

Alden goes for NCAA title trifecta

By Mike Still
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Brian Alden relishes the opportunity to race against the best competition available.

It doesn't matter who he's in the pool with, Alden thinks he can win every time he dives into the water.

MEN'S SWIMMING

And this weekend, at the 2010 Men's NCAA Swimming Championships in Columbus, Ohio, the sophomore will have the chance to show the country what he's got against the country's best. Alden, who couldn't be

reached for comment, qualified for NAAs in the 50-, 100- and 200-yard freestyle events earlier this season and will compete today through Saturday in the three events.

"Brian's a kid that doesn't care who's at the right or the left of him," coach John Hargis said of Alden.

"He's just gonna race no matter what, so I don't think that'll faze him at all."

Racing against Alden in the 50 freestyle will be California's



Alden

Nathan Adrian, a 2008 Olympic gold medalist, and Cincinnati's Josh Schneider, the 2009 University of Cincinnati Male Athlete of the Year.

Hargis is confident Alden won't change anything in his routine and will compete with the same mindset he has all year even with such highly decorated swimmers there with him.

"He gets excited to be able to compete against competition like that," Hargis said. "So I think he's gonna go in with the mindset that he can beat anybody and hopefully that'll take place."

Alden will potentially have to race six times over the course of the weekend, assuming he quali-

fies for the finals in each of his events.

Having so much racing to do in such a short amount of time is something Hargis has emphasized for Alden to keep in mind.

Preliminary races will take place in the morning each day and finals will be later in the day. It'll be important for Alden to come out ready to go in the morning to qualify for finals, Hargis said, while still maintaining energy and emotion for the finals later in the day.

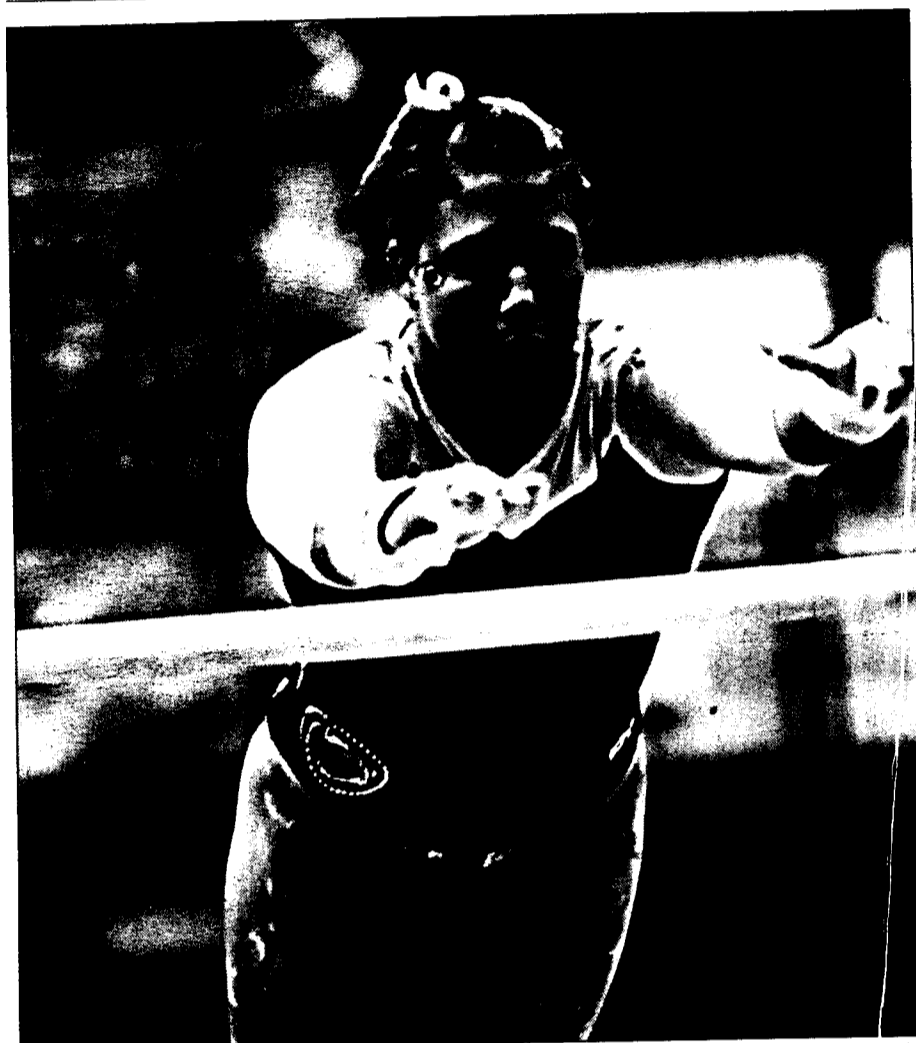
"The training we do all year prepares these guys for back-to-back daily competitions," the coach said. "At big meets like this, you've got to do it in the morning."

Despite knowing the challenges awaiting Alden this weekend, one of his teammates is confident he'll be successful.

Recently named an honorable mention All-American at her own NCAA championships, Penn State women's swimming freshman Amy Modglin, who trained with Alden in the weeks leading up to championships, has seen the type of serious competitor Alden is.

"He's a really strong leader for the team," Modglin said. "He's definitely someone that I think a lot of people look up to because he's more about doing something than just talking about it."

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Asit Mishra/Colegian

Penn State sophomore gymnast Alex Stine performs on the uneven bars during a quad meet March 7 against Maryland, Michigan and Bridgeport. It was the last meet the women's gymnastics team won. Stine, a State College native, reclaimed a starting spot for the bars rotation in time for the Big Ten championships, which start Saturday.

Soph. Stine embracing lead role on uneven bars

By Zach Fleagle
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

Alex Stine has had an up-and-down two years, but she's finding her rhythm at the perfect time — just before the Big Ten championships.

The sophomore reclaimed her spot on the uneven bars Saturday for the No. 17 Penn State women's gymnastics team after having a starting role a season ago. Falling in her first two meets of 2010 and struggling in her third, Stine found herself at a mental roadblock and only recently saw her hard work match her meet success.

"I was rushing in the meets before and not focusing as much as I needed to," Stine said. "I had to get back in the swing of competing."

Stine is fighting a stress fracture in her left shin but didn't blame that for her inconsistency this season. Limited to bars, Stine knows she's can overcome the only two impact points, the takeoff and the landing, with the right attitude.

Embracing the competition with her teammates to stay in the lineup this season gave Stine the satisfaction of stepping up to the challenge, instead of showing frustration in not participating.

Coach Steve Shephard said Stine's practices were much improved recently, and it was primarily the consistency she didn't show earlier in the year that held her back.

Shephard knows the team is hungry heading into Big Ten's and is confident with Stine's ability to start off and put up a good score. In her last start against

Nebraska, the sophomore recorded a 9.775, and Shephard knows that is what he needs from his lead off position.

"I think her routine pretty much stands alone and speaks for itself," Shephard said. "She's got a good level of difficulty and meets all the requirements. If she does her routine and sticks her dismount, they have to give her a 9.8 plus."

With four third-place Big Ten finishes in the last four years, the team is itching for a first-place finish for itself and the program. The Lions are seeded third overall, a different role from last year when they were seeded at the top. Stine feels the rankings shouldn't have any effect, and the team simply needs to perform.

"We know what we're capable of, we just need to do it," the sophomore said. "Stop talking and do it."

Allie Southard, senior co-captain for the Lions, knows the leadoff role sets the proverbial bar for the rest of the meet and a good score should keep the team from falling into a catch-up mentality.

Southard and coach Shephard are impressed with Stine's return and know what she will bring to the meet.

"That first person is going to set the tone for the next five girls," Shephard said.

"And that she stepped up after fighting all preseason and even in the beginning [of the season] to get into the lineup really shows our team depth and how important that is."

Stine is only one of the competitors for the Lions, but she knows her experiences this season have helped her mature, and she is ready for the challenge.



Abby Drey/Colegian

The women's gymnastics team hopes to leave Columbus, Ohio with its first Big Ten title.

Team sets sights on first Big Ten crown

By Jake Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

To Allie Southard, winning a Big Ten championship is a simple concept.

"Last year we went in as No. 1 and got third," the senior co-captain said. "So this year we're coming in as third, and we're gonna get No. 1."

Though No. 9 Michigan — winners of 17 Big Ten titles, including three straight — and No. 13 Illinois are the top-ranked teams in the conference, Southard and the rest of the No. 17 Penn State women's gymnastics team are confident Saturday's competition will be different.

History is against the Lions, though. Penn State has never won a conference championship since joining the Big Ten in 1992 and placed third for four consecutive years, including last year when the Lions came in as favorites. One of Penn State's preseason goals was to redeem itself by winning a first-ever title in 2010.

"I think this is the most talented team we've had so far," senior Brandi Personett said. "For three years now, we've had the disappointment and the fire build in us. Now we have so many girls on the team that have experienced that same thing. I think there's just a drive in this team that I haven't seen before on our team."

One of the sources of confidence in this year's squad comes from the fact the Lions know they can compete with any team in the Big Ten. Penn State's best meet since March 16, 2007, and biggest 2010 victory came against rival Michigan on March 7 at

Rec Hall. The Lions also posted their third-best score of the year in a victory against Illinois on Feb. 6.

In addition, Penn State has beaten the rest of its conference foes this season, except for Michigan State and Ohio State. However, the meet in East Lansing, Mich., was the season opener and the Lions admittedly had "first-meet jitters." The Feb. 27 competition in Columbus, Ohio was affected by the season-ending injury of sophomore Whitney Bencsko, who went down in the first event of the day.

Senior Casey Rohrbaugh said Penn State's prior 2010 meetings with Big Ten opponents, especially the victories against Michigan and Illinois, show the Lions can be the top dog if they hit their routines like they know they can.

Rohrbaugh's teammates echoed similar sentiments.

"I think it makes us know that head to head, if everyone hits, we're on an equal playing field," Personett said. "So if we pull out our best performances of the year, which we haven't had yet, we should win the championship."

Illinois coach Bob Starkell said he was impressed with the energy Penn State brought to the meet when his squad traveled to Happy Valley in February. The obstacles the Lions have faced this year might make them an even hungrier team coming into Big Tens, he said.

"You would be silly not to think that they're gonna vie for a title," Starkell said.

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