

PSU wins another title

By Kevin Kline
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

With a strong wind blowing in one direction through Alapocas Run Park in Wilmington, Del., on Sunday for the Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union league final, Penn State men's rugby coach Don Ferrell knew how he could use the breeze to his team's advantage.

Ferrell had the option of choosing which side his team would defend in the first half, and he gave Delaware the wind to its back, knowing his Ruggers would have the wind in the second half of what would likely be a close game.

The coach's strategy worked as planned, as the team scored 20 unanswered second-half points to come

back and win, 25-13, for its third-straight MARFU league championship and fifth in the last six years.

"It means everything in the world," senior Bryan Oteri said. "It's pretty awesome to win MARFU, period. Let alone three years in a row."

With the victory, the No. 2-seed Ruggers avenged a regular-season loss to Delaware, the No. 1 seed in the four-team league playoff.

Penn State beat No. 3-seed Navy on Saturday, while Delaware beat No. 4-seed Kutztown to set up Sunday's final.

The Ruggers were nursing an 18-13 lead with Delaware moving down the field late in the game. Senior Eric DiFelice intercepted a Delaware try attempt and sophomore Joe Baker made the conversion to put the game out of reach.

"The guys played real strong at the end of the game and it was another physical game," Ferrell said. "Going on back-to-back days is always tough, but the kids hustled hard and deserved the victory."

The victory gave the Ruggers the No. 7 seed in the national championships April 16. They'll be traveling to Atlanta to play the No. 9 seed, Texas A&M, which beat LSU on Sunday to win the Western Rugby Union league championship.

Penn State finished the season with a 10-2 record, with both losses coming in league play. Ferrell was happy to see his team bounce back from the losses during the season and raise its level of play.

"The league gets more competitive every year, and it's tough when you have two losses in the league," Ferrell said.

"But it's very satisfying to be able to come out on top in the end."



Ferrell

MEN'S RUGBY

Penn State

Delaware

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Lady Ruggers claim MARFUs

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

As his team lined up against Navy on Sunday, Pete Steinberg wanted to see one thing — how the Lady Ruggers would respond to a tough foe.

After a physical struggle, the coach had his answer: a 24-7 win and a Mid-Atlantic Rugby Football Union (MARFU) title.

"We really came out ready to play," Steinberg said. "With the team that we have, we're extremely talented, we're extremely athletic, but what we didn't know until today was if we could step up to big-time rugby when we play a big-time opponent. And we did, and we did it really well."

In the fall, the Lady Ruggers were thoroughly beaten 41-0, and early Sunday, it looked to continue. Navy scored early and scored the conversion kick to build a 7-0 lead, but this time Penn State responded.

Steinberg was standing behind the

goalpost when Navy scored and said he heard fifth-year senior Annie Zeigler telling her teammates it was fine that Navy scored. Zeigler, the team's captain, said she told her teammates the early score was a possibility and they needed to step up their intensity if they wanted to win.

"We really had a big chip on our shoulder about Navy shutting us out in the fall," Zeigler said. "That's a big deal for us to get shut out by them. We're rivals on the East Coast, so we really needed to take it to them."

While the Lady Ruggers avoided rainfall Sunday, they did have to contend with a sloped pitch and wind, which they were able to capitalize on in the second half. Steinberg said fly-half Sadie Anderson and fullback Lisa Henneman were able to pin Navy deep in its own zone with their kicking.

Zeigler said she won the coin toss to determine possession and opted to play uphill and into the wind during the first half.

Despite some initial struggles with

the conditions, the move paid off in the second frame when the Lady Ruggers were able to keep pressure on Navy.

The play of the team's forwards struck Steinberg as the key to the game. Despite having a large core of returning players, the forward pack relatively stayed the same and the coach felt the memory of the fall drove their performance.

"Our forwards just dominated," Steinberg said.

"We absolutely dominated. In the scrums we really had them going on the back foot."

Steinberg and Zeigler said the win is good for confidence as the team prepares for nationals. The captain said going toe-to-toe with a major rival was satisfying and matching Navy's intensity was a huge boost.

"It felt really good to be able to do that with Navy," Zeigler said. "Their forwards are always really strong and fit because that's what they do for their living, stay fit."

"It felt good to dominate them in the contact and make sure the ball was on our side of the breakdown every time."



Steinberg

WOMEN'S RUGBY

Penn State

Navy

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DeBernardis

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"The ball was going right at him then blew over the mound," Picconi said. "That's a real tough play but still hilarious."

DeBernardis has been getting the last laugh against opponents recently with his performance at the plate. The Lion first baseman has had multi-hit performances in eight of his last 12 games.

In the four-game series against Hofstra, DeBernardis went 6-for-14 with four RBI and five runs scored.

In the final three games of the series, coach Robbie Wine moved DeBernardis up to the No. 2 spot in the batting order. Wine said he wanted to get DeBernardis as many at-bats as possible during the two seven-inning games in Saturday's doubleheader and he decided to keep him there in Sunday's game.

"I'm taking a good approach and not trying to do too much," DeBernardis said. "I'm just putting the ball in play, and it's falling for me."

While DeBernardis has been strong at the plate, his play at first base has been just as important to the team's success.

Sunday, in a game filled with errors by both sides, DeBernardis continued to be reliable despite his run-in with the mound. He scooped several throws off the dirt and preserved the outs.

Picconi said DeBernardis is a valuable player for the team. The senior said DeBernardis' reliable glove allows the infielder to know their throws don't have to be perfect. They know if they put the ball near DeBernardis, he'll find a way to come up with it and get the out.

"DeBo is a very good defensive first baseman," Wine said.

"He's loose. Sometimes it appears to be lazy, but it's just fluid. He's doing a great job over there."

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Loss

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them, .277 to .250, and out-aced them, 8-5. But the difference in the match, Pavlik said, was Penn State's inability to win the crucial points.

"They went harder than we did at the most important times in the match," he said.

Several Penn State players did not return phone calls at press time.

The loss hit the Lions hard, Pavlik said, especially because of the opponent. The Rutgers-Newark men's volleyball team will not offer scholarships to any incoming players, and the program is working on realigning from Division I to Division III.

The Lions next play Thursday against Ball State.

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Abby Drey/Collegian

Penn State freshman Shannon Hutchinson slides into third base Saturday against Minnesota at Nittany Lion Field. The Nittany Lions were able to secure the win in the second game of the doubleheader with sophomore Lisa Akamine's pitching. She only surrendered one hit after the first inning, striking out nine batters.

Split

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three of them earned, in five innings.

"I'm not surprised they kept her in there," freshman Cassidy Bell said about Middlebrooks starting the second game. "We were figuring they would just because we made contact, but it wasn't really going anywhere. Their philosophy was, 'Why take her out if it's working?'"

Though its bats gave Penn State the 7-3 lead through three innings, it was Lisa Akamine's pitching that secured

the win. The sophomore gave up three hits in the first inning to fall behind 2-0 but surrendered just one more hit the rest of the game, a solo shot by Alex Davis in the third inning. The blast was Davis' third home run in the two games — with one of those off the scoreboard — but didn't keep Akamine from earning her ninth win of the season.

Akamine cruised for most of the rest of the game except the fifth inning. Minnesota loaded the bases when Akamine issued a walk and hit a batter and the Lion defense committed an error. With the tying run at the

plate for three consecutive batters, Akamine got a key strikeout — one of her nine in the game — and got Davis to hit into a fielder's choice before ending the inning four pitches later.

"I thought it was a great response. It was just critical that she got them out," Petrini said. "When you create a traffic jam, strikeouts are great, obviously because we don't have to handle the ball, but our defense is pretty solid, so even if we do have to handle the ball, we're making good decisions and making good plays."

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