

Lions take 4x800 at Florida Relays

By Anthony Barton
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Junior Ryan Foster's goal is to break the 4x800-meter relay record at Penn Relays — and he and his teammates took the first step over the weekend.

MEN'S TRACK AND FIELD

At the Florida Relays, Foster, along with juniors Owen Dawson, Lionel Williams and freshman Casimir Loxson took first place in the event with a time of 7 minutes, 18.72 seconds.

They not only beat the SEC contingent of Tennessee, Florida and Kentucky but won by almost three seconds.

"Our best relay of the weekend by far was the men's 4x8," coach Beth Alford-Sullivan said. "They were very sharp and really put together a solid outing."

The group also broke a meet record set in 2002 and a Percy Beard facility record, set in 1972.

Loxson was pleased with the effort and said the group came in confident and ran some good legs.

"It was a long-standing record that we broke today, and it's about

the same time [Penn State] ran at Penn Relays last year," Loxson said. "It's definitely a good indicator that we're in great shape and that we have some room for improvement, too."

The team believes the race left a mark nationally.

"I think people will look at it and say, 'Wow, they're a team that's coming to play and ready for a good race,'" Loxson said.

Foster said though he did believe the time sent a message, it's what most people expected of the group. The Nittany Lions boast arguably the strongest

group of 800-meter runners in the country, with all four finishing in the top 15 nationally during the indoor season.

"I don't think anybody's going to be raising eyebrows at it," Foster said. "It wasn't a perfect race, but it was a good solid heat, and we're happy with that."

The next time the four runners compete together, it will be at the Penn Relays with a chance to set the collegiate record, set by the Lions in 1985.

Though the race in Florida definitely got the ball rolling, Foster said the coaches are stressing



The women's relay finished first during the weekend.
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concentrating more on the present breaking the record.

"They want us to focus more on the here and now and get the little things done over the next few weeks," he said. "If we can do that and keep our heads on our shoulders, they say we've got a really good shot come Penn Relays."

To e-mail reporter: acb5152@psu.edu

Freshman Evans stands out against Independence

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

DOWNINGTOWN — With her seemingly limitless maddy, Evans covers enough ground during a game that Penn State women's soccer coach Erica Walsh describes it as "painting every blade of grass."

WOMEN'S SOCCER

Thursday night, Evans may have painted her masterpiece.

"Maddy Evans was outstanding. Absolutely outstanding," Walsh said. "She covered every blade of grass, communicated, organized. This is the performance we've been waiting for out of her and hopefully it will continue to grow from here."

Walsh spoke for more than a half-hour

from her home in Glenside. Evans started the Nittany Lions' 1-0 loss to the WPS Philadelphia Independence on Thursday.

While the freshman admitted to having extra nerves with a large group of family in the stands, Evans quickly settled in and played the entire game.

Starting in the central midfield, the role she was recruited to play, the role she would prefer to have, Evans showcased her improving play. Whether it was shouting directions on which Independence player her teammates were marking or fighting for a header against two opponents, Evans was in control.



Evans

"Coming in, I was really trying to focus on communication because it really keeps me in sync with the game," Evans said. "From there, I think everyone's energy kind of picked me up. Tonight felt incredible, the most fun game I've ever played in my life."

Early in the season, Evans was the turbo-charged engine perpetually stuck in top gear, playing with unrestrained energy, sometimes finding herself out of position or overrunning a play. Going into the spring, the coaches wanted the freshman to harness her engine, and the early results show she has.

Thursday, Evans was under control, directing the wing players out to cover an Independence attack she easily could have cut off, but would have left the middle

exposed in doing so. All it has taken is a little help from her teammates on when to move.

"She kind of asked me to regulate when she goes and when she stays," attacking midfielder Christine Nairn said. "I don't like to run personally, but she's a track star, she likes to run a lot, and I almost keep her on a leash a little bit and tell her when to go and when not to go. But she's definitely learning and producing a lot for us."

Evans has also stepped up her defense. During an Independence corner, there was Evans charging forward, getting a foot on the ball and sending it well clear of the Penn State box. But instead of recklessly running after it, Evans waited and let the field reset before making her next move.

As the game wore on, Evans

was able to intercept several passes and win possession for Penn State. After the game, Evans credited Nairn for funneling the ball toward her, which allowed her to make the plays.

At the same time, Nairn called Evans a "hustler" and said the way her teammate plays makes everyone else want to work harder. Nairn, who admits defense isn't her forte, said seeing Evans flying around the field picks up her intensity on that end.

"Me and Christine, I felt we were talking a lot back-and-forth," Evans said. "Even if you can't hear us off the field, we're trying to constantly figure things out. People are definitely listening, and that's huge and moving forward it's going to get better and better."

To e-mail reporter: adr5079@psu.edu

Big Tens

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before it junior meets, but this the first time I've gotten a medal in a huge Big Ten meet like this," Pineda said. "To be able to come back with some hardware is pretty cool."

The year-end conference awards were distributed after the individual finals. Virbitsky was named to the Second Team All-Big Ten. Felix Aronovich was named Big Ten Co-Freshman of the Year with Illinois' Yoshi Mori. Shaham was recognized as a sportsmanship honoree for his display of sportsmanship and ethical behavior.

While Jepson said he is proud of his gymnasts' accomplishments, he knows they can still improve. Before Big Tens, Jepson said the Lions needed to clean up pommel horse dismounts. He said the same thing after the meet and wants the Lions to fix this problem before the NCAA championships.

Even with his concerns with pommel horse, Jepson is happy with how his gymnasts have performed at the end of the season.

"It is a big shot of confidence for them," Jepson said. "They're feeling much better about what they can do and their preparation, and I think they're really ready to go for NCAA at this point."

To e-mail reporter: jbm5058@psu.edu

Baker

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"I think even though we came out with a loss here, considering this is probably the best team in our league, we're happy with how we played," Baker said. "We're just not all that happy with the outcome."

Coming into Saturday's game, UMass had just beaten then-No. 6 Hofstra, which many considered to be the Colonial Athletic Association's top team, proving its case as one of the conference's elite.

But despite the challenge he faced in UMass, neither Baker's confidence nor his effort faltered.

Britt and other teammates praised Baker's work ethic.

"He hustles — every shot he's chasing after to try and get us the ball back, he's running out of goal, he's helping us clear," Britt said. "He's just grown leaps and bounds from day one."

Baker realizes running to the end line to get his team possession also gives his defense a much-needed breather while he returns to the net. He also gets the chance to settle himself in the short break in play and can get himself ready for the next play, he said.

The Lions also went 16-for-19 on clears, and Baker was a big part of that success.

Baker had to step and make

decisions on his own in the clearing game on Saturday, and coach Glenn Thiel was impressed with his freshman's poise.

Thiel has seen Baker progress during the course of the season, and Saturday's performance was proof that Baker has finally settled, the coach said.

"He came out for some groundballs, which I really liked, and that's your kind of stuff you need from your goalie," Thiel said.

"We can't ask him to do anymore, and we'll never ask him to do any more."

"We'll never ask any goalie to do any more."

To e-mail reporter: mas5860@psu.edu

Errors

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its intended target and ended up in the stik of a UMass defender.

"The mistakes cost us," freshman Nick Dolik said. "I made a mistake defensively that cost us. We made some groundball mistakes, and that's the difference in games like this."

Lions coach Glenn Thiel said earlier in the week his team must play "flawless" lacrosse. For parts of the game it seemed Thiel had gotten his message across, but the mistakes at crucial moments proved to be the deciding factor.

Blunders at the end of the game have plagued the Lions in their last two losses, but it's something the players feel the team is on the brink of changing.

"We got the ball with a minute left and a chance to tie," senior Joe Britt said. "We just gotta finish. We put ourselves in position, we just gotta execute."

For all the mistakes the Lions made, though, there were glimmers of hope. Freshman goalie Dave Baker stopped 12 Mountmen shots and made two key saves that led to Penn State possessions at the end of the game.

The Lions won 14 of 22 faceoffs, led by Britt who won 12 of the 16 draws he took. And offensively, Penn State demonstrated balance as seven different players found the back of the net.

Despite the loss, the Lions feel the effort against the Mountmen is a sign they are close to figuring out the winning formula. It's just a matter of piecing everything together.

"We've had other games we didn't do well on faceoffs and we didn't do well in the goal, but we scored enough goals," Thiel said. "Someday we'll put it all together."

To e-mail reporter: wml5005@psu.edu

Blowout

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otherwise rough game. After going 0-for-5 Friday, Deegan found himself out of the lineup Saturday and out of his usual leadoff spot Sunday.

Dropping from first to seventh in the batting order, the speedy outfielder showed some pop and hit a two-run home run in the fourth inning.

"I really wasn't trying to do too much," Deegan said. "He had two strikes on me, and the outside pitch I just

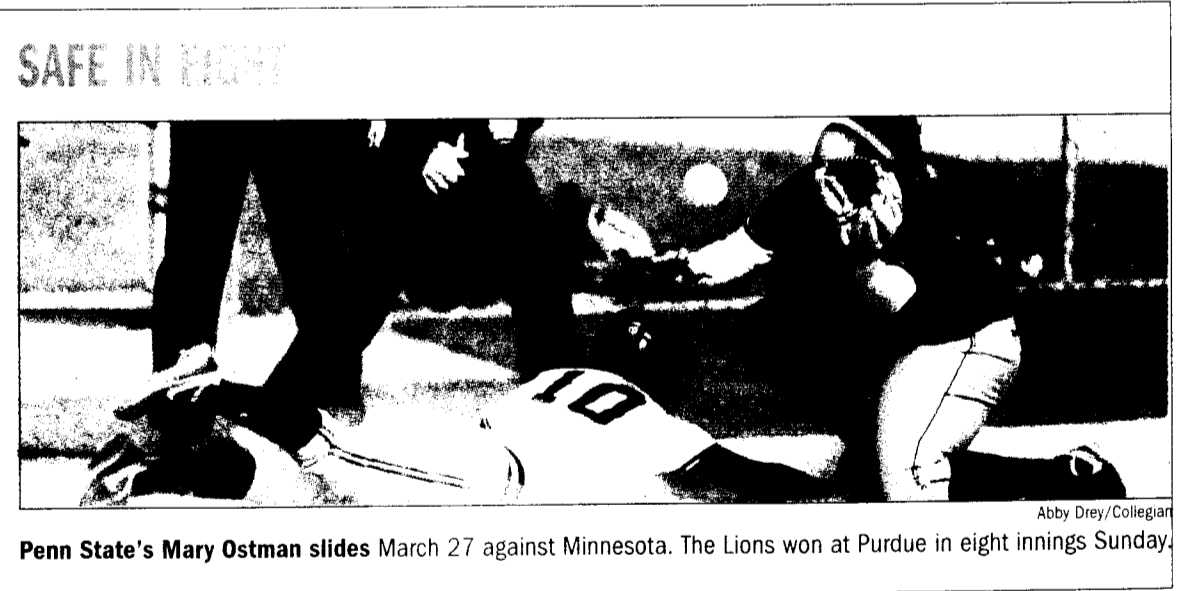
tried to stay on. The wind was blowing pretty hard today so that didn't hurt at all."

The wind may have helped Deegan on that particular at-bat, but not too much else went in Penn State's favor.

The Lions finished with 10 men left on base and failed to find ways to nab more than three runs despite having multiple runners in five innings.

"It's a tough game," Deegan Ben Heath said. "We were hoping to win the series [on Sunday], but we couldn't get it done."

To e-mail reporter: ada147@psu.edu



Penn State's Mary Ostman slides March 27 against Minnesota. The Lions won at Purdue in eight innings Sunday.

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