



Kelsey Morris/Collegian

Lions' coach Russ Rose (back, right) talks to the team during a match.

Lions looking to move on from losses

By Ryan Loy
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

For the first time in nearly eight years, the Penn State women's volleyball team is trying to rebound after losing consecutive matches.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

The No. 9 Nittany Lions (13-4, 3-3 Big Ten) suffered setbacks at Purdue and Indiana last weekend, but the team knows it can't dwell on those losses.

Coach Russ Rose and several players said there's no use in focusing on the past, and they can't go back in time to change the outcomes.

The Lions are focusing on improving the aspects of their performance it can control — one of those being their attitude.

"I thought Purdue competed a little harder than we did in the last three games," Rose said. "When you have opportunities to score points and make plays, you need to have a sense of urgency. I don't think we were necessarily good at that this weekend."

After beginning the season 7-0, the Lions have gone just 6-4 in the last 10 matches.

While two of those losses were to top 10 teams in No. 2 Stanford and No. 8 Illinois, the last two defeats came to unranked opponents.

Sophomore setter Kristin Carpenter said nothing had to be discussed among the team following the losses to Purdue and Indiana. Each player knows it's

time to pick up the tempo.

"It was a rough weekend, but there's no better time to step up our game than right now," Carpenter said. "It kind of stinks that we're deciding this now, to step our game up, but we need to do it. The time is now."

Though the regular season is now past the halfway point, senior libero Alyssa D'Errico said the Lions are still working at building chemistry among the players on the court.

It's been tough to form a cohesive unit because players are regularly switched in and out of the lineup as the team searches for the ideal group of players, D'Errico said.

For now, the libero said each player is trying to get better individually, which will lead to the team's progression.

While the team searches for its identity, D'Errico said it's not lacking in confidence. She said it's important to maintain faith in the team during struggles — something she learned in her first season at Penn State.

"If we would have let our mentality change my freshman year when we lost to Nebraska and lost to Stanford, we never would be what we are now," D'Errico said. "It's just something that you have to maintain and try to teach the younger kids that it's upholding the tradition. We didn't do a good job of it this weekend, but we have to move on and do better this next weekend."

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Middle battle heating up

By Emily Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The choice between the two middle hitters isn't an easy one — they're not exactly similar.

Katie Slay is just a freshman, while Fatima Balza is a senior finishing up her collegiate volleyball career.

Slay is defensive-minded while Balza focuses more on offense.

Or, as setter Krisin Carpenter puts it: "Katie's a giant blocker and Fati's got that Venezuelan swag."

It's seven weeks into the season for No. 9 Penn State, but coach Russ Rose has yet to decide on which player he wants as a complement to All-American Arielle Wilson in the middle.

Both Slay and Balza offer something different on the court. And because of that, Rose is hesitant to put one over the other on the Nittany Lions' depth chart.

"I'm not sure if I was starting today who I would start," Rose said. "But I would think they would both play. I would think they'd both do some things well."

Rose has yet to name a starter for Friday night's match against No. 19 Minnesota. He said he's waiting to see how things play out in practice this week.

Balza began the year as Penn State's regular starter. The Meridia, Venezuela native started 37 of the Lions' 38 matches last season and her 1.47 blocks per set in 2009 ranked 10th in the nation.

Yet when the Lions went deeper into their Big Ten schedule — and Slay adjusted to the fast-paced nature of collegiate volleyball — the freshman began to see more court time. Penn State was doing fine offensively, but needed a defensive boost.

By the Oct. 2 match against Michigan, Slay was the regular starter and Balza was relegated to the bench. Slay made an immediate impact, tallying five block assists against the Wolverines.

This past weekend, however, the competition opened up again. In the Lions' back-to-back road losses to Purdue and Indiana, Rose flip-flopped between the two middles based on matchups.

And as of now, that's where the race stands.

"It makes our team better when it's competitive, and Katie and Fati have this good competition going," senior defensive specialist Cathy Quilico said.

Carpenter echoed that sentiment, adding she's seen both players pick up their game recently.

"Because, of course, they're fighting for the same spot," Carpenter said. "It's good competition, it's healthy competition."

The competition is so healthy, Balza has been actually helping Slay out.

Slay said she's been doing "a lot of observing" during drills at practice. The 6-foot-6 Raleigh, N.C. native — the tallest player on Penn State's roster — said she will watch both Balza and Wilson and take mental notes on their form.

Afterward, Balza and Wilson will give Slay feedback.

"Just things like I need to stay further off the net, or watch my relationship with the setter," Slay said.

"And it really helps."

For Balza, that's all part of the job description for being a senior on the team. She said she doesn't care who starts — as long as Penn State wins.

"We always want what's best for the team," Balza said. "If she's in, or I'm in, it doesn't matter who's in. The point is to help the team and get the goal together."

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Icers land in No. 4 spot

By Greg Garcia
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

For the Penn State Icers, it's only a number. The American Collegiate Hockey Association (ACHA) has the Icers ranked No. 4 in its latest edition of the top 25. The Icers remained in the four spot, despite posting wins at Pittsburgh and a convincing 11-0 home debut against Drexel.

The two-time defending ACHA Division I national champions, Lindenwood University, remain at the top despite suffering its first loss to Davenport, the three-time defending ACHA Division II national champions. The

University of Ohio sits just behind Lindenwood, while the University of Oklahoma and Iowa State round out the top five.

The Icers were one of six teams receiving a first place vote from the committee.

Icers head coach Scott Balboni felt the rankings are hard to read, especially this early into the season. He said as the season progresses, the rankings would become "more prevalent" after he understands what teams have played amongst one another.

Assistant coach Josh Hand was more surprised when he heard the news.

"To be honest, I had no idea we

were ranked No. 4," Hand said after Tuesday's practice with a smile. "We don't put too much weight on the rankings."

Hand said his team is more worried about who they are facing this weekend than where they stand in the top 25, mentioning how things can change quickly in collegiate hockey.

This weekend, the Icers will square off against its first top-25 foe this season in Central Oklahoma. The Bronchos squad found itself ranked No. 16, despite dropping six of their first nine games.

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