

# Record doesn't concern Lions

By Alex Angert  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Penn State finds itself in an unfamiliar place getting ready to see some familiar faces.

After winning the last 12 conference titles, the team is sitting at the very bottom of the standings with Big Ten play about to begin and dates against teams from the Ivy League, Big East and Pac-10 now in the past.

However, the team isn't too worried.

"I think everything is kind of washed clean once you start these games," assistant coach Ann Cook said.

"It doesn't matter what we did against Portland or against Washington or against Dartmouth. It only matters now what we do against Michigan State."

Going into this weekend's contest, Penn State sports a Big Ten worst 2-6-1 record.

On the opposite side of the spectrum, the Spartans finished

non-conference play 5-2-1.

And though the nonconference record doesn't factor into conference standing, the team is looking at an even steeper challenge this season.

"I think they are all smart enough to recognize we need the Big Ten in order to make the NCAA Tournament," Cook said. "The Big Ten always matters to us but this year there is a particular importance placed on it."

It's not time to panic just yet for the Lions.

Last year, Penn State went into conference play with a 4-4-1 mark, while this weekend's opponent, the Spartans, were 7-0-2 at that point. When all was said and over, it was Penn State that was crowned Big Ten champions after going 8-1-1 in the conference.

And while head coach Erica Walsh hasn't been too satisfied with her team's performance through the first month of the season, she isn't looking back.

"We don't really think a whole lot about the past, I've got to be honest," she said. "But it is weird that there haven't been enough games that I've walked away feel-

ing that the effort was good enough."

Nevertheless, the team sees a chance to improve.

And with a lack of results so far this season, the players are wishful that having the worst nonconference record is going to be a wake-up call going into Big Ten season.

"I would hope that would motivate some people," junior Carly Ninness said. "We have a young team so we need all our upperclassmen to get across to the freshmen how important this is for us and what Penn State soccer means."

Ninness added it's not easy going into Big Ten play in last place, but she has faith the veteran players can help get things going and turn the season around.

Regardless, the Lions still find themselves in uncharted territory being in last place and understand this will be a different experience than in past seasons.

"It's really weird," Cook said. "It's a whole new perspective and a whole new challenge."

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Alex Schlener (left) makes a play in a game against Lafayette.

## Conference slate begins

By Joe McIntyre  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

### If you go

**Who:** Field hockey vs. Indiana  
**When:** 6 p.m.  
**Where:** AstroTurf Field

For a team that managed only one win in Big Ten play last season, the start of this year's conference play couldn't be a more welcomed sight.

On Friday evening at AstroTurf field, the No. 7 Penn State field hockey team will look to rebound from last year's disappointing 2-6 record in conference play when they face the Indiana Hoosiers.

Assistant coach Lisa Bervinchak-Love said what happened last season was out of the ordinary for a Nittany Lion team that won the conference just the year before.

And the team is looking to show that 2009 was a mere blip on the Big Ten radar.

"Last year we didn't have as good of a year," Bervinchak-Love said.

"We were at the bottom of the Big Ten, which we've never found ourselves in that position before, and I think we're out to prove ourselves again, to be worthy of being in the top spot."

And the Lions have proven so far this year they're ready to regain the Big Ten's top spot. Through as many games last season, Penn State was 2-6 and in no way prepared for the rigors of conference play.

But even at 5-2 through seven games in 2010, head coach Char Morett knows this year will be just as difficult as the last.

Morett said the favorite for any Big Ten matchup this season may simply be whoever the home team is on that particular day. And with three-straight Big Ten home games beginning Friday and four straight games in Happy Valley overall, Morett said it's important for the team to play well at home and use its four-game win streak to its advantage.

"I think it's great to have that momentum," Morett said.

"The girls feel positive, we're positive about their play. The fact that they've been scoring some goals is real positive and goal-keeping has been extremely reliable. So that gives you a lot of confidence going into the weekend."

But along with all of the confidence from the four-game win streak and a week of preparation for conference play, coaches and players say there's always a little something extra brought to the field for Big Ten games.

Bervinchak-Love admitted there's an added excitement, enthusiasm and energy that comes with playing conference games.

"I think everyone just gets pumped up for the Big Ten because it's such a tough conference," Bervinchak-Love said. "Every game you know is going to be competitive, and you know it's going to be physical. And you just need to go out there and play your hardest and make yourself a little more stronger. We're really excited for the Big Ten."

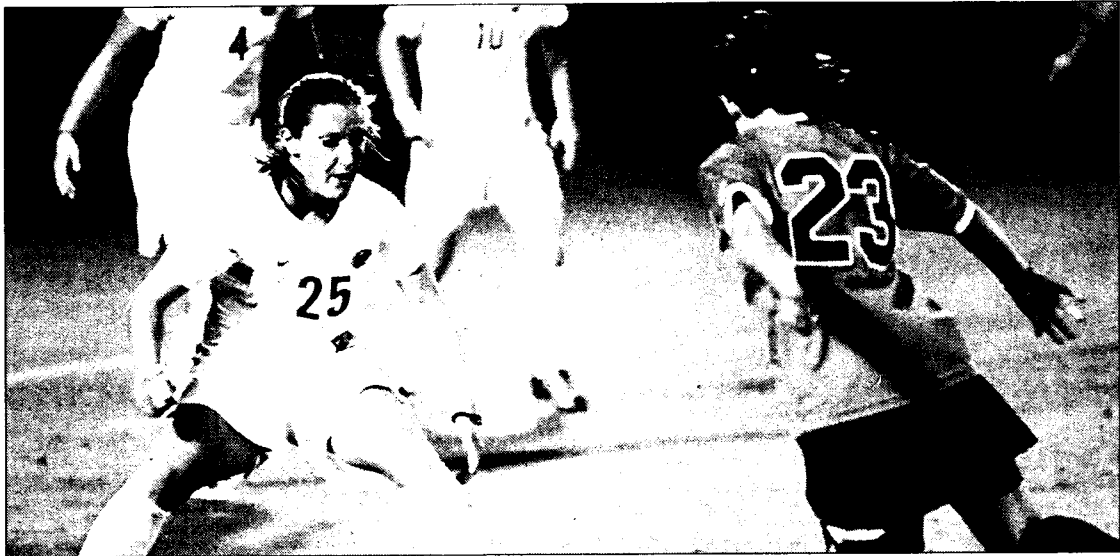
And even first-time Big Ten conference play, participant Lauren Purvis knows how tough these games can be.

"They play the same teams every year so they have an idea of who they are, what kind of players they are and what their playing scheme is."

"I mean it's definitely going to be a lot of competition," Purvis said.

"But it's your conference, so you want to beat on teams really bad."

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Emma Thomson (left) chases down a Virginia player during Penn State's home opener this season.

## Heyboer presents huge challenge

By Andrew Robinson  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

One year ago this weekend, Laura Heyboer took a perfect pass from Kori Reinhart around midfield and took off running, torching two Penn State defenders and burying a game-winning overtime goal.

Two years ago, Heyboer burned the Lions with the winner in a 3-1 Michigan State win over the Nittany Lions.

Sunday afternoon, the Penn State women's soccer team will welcome Heyboer, now a junior, to Jeffrey Field for the first time when the Lions and Spartans meet in their Big Ten opener.

"Right now, I think Laura Heyboer is the most dangerous attacking player in the conference," Penn State coach Erica Walsh said. "She's proven it for the last few years. She's strong, she's fast, she's physical, but most importantly her work ethic is the best as far as the forwards are concerned. We're going to have to match her effort."

Through eight games this season, Heyboer has five goals, three of them game-winners, and two assists. In her first two years, Heyboer has asserted herself as one of the nation's top scoring threats.

A 21-goal, nine-assist freshman

campaign earned Heyboer first-team All-Big Ten honors, the conference's Freshman of the Year and third-team All-American standing. She followed it up with another first-team All-Big Ten and third-team All-American listing despite blowing out her knee scoring the game-winning goal against Minnesota and playing just 15 games.

Heyboer's coach, Tom Saxton, believes playing Penn State brings out the best in his top striker.

"With Laura, I think big-time players play big in big-time games and she has been our go-to player the last couple seasons and she continues to be that," Saxton said. "When the stakes are high, she's going to dig down deep and give that extra effort."

Defending Heyboer is a tall task and Walsh said it's vital to keep track of where she is on the field at all times. Additionally, the Lions can't leave one defender isolated on Heyboer as the junior has proven in the past, she can easily turn that situation into a crushing goal.

The Lions' task is made more complicated with centre back Lexi Marton out for three months with a left knee injury.

Junior defender Emma Thomson said Carly Ninness has done a good job filling in for Marton and, if the Lions are dilli-

### If you go

**Who:** Women's soccer vs. Michigan State  
**When:** 1 p.m.  
**Where:** Jeffery Field

gent, they can contain Heyboer.

"It's just being aware of her," Thomson said. "We don't have to do what we did last year where we man-marked her and whether we do that or we don't, we're aware of her and we're aware of what we need to do."

While Penn State has faced some top talents this year in Virginia's Sinead Farrelly and Portland's Danielle Foxhoven, Heyboer might be the best offensive player the Lions have to contain this year. While Thomson knows the Lions have the players to do it, it's going to take a total team effort.

"Just be aware of her and understand don't get caught in a footrace, you're going to have to defend with more than one player," Walsh said. "She's proven time and time again that we defend her with one and we will get beat, so we're going to have to defend her as a group."

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