

Coach returns to alma mater, Lions finish top 10

By Stephen Planovich
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

Beth Alford-Sullivan is no stranger to Minnesota. The coach of the Nittany Lions men's and women's cross-country teams was once a Golden Gopher and captained her cross-country team for three seasons.

CROSS COUNTRY

Alford-Sullivan returned to Minneapolis this weekend for the Roy Griak Invitational.

This time, however, she was wearing the blue and white of Penn State.

On Saturday, both of Alford-Sullivan's teams competed in the Griak Invitational and each had positive outcomes.

The women's team finished

ninth out of 29 teams. The top runner on the team was sophomore Natalie Bower, who finished 34th out of 300 competitors. Arizona took home first place on the women's side.

Penn State's men's team had a successful Saturday, finishing ninth in a field of 23 teams.

"It was probably our best race in nearly two years," senior Ryan Foster said.

Juniors Kyle Dawson and Vince McNally, who finished 13th and 22nd respectively among the indi-

viduals, anchored the Lions. "Having two guys of that caliber really helps out," Foster said. "If you want to have a shot to be a really good team, you need to have those guys who are scoring the really low scores."

Dawson and McNally did just that as Dawson finished with a time of 24:42 and McNally finished 10 seconds later at 24:52.

Duke placed first in the men's event. The men's team feels it is getting progressively better and the

"It was probably our best race in nearly two years."

Ryan Foster
senior runner

runners are optimistic about the rest of the season.

"I think we've improved in every race so far," Foster said. "I'm hoping that it continues to happen."

Defense

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All-American, to one shot — a desperation volley with 13 seconds left.

"She's their main player, she's the key to their success," junior centre back Emma Thomson said.

"She scores everything, she's their playmaker. That was our main key, to keep her off the ball, to limit her touches as much as possible and we did it."

Michigan State's (5-3-1, 0-1-0) formation put Heyboer at left striker, meaning Thomson had the unenviable task of trailing the Spartans for most of the game.

The rest of the back line — Carly Niness, Bri Hovington and Jackie Molinda — stepped in every time Heyboer got the ball, and the Lions midfield dropped to help as well. Molinda, making her first collegiate start, shut down Michigan State's right outside midfielders all day.

Aside from the defense, the Lions fielded two holding midfielders, giving the team a six-player unit focused on shutting down Heyboer.

"It's just always knowing where she is and communicating among the back six and [goalkeeper] Krissy [Tribbett]," Nairn said.

"Not letting her turn and spin us, she had her chances unfortunately just couldn't put them away, which was fortunate for us but we'll take that."

Penn State's lone goal came in the 20th minute when forward Maya Hayes was taken down from behind well inside the box. Nairn stepped up and ripped the ball into the upper left side of the net, her second penalty kick goal of the year.

"I'm the person to take it for the team and I think the team has confidence in me to put them

"Hopefully I can continue to be successful and put them away for the team."

Christine Nairn
sophomore midfielder

away," Nairn said. "Hopefully I can continue to be successful and put them away for the team."

A week after struggling against an inferior Dartmouth team, the Lions offense came back with a passion Sunday. While the team didn't score in the run of play, it did put up 12 shots, with seven on goal.

Junior midfielder Ali Schaefer played 66 minutes off the bench as the attacking midfielder and combined well with the forwards. The Lions clearly wanted another goal and Schaefer said the players felt they were due.

"I absolutely felt we were going to get another goal," Schaefer said.

"I was pushing constantly, probably up until the last five minutes where we and I was trying to get the ball out and I was trying to settle the team. But we never stopped this game and we were going to go until we had 15, 16 goals."

Last year, Heyboer torched the Lions in overtime to give the Spartans a 3-2 victory. Penn State's coaches wanted to make sure that didn't happen again.

"They focused on it and concentrated from the opening minute. Last year we did the same thing but for the first 45 [minutes] she ran wild," Lions coach Erica Walsh said. "This year the focus was a lot better. We had good communication, good energy and good focus."

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Molinda

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Erica Walsh let it be known lineup changes were expected going into the Michigan State game.

Molinda was finally ready to go those moves, and it paid off big time for the Lions on Sunday.

"She was good on the ball, she was good in her defending," Walsh said. "Her communication was good. I was really proud of Jackie Molinda. I'm sure she's going to be as sore as can be. She hasn't played those types of minutes, but that kid put herself out there."

After a grueling week of practice for Molinda, Walsh felt Molinda was finally ready to go and thanks to her performance right off the bat she went on to play the entire 90-minute game, surpassing her season total only 13 minutes into the game.

Her previous high for minutes played in a game was 35 last year

in a win against Iowa.

And even though Molinda noticed a little bit of rust after playing so few minutes this year everyone was impressed with her poise and performance in such a pivotal game.

However, they were not surprised at all.

"From a coaching staff standpoint, Jackie Molinda had been a starter early in the season but had taken on an injury," Walsh said. "I thought she was tremendous. I thought she earned the start in training and in the game she earned the continued start. I thought she had a really strong game."

Before Sunday's game, the only other time Molinda saw action this season was during mop-up time in a blowout against Bucknell two weeks ago.

But going into the team's biggest game of the season, she got the call on Saturday after the team voted on who they thought deserved the start. And with the

coaches having the final say, Molinda got the nod thanks to what they told her was her ability to get forward and attack passes.

Senior Megan Monroig, the player in the starting lineup Molinda replaced, was extremely proud of the defender's performance Sunday.

"She played fantastic," Monroig said.

"She was winning one [on] one ball, she was up getting into the attack and driving back with the line. There's not enough praise for her [Sunday]."

And though Monroig couldn't say enough about the job her younger teammate did, Molinda was at a loss trying to describe the emotions that came with her first start.

"I was really excited," she said. "I've been working really hard to get back in. It was just great. No words can express how I feel right now."

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Loss

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need to keep fighting throughout the entire time."

The Lions (6-3, 1-1 Big Ten), who dominated play in a 1-0 win Friday against Indiana, failed to find offensive continuity on Sunday. Head coach Char Morett had tough feelings toward the way that her team started play.

"I thought that we were so flat to start out the game," Morett said. "I thought we were flat in our warm-up. I just didn't think they came ready to play today. It's so disappointing to play a Big Ten game, a conference game, on your own turf, on TV."

Possession was something the Lions struggled with during the game and Morett said that turnovers played right into the

hands of the Wolverines' (6-4, 1-0 Big Ten) fast counter attack.

Forward Kelsey Amy found little room to run and she too said a lazy start plagued the Lions.

Amy said a letdown in offensive production mentally affected the team's approach and that everyone's playing needs to work through the frustration and stick to what they know they do well.

"I think when we come out and play a team that's overly aggressive it frustrates us and that's what, in turn, ends up having us play less aggressively," Amy said. "We feel we're going to get the calls all the time and we're not."

The Lions' offensive woes led to several defensive breakdowns and long runs from the Michigan forwards. Senior captain defender Daneen Zug said anticipation and field vision are something the Lions seemed to get away from.

Amy said long passes are unacceptable from a defensive perspective and the forwards need to be much more active to help the last line of defense to keep the offense in front of them.

"We need to communicate more to get forwards and [midfielders] in the lanes," Zug said. "They did a great job of switching their forwards and it mixed our defense up a lot."

The loss had all of the players hanging their heads, but Zug said that the goals remain the same and intensity won't be an issue from here on out.

"I think after this loss, [the motivation] is going to be there," Zug said. "Our goals are on winning the Big Ten and, after that game, I think it hit us hard and we're going to respond."

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Stunner

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that got to Hertzog mid-stride, which he headed in.

"We really had a hard time of it [Friday]," Warming said. "They pressed with five front players and defended with five players."

The game had its share of physical play and fouls. While senior co-captain Drew Cost felt the calls impacted the game, he said the reason the team loss was its play.

"We gave up three goals that we shouldn't have," Cost said. "That's what eventually lost us the game."

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Sweep

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hitting percentage, but still lost the match.

"Coming off of a loss on Friday, I think that we really wanted to come out and prove ourselves in Big Tens," Brown said.

Now — with a 1-1 conference record — the Lions feel better about heading into the rest of their Big Ten slate.

"I thought we played a much better match [Sunday] than we played on Friday night for sure," coach Russ Rose said. "But it's a long season so on a weekend like this you can't get too beat up when you disappoint yourself and you can't get too excited when you get a victory."

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