

Duo makes return to field after season of knee rehab

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Meghan Gill stood on the sideline waiting, calm in comparison to her energetic teammates who had earlier entered the game. Finally, the horn sounded and the redshirt junior took her first step into a game since November 2008.

A little over four months earlier, on an astoundingly cold late April day, her teammate Bri Garcia ripped a ball from 20 yards out that shot through the air and landed in the back of the net and held as the decisive score. However meaningless that game, a 2-1 exhibition win over Pitt, being on the field was something the redshirt junior had been robbed of for the past year.

After missing the entire 2009 season because of Anterior Cruciate Ligament (ACL) tears, Gill and Garcia have returned to the Penn State women's soccer team and are working their way back onto the field.

"It was definitely indescribable to be able to come back in your first game and score a goal," Garcia said of her return in April. "Granted, it's an exhibition game and we're trying to get new people in different places but just being able to put a ball in the back of the net and hear the net swoosh and everybody cheer, it's definitely amazing."

Gill played in the Nittany Lions' exhibition win over Villanova on Aug. 14 but made her official return Sunday afternoon against

William & Mary. Standing on the sideline at midfield preparing to check in, Gill said there were a number of emotions racing through her head.

"Excitement, nerves, anxious, everything you can think of," Gill said. "I was going back, a flash-back almost, to the last time I was on the field and I just said to myself 'Calm down, relax and have fun out there. Never take for granted every moment you get out there. So every minute just give it your all.'"

Rehabbing an ACL tear is a long and grueling ordeal, one that requires hours of rehab each day isolated from the team. Both said the worst part of the rehab was all of the work in the training room then not being allowed to participate in practice.

For Gill and Garcia, going through the same rehab helped them push each other to get back and just get through it.

"You definitely get to know a person really well when you're with them 24/7," Gill said. "That's an exaggeration, but we were always on the sidelines. We could always talk to each other when we were watching and try and keep our minds into the game, talk about the different things, formation, strategy, all of that."

Garcia said she played the role of the "guinea pig," because she was further ahead in the rehab schedule. By going through the steps, the redshirt sophomore said she was able to serve as a mentor for Gill, giving her team-



Tyler Sizemore/Collegian

Bri Garcia (9) and Meghan Gill (27) celebrate a goal during the Blue-White scrimmage earlier this season.

mate advice on the best way to get through rehab.

"She was able to learn from my mistakes and I could coach her through different things," Garcia said. "Granted we're pushing each other through but because of the difference we were at it was more of a 'I was there now, you're here, it's gonna be ok, and you're gonna get through it.'"

Finally back on the field and

training, both players have something most of their teammates don't — knowledge of what it's like to lose an entire year. That perspective makes Gill and Garcia unique and it has made an appearance on the field.

Lions coach Erica Walsh said both players always give a top effort in training and that Gill has been defined by her effort in her Penn State career. On Sunday,

with the team struggling on the field, Walsh turned to her bench, which included Gill and Garcia.

"When you've got a game like we had on Sunday, that it's just pure heart and effort, you need players that understand and are really grateful for the opportunity," Walsh said. "I thought they both would be, and they were."

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