

Women's tennis showing improvement

By James Nicol
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Improvement has been a goal of the women's tennis team all season and at a regional tournament featuring some of the best players in the country, the team got what it was looking for.

WOMEN'S TENNIS

Petra Januskova was the runner up in the singles bracket of the Intercollegiate Tennis Association's Women's Atlantic Regional Tournament. She fell to Michaela Kissel of Marshall 7-5, 6-0 in the finals of the singles bracket.

The tournament brought together teams from the ITA's

Atlantic Region, which consists of schools in Pennsylvania, Delaware, Virginia, Washington D.C., West Virginia and Maryland.

The winner of the singles and doubles titles earned a berth in the USTA/ITA National Intercollegiate Indoor Championships, played in Flushing Meadows, N.Y., at the USTA-Billie Jean King National Tennis Center from Nov. 4-7.

It was the second time this season Januskova had advanced to the finals of her bracket. At the Midland Invitational Tournament in September, Januskova won the

singles consolation bracket and defeated the tournament's No. 1 seed Alexandra Kichoutkin of Tulsa.

Januskova said she was pleased with her performance and hopes to continue improving on her game for the spring season.

In the Atlantic regional Januskova improved her record this fall to 10-3 in singles. Head coach Dawna Denny said she was impressed with Januskova's play against some of the talented players in the region over the course of the tournament.

"Without question she did a great job," Denny said. "It was a tough tournament and she did really well. She should be really proud of herself, she had a great tournament"

Denny has stated all season that she wants to see consistent improvement from the team. The team delivered at the regional tournament and posted a record of 14-9 in the tournament.

Januskova was not the only Nittany Lion to have success in the main draw. Amy Simidian, Marie Bedard and Maria Prishlyak all won games in singles, with Prishlyak advancing to the round-of-16 where she was defeated by the tournament's No. 4 seed, Emily Fraser of Virginia, 6-3, 6-4.

In doubles play the team of Januskova and Simidian advanced to the round-of-16 where they were beaten by the team of Lindsey Hardenbergh and Erin Vierra of Virginia, 8-1.

"I'm really happy and I think it was probably our best showing at the regional," Denny said. "It was really a great tournament all around."

The team hopes to continue to improve its play moving forward when it competes in two weeks at the Western Michigan Invitational in Kalamazoo. The event will be Penn State's last date on its fall schedule.

"They definitely stepped it up this weekend and worked really hard and did well, Denny said. "I'm proud of the team and their results and we still have a couple weeks left to make improvements and head into Western Michigan."

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Balza produces on offense

By Ryan Loy
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When opposing players turn their attention to the Penn State women's volleyball team's outside hitters, Fatima Balza has been making them pay from the middle.

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Though the senior middle hitter hasn't recorded a large collection of kills, Balza has quietly strung together some very productive performances in the past two weeks for the No. 9 Nittany Lions (17-4, 7-3 Big Ten).

Balza has just 54 kills this season — fifth on the Lions — but she is second on the team with a .393 hitting percentage.

Much of her productivity has come in recent weeks.

After she saw limited playing time during a stretch early in the Big Ten schedule, coach Russ Rose said Balza played really well in the Oct. 9 loss at Indiana. Since then, the senior has returned to being a regular in the Lions' rotation.

While Balza's defense, especially blocking, has been her strength, the middle hitter has become a threat offensively. In Penn State's four wins since the loss to the Hoosiers, Balza has 17 kills on .481 hitting.

The Venezuelan native said she has to take advantage of her opportunities. "Because they don't set me that much, I have to score the times they set me," Balza said. "The other team is pretty much not expecting me, so if I don't have two blockers in front of me, I have to score."

Balza said sophomore setter Kristin Carpenter is getting better at seeing where blockers are and setting the middle hitters at the right times.

Fellow middle hitter Arielle Wilson said Balza has a good approach, which allows Carpenter to see her for a set.

"With us working on being quicker in the middle, Fatima gets to the ball very well," Wilson said. "She's been doing a great job of seeing the blocker and seeing the opening on the other side of the court."

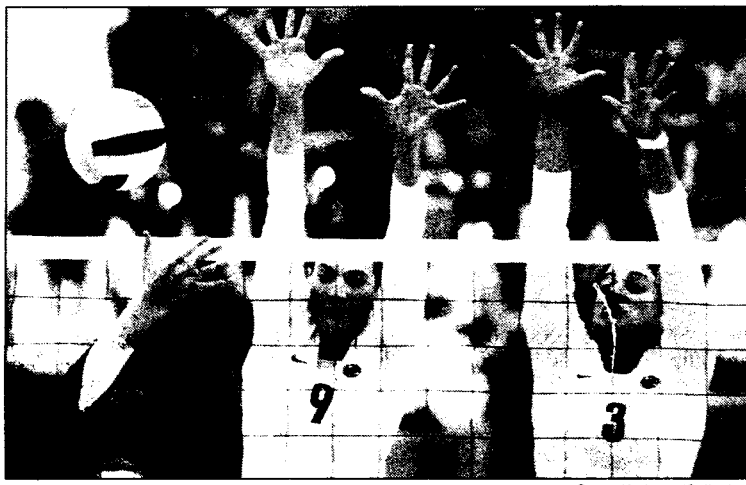
While Balza has been a role player on offense, her blocking has been a key to the Penn State defense.

Now that she's finding more success recording kills and scoring points for the team, she said she's more energized defensively. Balza said recording one kill only motivates her to get another and work hard to hold a block.

Senior libero Alyssa D'Errico said Balza has done a good job of settling into her role on the team. D'Errico said the middle blocker's recent productivity has helped produce points, through both kills and blocks, that are vital to the team.

"Right now, she's just in a really comfortable spot with where she is on the court, who she's around and who's surrounding her," D'Errico said.

"She's just doing a great job of stepping up when we need her to."



Fatima Balza (3) goes for a block with teammate Blair Brown.

Bryan Heritage/Collegian

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Right backs playing strong

By Andrew Robinson
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At least four times this season, a ball bound for an open net has instead been drawn like a magnet toward Brian Furgue, who made a key stop before sending it back into the open field.

MEN'S SOCCER

Furgue isn't a goalkeeper, however. He's the right centre back on the Penn State men's soccer team with a knack to be at the right place at the right time.

Furgue has combined well with right back Matt Smallwood to provide resiliency and toughness on that side of the Nittany Lions' defense.

"Overall the back four are really doing well and they feel good about themselves too," Penn State coach Bob Warming said. "They're really catching on and we're not getting beat by those balls over the top as often."

Smallwood has been the starter at right back all season and has transitioned seamlessly from the defensive midfielder role he played the last two years. At 6-foot-1, 180 pounds, Smallwood brings a hard-nosed, physical edge to the right side but is still quick enough to

keep pace with the speediest left wingers.

However, the junior is rooted to the final third and makes plenty of forays into the attacking half of the field each game. Despite having an attacking mindset and actively pushing into the opposition's territory, Smallwood has no trouble going the full 90 minutes and running up and down the field the entire match.

"He always goes forward and we always say to him he has huge lungs," senior midfielder Matheus Braga said with a laugh. "The guy can't stop. Every time I go back from the end line I always breathe hard to get back and defend, and this guy just goes back and forth all the time, it's crazy."

While Smallwood has been consistent all year, Furgue had to fight his way onto the field early on. The sophomore started the year on the bench, then earned his way into the left back role and shifted across the line as Warming made changes throughout the year.

Braga said Furgue and Smallwood have been strong all

season and the other players have plenty of confidence in their entire defense. Since Furgue took over in the middle, Smallwood has played well with his linemate.

"Furgue," he's always talking and he's a great leader out there," Smallwood said. "He knows what he's doing and he's a great centre back and he's always talking to me. 'Slide back.' 'Get over.' 'Step right.' He's just awesome in communication."

Smallwood's contributions haven't been lost on Furgue either. The centre back said his teammate is relentless in the attack and Smallwood's crosses consistently give the forwards a chance to bury goals.

In the final third, Furgue couldn't have asked for a better partner to lock down the right side with.

"Defensively, he's one of the most tenacious players I've ever played with and he'll stick anyone, he doesn't care who it is," Furgue said.

"If he plays for the No. 1 team in the country, if he's a national team player, it doesn't matter, 'Smalls' will stick him. Having a guy playing to my right like that, it makes my job a lot easier."

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Hayley Brock (center) dribbles the ball against Dartmouth.

Lexi Simchak/Collegian

Slump broken

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The situation required somebody to rise to the occasion.

After struggling for stretches of the year, the Penn State women's soccer team's forwards answered the call Sunday against Illinois. In a must-win game on the road, the forwards scored both of the Lions' goals and contributed 11 of the team's 23 shots in its 2-0 win.

Though the contingent of strikers has had their share of scoring woes this season, their teammates said they've never wavered in support of the forwards.

"We haven't lost confidence in Maya [Hayes], D-Tones [Dani Toney] or Hayley [Brock] because once they open up the floodgates, they're not going to be stopped," sophomore midfielder Christine Nairn said last week, before the Nittany Lions played Illinois. "They're going to continue to score goals and they just need one to get the ball rolling and once it starts going, it's not going to stop."

With just three games left, including a home game Thursday against Indiana, Nairn's prediction needs to hold true for the Lions to keep their hopes of an NCAA bid alive. At 7-8-1, the Nittany Lions need to win out in order to keep their record above the necessary .500 mark to get into the tournament field.

Sunday afternoon, the forwards showcased the talent they have and an ability to score goals in a variety of ways.

Toney scored the eventual game-winner after receiving a textbook through ball from midfielder Jess Rosenbluth then

slotting it into the left corner of the net.

After Toney's 20th minute goal, freshman Hayley Brock put the game away with a goal that helped earn Brock the Big Ten Freshman of the Week honors. The freshman beat a defender off the dribble on the right side of Illinois' penalty box before placing a shot to the far post.

While the rest of the players knew the forwards were primed to start scoring again, having it happen against the No. 13 Fighting Illini was a big lift.

"It's very reassuring. Both of them bring a different aspect to the game," junior co-captain Emma Thomson said. "Hayley's goal was pure speed, she broke past a girl in the back and it just shows the different skill set we have and we can bring to different games. It's always good for the forwards to score and bring their confidence up."

The Lions' three remaining opponents — Indiana, Purdue and Michigan — have a combined six conference wins, but at this point, the players know they can't overlook any team.

Sunday's breakthrough was a positive for the forwards, and the offense in general has experienced a bit of a resurgence over the past three weeks. Sophomore midfielder Maddy Evans said it's taken time, but she's seen an improvement with each game.

"With each game we've been clicking a little bit more," Evans said.

"Not that we've put away more goals but we've created way more chances so I think we can look at that on a positive note. And while we haven't gotten all the goals we would have liked, we have come a really long way with it."

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Lady Icers get win over Rams in Rhode Island

By Christine Newby
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

The Lady Icers secured a victory against a team that has defeated them during each of the four years Mo Stroemel has stood on the bench as head coach.

LADY ICERS

After a 5-0 defeat Friday night, the Lady Icers got redemption Saturday in a back-and-forth battle against the University of Rhode Island, 4-3, in Kingston, R.I.

"This was a big character win for [the team] because it showed that they could really buckle down," Stroemel said.

The Lady Icers entered the final 19 minutes of the third period

down 3-2, but they tied the game with 11:48 left, and scored the game winner with 4:48 remaining on the clock.

The winning goal for the Lady Icers came off the stick of junior forward Chelly Deiling, who has been with the team since freshman year.

Deiling took the faceoff to the right of Rhode Island's goalie. According to Stroemel, the faceoff was a draw, but the puck skirted out to the slot.

"Deiling literally just got [the puck] and fired it," Stroemel said. "The shot was high, stick side, and that was the game winner."

After the Rhode Island goal in the first minute of the third frame, the Lady Icers showed teamwork to level the score.

Freshman forward Carly Szyszko carried the puck down the left side of the ice and dished a pass to junior forward Michelle Clarke, who broke for the goal. Clarke redirected the puck into the mesh of the net to tie the score, 3-3.

"Michelle did exactly what she was supposed to do," Stroemel said.

"It was a good, hard pass and a perfect redirect."

On Friday, the Lady Icers arrived to the arena just 40 minutes before game time due to some traffic.

Deiling said the team skated faster Saturday night compared to Friday night's loss.

"We definitely had a lot more confidence [Saturday] since we

didn't come off the bus," Deiling said.

According to Deiling, the trip was supposed to take eight hours, but lasted about 10 hours.

"Before [Saturday's] game, we talked about what we needed to do: Staying with them, being more aggressive and about the plays," she said.

It was truly a night of firsts for the Lady Icers.

Not only did Penn State defeat Rhode Island for the first time in Stroemel's tenure, but one of their newest players registered her first career goal.

Junior forward Cassidy Augustine, a transfer student from Penn State Harrisburg, scored with about five minutes remaining in the second to tie the game.

Augustine put the puck past the goaltender on the low stick side after collecting junior forward Dana Heller's rebound.

"[Augustine] jammed it home on the goalie," Stroemel said.

After the go-ahead goal by Deiling, the Lady Icers were called for a penalty with 2:08 left, and Rhode Island pulled their goalie at the 1:30 mark.

Despite having to play 6-on-4 for the final minute and a half, the Lady Icers came away with a hard-fought victory over the Rams.

"I think we really played tough and tight," Stroemel said about the last minute and a half in the game.

"We managed to pull out the win. It was pretty exciting."