

Spikes players, coaches reflect on season

By Jake Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

When reflecting on his first season as a professional baseball player, outfielder Adalberto Santos described it in simple terms.

"I guess you could define it as a baseball season," Santos said. "Hitters go in a slump. Pitchers pick us up. And then vice versa. And then when we had both together at the same time, it was lights out for anybody."

Unfortunately for Santos and the rest of the State College Spikes, it was rare the team put both hitting and pitching together in the same game, especially down the stretch.

The Spikes lost nine of their final 10 games, and stumbled across the finish line with a 33-42 record. Yet again, as they have done in each of their five seasons, the Spikes failed to qualify for the playoffs, finishing fifth in the Pinckney Division and well out of reach of earning the New York-Penn League wild card.

"It was a little bit of a roller coaster year," said pitcher Kevin

Decker, who was named Spikes' pitcher of the year. "We kind of struggled to put a bunch of wins together, but the guys just kept battling every night."

The Spikes battled to the end, and even though they lost nine consecutive contests entering Sunday night's season finale, they ceased to give up.

The Spikes, the Pittsburgh Pirates' short-season Class A affiliate, concluded their fifth season in Happy Valley on Sunday with a 6-2 win against the rival Williamsport Crosscutters, the leagues' Philadelphia Phillies affiliate. The victory, in front of 5,551 fans at Medlar Field at Lubrano Park, knocked Williamsport out of the playoffs, and gave the Spikes a positive note to end the season.

"It was awesome," said right fielder Cole White, who along with third baseman Chase Lyles earned the Spikes Leadership Award. "This team has been battling, battling, battling. I think what we did tonight is that we played loose and like the game should be played."

After hovering around .500 for most of the season, the Spikes

began to fall apart late in the year. State College fell to 25-26 after a 7-0 loss to the Tri-City ValleyCats Aug. 9, and would not get back to the .500 mark the remainder of their 2010 campaign.

"We kind of limped to the finish," State College manager Gary Robinson said. "We were hurt. I'm not an excuse maker. I'm sure we could have won more games than we did, even with the injuries. However, they never quit, they battled. They were in every game."

The Spikes' late-season struggles came to a head on Aug. 27, when Robinson was ejected from the game following an argument with the home plate umpire, which transpired into a tirade that ended with the manager grabbing first base, autographing it and handing it to a fan along the first-base line.

The Spikes lost 7-3 that night, and did not win a game from then until Sunday night's season finale after that ejection, which earned the No. 2 ranking ESPN's SportsCenter's "Not Top 10" last week.

Despite all the late-season hardships, Santos said he grew a

lot as a player during his time in State College.

"It was a great time to actually just come here, and have this group of people here to help us grow together as a team," said Santos, who was named the team's MVP.

White said the adversity helped the players grow, and will continue to help the players as they climb through the Pirates' minor league system.

"At this level, I think we learn more from the adversity than anything," White said. "If we would've just gone out there and won every single night, we wouldn't have learned anything. When you go through adversity, that's when you truly find out who you are as a player, who you are as a person, and I think every single person in this locker room learned a lot this season and they're going to benefit from that down the road."

Many of the Spikes players will have some time off before they report to fall instructional league on Sept. 19. The others will work out on their own in preparation for spring training. Robinson said developmentally he and his staff

Spikes' struggles

Pinckney Division record in five years.

Year	W-L	Pinckney Division Standing
2006	39-36	3rd
2007	36-39	3rd
2008	18-56	6th
2009	38-38	3rd
2010	33-42	5th

Source: The State College Spikes
Katie Moore/Collegian

laid good groundwork for the players' futures.

"All that will serve as fuel for a more aggressive instructional league, a more focused instructional league, a more focused spring training," Robinson said. "And hopefully they'll transfer what they've learned through their struggles here into the season wherever they are next year."

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Women sweep, men win meet against Lock Haven

By Zack Feldman
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Replacing athletes can be tough for almost any team, especially when replacing a Big Ten cross country champion.

But no one would have guessed there was any turnover following Penn State's clean sweep of Lock Haven at the Dolan Duals Friday.

In its first race since losing cross country mainstays Bridget Franek and Cheryl Spring, the Penn State women's cross country team swept the first seven spots, earning a perfect score of 15 against Lock Haven's 50.

The men's team did not win by the same margin, but also took home a victory over the Bald Eagles, 23-35.

Junior Caitlin Lane finished in

first place for the women, winning the Duals for the third consecutive year, earning her place with a finish of 14 minutes, 2.48 seconds.

In the 4,000-meter race, Lane said the women's team tried to stay in a pack until the last mile. At that point, runners who had something left in the tank jumped in front, with Lane edging teammate Paige Anderson, who finished in 14:12.90.

"We were kind of picking it up to see who had it in the last half mile [or] mile," Lane said.

"And it felt good, so I went for it in the last bit. And I did get the win."



Lane

Lane, one of two captains on the women's side, said before the meet she wished to take time off her previous year's finish of 13:54.90, though she said she was happy to take the gold again at the Duals.

"I went a little bit slower than last year, so I think if a couple of girls had been ahead of me, I don't think I would have been as thrilled with my race," Lane said. "But if anybody had beat me, it just would have been better for the team."

While Lane has had strong success at the Duals in the past, the men's team has been relying heavily on one runner, Vince McNally.

In each of the four meets he participated in last year, McNally earned the gold.

And while McNally did not run

in the Dolan Duals last year, he did not disappoint his team this time around, winning the men's 6,000-meter race with a time of 18:09.53, helping his team to the victory.

Teammate Ryan Foster said McNally, who has been an integral part of the men's team for the past two seasons, helped keep all the team's runners together Friday.

Foster said the team's outlook now is better than last year, after a narrow 26-29 defeat last year against the same Lock Haven team.

"It's certainly a lot more positive for us to have won the Dolan Duals than it was last year," Foster said.

"Cross country is sometimes about momentum that you build as a team. So for us, it was really

important to start off with a win."

In addition to McNally's performance, team captain Chris Cipro and sophomore Danny Pawola grabbed the third and fourth-place spots, helping Penn State to the victory.

But for the women, without Franek and Spring, who combined to win each of the five meets they participated in during the 2009 campaign, Lane said the newcomers have already shown their willingness to step up.

"I think the freshmen ran great. Emily Giannotti, who finished in fourth, that was great for her," Lane said.

"I think we have a lot of underclassmen who are really ready to run."

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Defensive breakdown plagues weekend field hockey game

By Zach Fleagle
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Waiting nearly the entire game for an opportunity, Jess Longstreth tied Friday's game at the 50:11 minute mark, only to see it slip away 16 seconds later as the No. 5 Connecticut field hockey team beat the Nittany Lions, 2-1.

The No. 18-ranked Penn State team had to fight off a flurry of shots in the first half as they were outshot 11-3 in the first 35 minutes. The differential was largely because of the Lions' inability to get the ball to the net.

Goalkeeper Ayla Halus had another outstanding performance finishing with 12 saves on 18 shots, 10 of which were in the first half.

"Her communication is key organizing our defense," said co-captain Daneen Zug. "She kept us on track watching their forwards and keeping an eye over our shoulder."

Head coach Char Morett also spoke highly about her goalie's performance in the first half and credited her team with its ability to adjust at the midway mark. Morett said the second half has been a strength for her team all season and was proud of their response Friday.

The disparity in shots on goal was something Morett said the team needs to work on — specifically just putting the ball on the net and making things happen. The numbers, she said, don't show the pressure the Lions brought, only the inability to finish.

"They got a lot of shots and

were able to get a second and third," Morett said. "It wasn't as if we weren't knocking on the door, we just weren't getting shots on net."

One of the adjustments the Lions made going into the second half in attempt to find more opportunities was moving Longstreth to the center of the field. Moving forward, Morett said her team needs to spread the field and work on breaking the habit of favoring one side.

Zug said the team seemed to be on their heels a little to start Friday's game. She credited the adjustments by the coaches and players to help them balance out the game in the second, but said the team needs to improve on running without the ball. She also said the team will work much better once everyone starts to help each other more.

"I think our team attack was lagging in the first half," Zug said. "But then we came out in the second and outnumbered them in corners, unfortunately we couldn't put in any goals."

The game-winning goal, which came at the 50:27 mark, was a breakdown on defense and Morett said it was a youth-like mistake. She said there were "probably six players" who could have made the play but it was a fixable error.

Zug assured a goal like that would never happen again.

"It was a mental mistake on our part," she said. "After we score we always say to get the ball deep up field. They came at us with speed and I don't think we were expect-

ing it. We needed to stop the ball even if it meant foul them, but we didn't." Most recently facing two top-five teams in Virginia and Connecticut, the Lions won't play a top-25 team until Indiana on Sept. 24.

Zug said Friday's game showed more than the game against Virginia last week and the team is poised to play with anyone. The Lions' next game is Sunday against Lock Haven.

"I'm proud of how we played."

Although the outcome wasn't what we wanted, it proved we can play with the best," Zug said. "I think you'll see some big things from us this year."

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A group of fans hold a sign saying, "Paternonator" at Saturday's game between Penn State and Youngstown State. Penn State won the contest, 44-14, even after trailing 7-3 at the close of the first quarter.

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