

Forwards lead way for Lady Ruggers

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

They work as one. Eight forwards, tight and coiled, surging into a scrum with one goal — push the opponent off the ball.

“When you see what we did against them, it’s a real sense of Leshe Walsh said. That’s our mentality going into the first scrum. We want to see them so hard they don’t want to scrum with us ever again.”

The Lady Ruggers forward pack has been instrumental in the team’s wins over Virginia Tech, Delaware and Navy this spring. While the forwards are a young unit, they have been able to create depth and versatility this season.

Delaware State’s win over Navy which earned the Lady Ruggers the WFOU title, coach Leshe Walsh praised the forwards for their role in the victory. “They showed the way the forwards can be able to switch positions and be able to keep up a high level of play.”

Senior flanker Zeigler, the head coach, praised the forwards and how they saw the forwards over the weekend.

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Walsh said the team’s game against Salisbury this weekend has no bearing on its playoff run.



Forward Kyle Armstrong runs with the ball against Virginia Tech in a game March 20 at West Campus Pitch.

it does provide a chance to build more depth and continuity among the forwards. Walsh said the Lady Ruggers aren’t afraid to move players around and it helps the players push each other in practice.

For junior flanker Jackie Cairns, the depth in forwards is a main reason for the improvement. Being able to go to practice twice a week with no guarantees on playing time is something that pushes the players to get better.

“We have a lot of competition, and what was great was that we got to bring a lot of girls this weekend,” Cairns said. “What’s important is we keep having people come out to practice and keep having people work hard, and I think if no one gets complacent with the spot they have that we are going to be fine.”

Aside from dominating the scrums and rucks, the off-field work the forwards have put in has been vital. Walsh pointed to the extra work, like the annual “April Push” run, as the biggest key to building chemistry in the pack.

Cairns was one of the players who returned from New Zealand

this spring and brought back raw physicality from her experiences in the fall. The flanker said she actually had to re-adjust to rugby in the U.S., but the Lady Ruggers can use that physicality to their advantage for the rest of the spring.

“The rules around the breakdown and contact are way different. You just throw bodies and people are just smashing each other,” Cairns said. “Here, I think we can take the physicality we learned down there, but we have to refine it a little to the American game.”

One thing the Penn State forwards can do that other forwards often can’t is support the break. Once the ball gets to the backs and they make their runs, the forwards can get up and support the attack, and it’s something they love doing.

“It’s a lot of work to get the ball out, but the whole reason we do it is to let the backs do what they do,” Walsh said. “It’s amazing to be a part of that and to hang with people like Sadie [Anderson] and Lisa [Henneman]. It’s pretty awesome.”

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Ex-Lion adjusting to professional life

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Standing behind a net Monday afternoon in sweatpants and a dark blue sweatshirt, Katie Schoepfer seemed distant from her former teammates despite being less than 10 feet from them.

Ever since she was drafted Jan. 15 by the Sky Blue FC of Women’s Professional Soccer (WPS), Schoepfer has been adjusting to life as a professional soccer player. But through it all, the forward has adapted to the WPS and expects to be a contributor as a rookie.

“It was really nerve-wracking, and I was so nervous about making a mistake and not being able to play well,” Schoepfer said of her first playing time. “Once I got the nerves out, it was fine. It’s just a regular soccer game after that.”

Despite playing on a roster with established strikers Natasha Kai and Jessica Landstrom, Schoepfer used training camp and preseason to move herself up the depth chart. Schoepfer said she is the first forward off the bench and has played about 20-25 minutes a game.

At Penn State, Schoepfer could keep the ball on her foot and either power past defenders or beat them with a finesse move. But in the pros, it’s one or two touches then pass. The speed of the game was the biggest adjustment, Schoepfer said, but her size allows her to take hits from defenders and not get knocked off the ball.

“There’s no time to dribble and no time to second-guess yourself,” Schoepfer said. “You have to know where you’re going to play, play the ball and not doubt yourself.”

Aside from game speed,

Schoepfer found the pro lifestyle dramatically different from college. As a WPS player, she is responsible for getting to and from practice on her own and the players are more individual than the “automatic family” at Penn State.

However, Schoepfer was surprised how welcoming the older players were to her and the other new players. When the contract players came to camp, being on the same field as international stars and U.S. National Team players took some getting used to for Schoepfer.

“It was really intense. You met everyone in one day, and it was just go and play with some of the best players in the world and just go impress people,” Schoepfer said. “It was kind of surreal at first but once you get used to it, like I said, it’s just a soccer game.”

One thing Schoepfer didn’t have to adjust to was the drills in training. Schoepfer said Sky Blue coach Paulina Miettinen and Penn State coach Erica Walsh both follow U.S. coach Pia Sundhage’s style, giving her a leg up on how to win drills.

While she is living out of a hotel room until the end of the week in New Jersey, where Sky Blue is based, Schoepfer is still in contact with her Nittany Lion teammates. She said she talks to at least one of her old teammates every day, and the contact is something the current Lions enjoy.

“It’s really cool that we have that connection with someone who’s playing at the highest level as a professional and still be able to talk to her as a soccer player and a friend,” freshman Maddy Evans said. “We see her and see how far she’s made it, and having her as part of our support system is just huge.”

With the WPS season ready to begin April 11, Schoepfer is hoping her work in the preseason carries over into the regular season.

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WOMEN'S SOCCER



Schoepfer

Junior Dunbar happy to switch positions for sake of team

By Margaret McAvoy
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

For Maggie Dunbar, it’s all about the team.

In her recent game against No. 17 Virginia Tech, Dunbar played what coach Suzanne Isidor called “awesome” on Sunday, her success didn’t start there.

Dunbar played all 16 games as a freshman defender and led her class in ground balls and draw controls. Starting every game as a sophomore, she established herself as a part of the defense’s foundation. This season, however, Dunbar made the transition to midfield.

“I think to myself, if I get that ground ball, or win that draw control, I can pass it some-

one else and then they can score.” Dunbar did exactly that on Sunday in the Penn State women’s lacrosse team’s 11-8 win over the Tribe.

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The easy-going Cocksylvia, Md., native said she happily made the move.

Her speed and quickness have opened doors on the Lions’ attack but at the same time offer a nice cushion for the defense.

Dunbar’s mother, Martha Dunbar, said her daughter has always been a hard worker. But watching the younger Dunbar hustle up and down the field, it’s easy to see she’s more than that.

“She gives it her all,” Martha Dunbar said. “She never quits, and everything she does is for the team.”

Dunbar was a standout athlete at St. Paul’s School for Girls in Baltimore County, Md. Though she received 19 varsity letters in lacrosse, soccer and basketball,

she chose lacrosse for one reason.

“Lacrosse is just my favorite,” Dunbar said. “It’s my passion.”

Dunbar’s passion shows on the field. Whether it’s hustling after ground balls, winning draw controls and causing turnovers, Dunbar’s presence stands out on the field.

“She is a great player,” goalkeeper Steph Ellis said. “Honestly, she’s the complete package: speed, vision, agility, passion. She’s got it all.”

Dunbar’s teammates respect her and know when she steps on the field she will give 100 percent.

As she races up and down the field, she usually causes havoc for the person who is guarding her. She said that runs in the family.

“My family is just competitive,” Dunbar said. “Even if it is a board game, we are always competitive.”

With Dunbar’s competitive nature, her coaches know she’ll play hard every game.

Dunbar said Mitch Whiteley, her high school lacrosse coach, always believed in her abilities.

Isidor must have confidence in Dunbar as well.

Dunbar leads the Lions in ground balls (28) and caused turnovers (13).

“From here on out I feel like our team can do a lot better than in our previous years,” Dunbar said.

“We work hard all year for this, and now it’s just the fun part.”

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Dunbar

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