friday, Saturday thing," Ignas said. "It will work out for us in the long run and take us deep into some ball games and take some pressure off of the freshmen and the younger guys."

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