

Senior Parr matures through career's injuries

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

It hangs in the hallway outside the Penn State men's soccer team's locker room, a large picture of a young man all but swimming in an oversized jersey, his long hair flying wildly behind him, the number 12 surrounded by a circle on his chest.

MEN'S SOCCER

These days, Andy Parr keeps his hair short, his jersey fits a little better and he is constantly ribbed by his teammates for the simple fact he is the oldest player on the team. But the fifth-year senior, dubbed "Grandpa" by his fellow Nittany Lions, is anything but an old man, playing a key role in the middle of the back line.

"It's my senior year. It's getting down to the end and I want to make this thing last as long as I can," Parr said after Friday night's 2-1 Big Ten semifinal win over Indiana.

"I'm playing every game like it's going to be my last. We're trying to get out there, work hard and win every game so we can keep this season going."

If the regular season was Parr's message that he was back, the Big Ten tournament was the exclamation point. Warming said

the centre back was the team's best defensive player Thursday against Northwestern, and he was just as good Friday against Indiana.

Once Sunday's championship game against Michigan was decided with the Wolverines' fourth goal, Warming began systematically pulling his starters, but Parr stayed in for the entire 90 minutes.

With the NCAA tournament starting this week, the Lions will look to Parr's veteran presence as they look to advance through the brackets.

Parr's eyes have seen plenty of battles on the field, but they have also watched far too many from the sideline.

For redshirt freshman goalkeeper Brendan Birmingham, Parr's experience has been a comfort zone as he has settled in to the starter's role.

"He's great, he has all the experience he's been around here forever and we mess with him about that," Birmingham said. "He brings knowledge of the game, he's a smart player out of the back and him and Brian [Forgue] work real well together."

On Sept. 26, 2007, Parr tore the anterior cruciate ligament in his right knee as a sophomore, costing him not only the remainder of that season, but also all of 2008.

Last year, Parr, along with forward Jason Yeisley, returned and sparked a resurgence that saw the team get to the Big Ten tournament final. But again, Parr could only watch that game. The defender sprained the medial collateral ligament in his right knee in the first round of the tournament and had to sit out the team's final three games.

But for the first time since his freshman season in 2006, Parr has avoided serious injury in 2010. In fact, the entire team has enjoyed relatively good health this year, so much so that it caused superstitious coach Bob Warming to pause his interview Friday night so he could knock on a wooden table before addressing it.

"He's been great, the whole team's health has been fantastic," Warming said.

"They've really taken care of themselves, it's really helped us this year."

Parr hasn't totally dodged injury, though. On Oct. 10, the redshirt senior collided with a Michigan State player, opening a gash on Parr's forehead that left

him with a small, jagged scar for the rest of the year.

Always composed in interviews, Parr is fiery on the field. Whether it's in practice or a game, the redshirt senior is vocal with his teammates, with aggressive language mixed in, to get the message across.

"Me and all the other seniors, we know this is our last year, we want to make the most of it. Some of the younger guys may not understand yet because they haven't been here long enough but we're getting into them," Parr said.

"Especially when we've gone down we're yelling at everybody. 'Come on now, do this for yourselves, do this for your team.' The seniors are trying to pump up everybody for this final stretch here."

Though his right knee injuries may have cost Parr more time than he would have ever wished, that lost year did provide a benefit. Parr's younger brother, Dan, transferred to Penn State from Rutgers before this season, marking the first time the brothers have been on the same field since playing at Lower Dauphin High School.

Junior forward Corey Herztog said one of Parr's biggest strengths is the way he organizes and controls the Lions' defense.

Being at Penn State for five years has made Parr consistent, and junior midfielder Justin Lee said Parr is rarely caught out of position.

That was evident last Thursday against Northwestern, when by Warming's count, Parr gave away just one ball out of the back and was integral to the containment of the Wildcats' dynamic counter-based attack.

"Andy Parr looked like a big-time centre back tonight," Warming said Thursday. "His passing out of the back was fantastic. His passing helped start a lot of the good sequences that kept them pressed in the final third of the field."

While he may have shed the Alexi Lalas-like hairdo of his younger days, the photo of Parr with his head wrapped in a bandage, covering the gash on his head this season, sent the same message about his tenacity.

"Grandpa" can bring it with the best of them.

"When your nickname's 'Grandpa' it means you ought to have a little experience," Warming said. "He's given us experience and some maturity and calmness in the back, just like a grandpa out there. That's been great."

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Parr

Defensive specialist Longo continues to play well

By Jake Kaplan
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Similar to her team, freshman defensive specialist Ali Longo saw a drastic improvement in her performance the second time around against WOMEN'S ILLINOIS on VOLLEYBALL Saturday night.

In the Nittany Lions' five-set road loss to Illinois on Sept. 24, Longo struggled, missing a couple of important digs in the fifth and deciding set.

However, Saturday night, when now-No. 7 Penn State swept No. 9 Illinois in front of the Rec Hall crowd, Longo looked almost like a different player than the defensive specialist that played at Huff Hall in Champaign, Ill. seven weeks prior.

The Littleton, Colo. native

came off the bench and recorded a career-high 12 digs on Saturday, the most of any player in the match. She also tallied one of the Lions' four service aces.

"I think, for her, it's a huge turnaround from the last time we played Illinois," said senior libero and co-captain Alyssa D'Errico, the team-leader in digs this season.

"She's one of those kids, you can tell by her persona on the court, she's tough on herself. She wants to be the best player she can be, and she's kind of a spit-fire kid that's hard-nosed and just goes after it out on the court."

This wasn't the first time

Longo has stepped up recently, either. The 5-foot-6 defensive specialist played well in a sweep of then-No. 15 Michigan on Nov. 5 in Ann Arbor, Mich. In that match, she came in to serve and helped her team to seven consecutive points.

"She played really well against Michigan and I wouldn't have put her in those matches if I didn't think she could be successful," Penn State coach Russ Rose said after Saturday's win, which put the Lions in a first-place tie in the Big Ten.

"So, when kids make mistakes they feel bad as well. It's not like they feel bad and I tell them that they were bad. They know when they make mistakes and don't play well. So, she did a real nice job."

Freshman outside hitter Deja McClendon said the play of the

back row helped her get more chances Saturday. Longo, as well as starting defensive specialist Cathy Quilico who had 10 digs and D'Errico who had eight, helped keep rallies going and give the Lions' hitters more opportunities.

That showed, as on Monday, opposite hitter Blair Brown was named the Big Ten Player of the Week while McClendon was named the conference's Freshman of the Week.

"Our defense is getting so much stronger with Ali, and, I mean [D'Errico] making some great digs," said McClendon, who had 12 kills on 20 attempts Saturday.

"The fact that they keep making digs just gives me more opportunities."

McClendon added it was especially nice to see one of her fellow

freshmen perform well.

"She is just a ball of fire," McClendon said of Longo. "When she gets on, she's great. I just love to see her do well. When she does well, we're all happy."

The Lions (23-4, 13-3 Big Ten), which at some points have four freshmen on the floor at one time, hope Longo maintains her high level of play for the last four games of the regular season and into the postseason. Penn State hosts Ohio State (20-9, 8-8) at 7 p.m. Wednesday at Rec Hall.

"It's a great turnaround and confidence builder for her to have the past couple of games that she's had and be able to contribute to the team," D'Errico said.

"cause that was her goal from the start."

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Longo

Volleyball team seeing improvement in serving

By Emily Kaplan
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Coach Russ Rose suggested to his players that they should arrive a half-hour early to last Saturday night's match to work on serving.

As senior co-captain Alyssa D'Errico recalled the conversation her coach had with the Penn State women's volleyball team following Friday night's match, she laughed, using air quotes as she said the word "suggested."

"You can put the quotation marks in the paper," D'Errico said, with a smile.

That's because D'Errico and her teammates know that serving has been an area of concern all season. They didn't need their coach to suggest anything, especially after Friday night when they committed 12 service errors against unranked Wisconsin.

So Saturday night, all of the players arrived at Rec Hall 30 minutes earlier than usual to work on their biggest flaw.

The extra effort paid off. Against No. 9 Illinois, a team Penn State had lost to earlier in the season, the Lions recorded only six service errors.

And, for at least one night,

their serving woes were cured.

"A lot of it was our jump servers, they were serving tough," freshman Deja McClendon said. "It's hard for them to keep their serves in and still be aggressive. But they practice. We practiced extra serving, and I think that helped us a lot."

In 38 matches last season, the Lions recorded 242 service errors.

This year, 27 matches in, the team has already accumulated 201 service errors.

The No. 7 Lions' failure to serve the ball in play has been a topic of discussion in nearly every one of

Rose's post-game press conferences this season — win or lose.

After Saturday's match, the coach didn't elaborate much on Friday night's discussion with his team. When asked, he just smiled and added: "We had a lot of conversation about it."

Yet Rose did say he was pleased with Saturday's improvement.

His players were, too. D'Errico said on Friday night, the Lions were tentative. They served just to keep the ball over the net — and didn't even do a good job of that, she said.

On Saturday though, the team

was effective because it had a "confident, aggressive attitude."

"We're going to serve better when we're going after it," D'Errico said.

McClendon said serving is an area the coaching staff emphasizes in practice. And though the Lions saw improvements Saturday night, she doesn't think they'll stop working on it.

"We focus on serving in practice a lot," McClendon said. "It's a huge chunk of the game that you think is small, but it really does make a difference."

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