

Bad Habits sink No. 12 Nittany Lions

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Even before the decisive goal found its way to the back of the net and even before the slow start to the second half, the Penn State women's soccer team didn't play to its expectations against William & Mary Sunday afternoon.

WOMEN'S SOCCER

The No. 12 Nittany Lions fell 2-1 to the Tribe and continued to show several bad tendencies that have developed this season. If there is a positive to Sunday's loss, however, it's that the season is still young and there is time to turn things around.

"[We told the players] it's the third game of the season and they can decide what they want to be all about," Lions coach Erica

Walsh said. "If this is going to define us on Sundays it's going to be a long season. If this is going to stop here we could go very far, but they've got a decision to make."

Walsh pointed to the players' poor mindset, thinking they were going to win the game without having to work for it. The Lions (1-1-1) got off to slow starts in both halves, and especially the second, that had them frantically working to simply clear the ball out of its third of the field.

In Penn State's two previous matches, its speed and athleticism gave opposing defenses plenty of trouble. However, that blessing has also been a negative, as the Lions have started a reliance on

long passes that bypass the creativity in the midfield.

"We need to possess it way more than we have been," senior forward Dani Toney said. "We've just been clearing the ball out of the back when we could hold onto it and keep it and play through our midfield more often."

In the beginning of last season, the Lions struggled to finish scoring opportunities. That problem seems to have appeared again so far this year. On Sunday, the team fired 24 shots, but only five on net and have scored just four goals in its three games.

While last year's team had seven seniors to rely on, this season's team is much younger and if the upperclassmen aren't in the game, it could stifle the team's production. Sunday, Walsh said she felt there weren't enough players in the starting lineup with the

right attitude, so the coach turned to her bench.

The play of junior Ali Schaefer, redshirt junior Meghan Gill, freshman Bri Hovington and sophomore Maddy Evans in the first half earned them second half starts. Schaefer said the coaches told the reserves to get the game under control.

"The main agenda was just to keep the ball, whether it be a three-yard pass or a five-yard pass or that 40-yard bomb, just find a blue jersey and keep the ball," Schaefer said. "We just needed to settle it down."

Walsh and Toney both said William & Mary wanted the game more and Walsh saw a desire from the Lions to score, but no execution or effort to do it. With the team preparing for a weekend-long road trip each of the next two weeks, there will be an extra

emphasis on making sure the competitive mindset is rebuilt.

Once the team takes the practice field, Walsh said coaches are going to push competition in every drill.

Schaefer believes this game can be a turning point for the Lions and it will bring a different side out of the team. The junior said the team realizes that it's "breakable" and she expects her teammates to "bring it" the rest of the season.

"We're going to remain focused and working hard, it's just about finding our rhythm," Schaefer said. "It's a Ghandi quote that comes to me after this game, 'When you lose, don't lose the lesson.' It's really early in the season and there's a lesson to be learned here, and I'm thankful that it came this early."

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Freshman Schram's energy continues to help Lions

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER



Sarah Finnegan/Collegian

Taylor Schram (19) battles with a Virginia player in Friday night's opening game

Taylor Schram could only flash a quick smile as a well-intentioned ball slid a little too far in front of her and out of bounds.

Despite the misplay, Schram had every right to smirk after turning in a strong showing in the Penn State women's soccer team's 1-1 double overtime draw with the University of Virginia Friday night. For Schram, finally playing on Jeffrey Field was something she had been looking forward to for two years.

"It was the best experience ever. I've been waiting a long time for it and the crowd was great," Schram said Friday. "The team was really prepared. We were working really hard for it. We didn't get the result we wanted, but we worked hard and overall it was an exciting night."

Schram didn't enter the game until the 31st minute but was an immediate spark when she stepped on the field. Throughout the first half, Cavaliers holding midfielder Colleen Flanagan had too much space, which allowed her to easily break Penn State's advances into Virginia's side.

As she was warming up, Schram said Penn State coach Erica Walsh told her to focus on dealing with Flanagan and filling in that space.

Aside from plugging up the middle, Schram kept running and making plays, earning a start in the second half and both overtimes.

"She's just a workhorse," Walsh said of Schram Friday. "She's good in the air, she covers a lot of ground. She did a good job at plugging up their holding midfielder who I thought was giving us a lot of problems in the first half. She seemed to be the right piece [Friday night] and that's what we're trying to do, is put the right pieces in at the right time."

While the freshman's final stat line only showed two shots, it didn't show the countless hustle plays and two outlet balls that nearly led to goals. Late in the second half, Schram flipped a ball in the air out of the midfield to defender Emma Thomson who then took a shot that would have gone in except for a great save over the crossbar by Virginia keeper Chantel Jones.

In the first overtime, Schram put another well-placed lob pass to the feet of forward Dani Toney that the Lions were unable to convert in the box. Despite being one of, if not the, smallest players on the field, Schram didn't concede anything easily and meshed with central midfielder Christine Nairn, who likes what she's seen from Schram so far.

"Her attitude is just, 'What can I

do to help the team and what can I do to make everybody else better around me?' and that's very unique," Nairn said. "For her, it's a team mentality and, 'What can I do to make Carly [Niness] better or Emma better?' That and, she hustles her little heart out. She's a little girl out there, I feel like I'm so much older than her, but she's definitely been helping us."

In high school, Schram played mostly as a forward but has played in the midfield for the Lions so far and, as a result, has had to pick up more defensive tendencies. Against Virginia, she won several balls in the midfield and was constantly chasing down attackers, at one point bodying up a taller Cavaliers player, slowing the attack and letting the Lions win back possession.

The freshman ended up playing 73 of the game's 110 minutes, although she said she wasn't expecting to play that much. But if her effort against Virginia is any indication, Schram is going to make the most of her time in the rest of the season.

"I go out there and whatever minutes I get, I give it my all," Schram said. "It was very exciting playing that much time and I just gave it my best effort."

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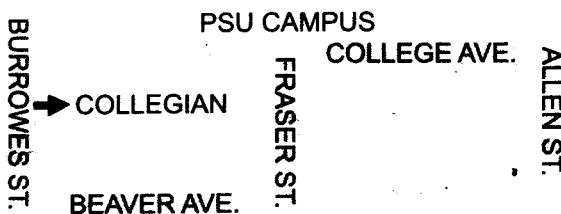
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