

Big East move necessary for TCU, conference

By Jared Shanker

WATCHING the Big East welcome TCU into the conference Monday

afternoon, I couldn't help but wonder why the announcement was being televised on ESPN.

It would have been much better suited for the Discovery Channel, right in between episodes of "Man vs. Wild" and "Survivor Man." After all, TCU, which stands for Texas Christian University, agreeing to join the Big East, smells of desperation, of a school and conference battling the elements of an ever-changing college football landscape.

Why would a university based in Ft. Worth, Texas sign up for a league based in Providence, R.I., 1,770 miles away? Why would a league take in a university that is a 14-hour drive from the nearest



MY OPINION

conference member?

The answer is simple: It's survival of the fittest, and the Big East and TCU are looking pretty out of shape right now. The Big East and TCU need each other if they plan on staving off the BCS buzzards.

Since 2002, the Horned Frogs have finished the season with double-digit wins seven times, including consecutive undefeated regular seasons. Only Boise State, Ohio State and Texas have finished with more double-digit-win seasons than the Horned Frogs during that span.

However, this season will mark only the second time the Horned Frogs will crash the BCS party as they will likely spend New Year's Day in Pasadena, Calif. at the Rose Bowl.

Prior to last season, the Horned Frogs, who have spent time in the WAC, Conference USA and the Mountain West conferences since 2000, had never even finished in the top 10 of the final BCS Standings.

The MWC was gaining steam

in its bid to gain automatic-qualifying (AQ) status with the addition of Boise State, but BYU (football independent) and Utah (Pac-10) have decided to pack their bags since, a "significant blow to the conference," TCU athletic director Chris Del Conte said.

As a member of the Big East beginning in 2012, though, the Horned Frogs will be in a BCS automatic-qualifying conference.

"Having BCS automatic-qualifying status was a priority for our football program and a great reward for the success we've had the last decade," Del Conte said in a statement.

Without the addition of TCU, though, the Big East might not have been an AQ conference for long. The idea that the conference should lose its bid began in 2004 after Miami (Fla.) and Virginia Tech (and Boston College in 2005) bolted for the ACC. The Big East responded by adding Cincinnati (eh), Louisville (blah) and South Florida (aren't they I-AA?).

In 2004, an 8-3 Pittsburgh team

was the Big East's BCS sacrificial lamb as it was blasted in the Fiesta Bowl by a Utah team without a head coach.

The cries from the Big 12, Big Ten and SEC for the repeal of the Big East's AQ status only grew louder this year, as it's possible a five-loss team will represent the Big East in the BCS.

"When the Big East looked to expand, we sought to add a member that...would make us not only bigger, but stronger and more competitive," Big East commissioner John Marinatto said Monday.

"Our focus was to add a quality institution to our football membership. Clearly, the tremendous success of the TCU football team adds enormous strength to the Big East roster."

Now, there's no doubt the addition of TCU will undoubtedly throw off the balance in just about every sport not named football. Not only do the Horned Frogs automatically become the red-headed stepchild in basketball (congratulations, DePaul), they

become the 17th basketball member, a nightmare for Big East bracketologists.

And that banging noise heard across the nation was athletic directors slamming their heads on their desk. Athletic directors, many of whom are already crunching numbers and cutting costs, now have to plan for that annual 1,000-mile trip to "Where the West begins" in at least eight different sports (baseball, men's and women's basketball, football, men's and women's tennis and women's soccer and volleyball).

It's not even just the money, but the travel on students. Good luck to Syracuse or Rutgers sending one of its teams to Ft. Worth for a mid-week contest.

To the Big East and TCU, though, it will all be worth it, because it's much better than the alternative.

Jared Shanker is a senior majoring in history and journalism and is the Collegian's sports columnist and a men's basketball writer. His e-mail address is jps5226@psu.edu.

Icers set to begin grueling second half of schedule

By Greg Garcia
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The first half is up.

After capturing 11 wins, the first half of the season is completed for the No. 11 Penn State Icers. Now, they will turn their attention to the next 15 games.

The final 15 will be no easy task for the Icers (11-4-0). Coach Scott Balboni's squad will face off against 13 teams ranked in the top 25 of the ACHA.

"This is a huge make or break point for us," junior forward Paul Daley said. "It starts this weekend against No. 4 Delaware."

According to Daley, the Icers' offense has struggled through the first half of the season. The offense has simply struggled against stronger opponents. The Icers have combined to score 84 goals this season, but more than a fourth of those were produced in

two games against unranked Towson in a 25-goal outburst.

When the Icers traveled to Rhode Island to take on their division rival they managed one goal in 120 minutes of play. The offense was stifled by Rams' goalies Paul Kenny and Andrew Marks.

To improve for the second half, Daley said the team's main focus is supporting the puck. The junior forward said his teammates need to continue to help one another and if they can execute they will score more goals.

Daley used the Icers' last two games as an example of how successful the offense can be.

"We're a little disappointed, but as of now we ended on a positive note scoring 25 goals," he said. "We need to carry that over into the second half."

One of the Icers' strong points through the first half was their play on the defensive side of the puck.

Balboni received a boost when

junior Kevin Miller transferred from Robert Morris to help protect the blue line in Happy Valley. Miller has also used his long 6-foot frame by playing the point on the powerplay.

Sophomore Rich O'Brien has helped establish an identity for the defense by playing hard, physical hockey. The defenseman's efforts could be found most on the penalty kill, with the Icers refusing to surrender a goal 84.4 percent of the time.

Between the pipes, the Icers could be viewed as a carousel, with senior Teddy Hume, sophomore Dan Ivanir and freshman Mathew Madrazo all rotating in the starting spot.

Madrazo has been the recent hot hand after posting his first career shutout against Towson on Nov. 19. The freshman described the series against the Rams as an "eye opener" and is hoping the team can continue to come together.

"I think the goalies have played pretty well so far," Madrazo said. "We haven't had much help on offense, but hopefully we can get

some goals in the net and start rolling from there."

To e-mail reporter: gjg5044@psu.edu



Paul Daley (27) fights for the puck in a game against West Chester. The Icers will play 13 ranked teams in 15 games.

Awards

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certainly something that we're proud of the players getting recognized and we understand that there were a lot of great players at all the other schools."

Brown finished the regular season second in the conference with 4.14 kills per set and 4.75 points per set. And as one of Penn State's three senior co-captains, the Purcellville, Va. native helped lead the No. 8 Lions (25-6, 16-4 Big Ten) to an eighth-straight Big Ten title.

"I think it's a reflection of the coaches and the players that I've gotten to play with over the years," Brown said not long after learning of the award via text message from one of her former coaches and from her father on Tuesday. "This is such a great atmosphere to become better because everyone forces you to be better."

Starting in every match this year, McClendon totaled 351 kills, good enough for second on Penn State behind only Brown, who had 431. A Louisville, Ky. native, the 6-foot-1 McClendon also recorded a .329 hitting percentage, which was seventh in the conference.

"I mean you always hope you're in the

running," McClendon said with a wide smile. "I felt like I was playing well just because as a freshman, I'm playing a lot. But you never know. There's so many great freshmen."

Rose said it's terrific his players were honored, but he would have liked to see his starting setter get recognized, as well.

"I'm disappointed that Carpenter wasn't recognized in some way because she was the 5-1 [rotation] setter of the team that won the conference championship," Rose said of Carpenter, a sophomore who tallied 11.34 assists per set in her first season as a starter. "But people have to vote the way they vote and it was a very strong year in the conference. There were a lot of great players, but certainly I think [Carpenter's] performance warrants more than a question mark."

Ultimately, though, Brown said it's not about the awards for the Penn State players. The three-time defending national champions open up NCAA tournament play Friday night against Niagara at Rec Hall.

"We still have a lot of time left in this season," Brown said. "And we want to make sure that the team atmosphere is what's really getting the main focus."

To e-mail reporter: jyk5142@psu.edu

Mauti

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across field and make the ankle tackle.

Standing up after the play, the Penn State linebacker favored his right shoulder because of an injury suffered at Ohio State. After the loss to the Buckeyes, he was subsequently sidelined against Indiana and the first three quarters against Michigan State.

The separated shoulder leaves Mauti questionable for the Lions' upcoming bowl game. About a month off from game action should give him time to heal more, and he has been practicing this week, a source said.

Defensive coordinator Tom Bradley said Mauti had his shoulder wrapped, and the redshirt sophomore saw limited time practicing last week before Michigan State. The linebacker's availability for the bowl game is up in the air.

"I don't know," Bradley said on Saturday concerning Mauti's bowl status.

Bradley referred a question on Mauti's status to team physician Wayne Sebastianelli, who was unavailable for comment. Bradley, though, said the magnitude of defensive injuries disabled Penn

State from using a set rotation this season. Mauti is just one of a list of banged-up defensive players who have been both sidelined with injuries and played through them.

Mauti falls into both categories. He missed games against Illinois and Indiana with different injuries and played through the setback to his right shoulder against Ohio State and Michigan State.

Mauti hasn't been able to avoid the injury bug during his career. Coming into the year, he returned from a tear to his ACL in his right knee. He also dealt with a sprained right ankle earlier this season.

The redshirt sophomore has a reputation for bringing an added element that ups the play of the defense.

His oft-described intense demeanor has a chain effect among defensive teammates, as players have previously noted this season.

"I think all linebackers are great, and they make good plays — but he has a presence," Colasanti said.

"He has an enthusiastic presence. He's just a good player. He's enthusiastic, and we build off that. You just need those guys around you."

To e-mail reporter: bjm5146@psu.edu

Bracket

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enrollment: 3,260 — at 7 p.m. on Friday night at Rec Hall in the first round. Should they advance, the Lions would face the winner of Virginia Tech and Delaware.

Based on RPI — a mathematical ranking system that factors strength of schedule as well as home and away records to formulate national rankings — Penn State has an easier road to the Final Four than other top squads, such as Nebraska, the tournament's No. 2 overall seed.

Of the 16 teams in Penn State's region — which includes five squads in the American Volleyball

Coaches Association (AVCA) Top 25 poll — the average RPI is 47.4.

Meanwhile, the Cornhuskers (27-2) are in the Seattle region, which features seven teams in the AVCA Top 25. The average RPI of those 16 teams is 42.9.

The NCAA selection committee cites geographical location and limiting the amount of potential flights as one of the factors it uses when putting together brackets.

"They have some different parameters that certainly one would say are advantageous to schools in the Northeast or the Midwest that can play schools from smaller conferences," Rose said.

"Where the California schools are playing matches with more

teams that were ranked during the year."

Sophomore setter Kristin Carpenter said she understands that. She said when she looked at the Seattle region — which also includes No. 4 California, No. 7 Hawaii, No. 11 Washington and No. 12 Minnesota — she felt overwhelmed.

But she said the Lions are not focusing on that at all. They're only worrying about what they can control.

"Anything can happen, any team can come out and have a really good game," Carpenter said. "So we need to be ready for every match, whether it's [No. 2] Stanford, or it's Niagara. We have to play our best every time, and

that's all that we, as a team, can do. It doesn't matter what happened last year, it's only about now."

Penn State's strength of schedule for regional play — solely based on math — is virtually the same as last year, when the Lions were the No. 1 overall seed and entered the tournament with a perfect 32-0 record through the regular season.

The average RPI of the 16 teams in Penn State's region last year was 49.6 — roughly two points higher than the average of the Lions' region this year.

Yet this year's bracket has one glaring difference, and one that could give the Lions a major advantage: Penn State's potential

trip to the Final Four in Kansas City, Mo. goes through Rec Hall.

The Lions' home court, of course, is where they have established an NCAA-record 90-match winning streak.

If they continue that streak by four more wins, they'll be in the Final Four for the third straight year.

"With our bracket, it's not who you play, it's how you play," senior Fatima Balza said. "At this point of the season, everyone's playing well. And I'm just so excited we get to play at home, to get to this point of this season. And we're just going to play every match like it's the last match."

To e-mail reporter: exk5049@psu.edu

Gymnastics

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Attendees will get the chance to see the unveiling of the 2011 season posters for both teams, as well as enter their name in a drawing for free tickets to the Penn State-Maryland basketball game at 9:15 tonight.

Jepson highlighted the event as a chance for the men to showcase their young team, and get people familiar with the gymnasts. There are five freshmen on the team and 10 sophomores, so people might not be familiar with the gymnasts, according to Jepson.

Jepson hoped people will come out and meet the new members.

The women's team will be announcing the creation of the "Flip Zone" student section. The first 50 students attending any home gymnastics meet will receive

free T-shirts allowing them unlimited access to the Flip Zone student section, as well as opportunities to meet with the team and attend other special events.

Coaches on both teams are hoping that students and members of the community will come out to meet the teams, get familiar with the gymnasts and build support for the teams as they look toward the upcoming season.

"[We hope to] get people excited about it, meet the girls, meet the guys, and see that both teams are working together," Thompson said. "They're both going for the same thing — a national championship."

Jepson felt the event would be a good chance for people to interact with and get excited about the team.

"It's a chance to get [the young gymnasts] out in front of people and give fans a chance to connect with our team a little more," Jepson said.

Men's basketball

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plans focused on stopping Williams.

"That'll definitely be Drew Jones," forward Jeff Brooks said. "He'll be down there battling with [Williams] and we're going to give him help as well. Whether it's digging in down in the post or double box-outs or anything like that, we're going to do our best to keep him off the glass."

Brooks added rebounding is going to be the key to the game if the Lions want to beat Maryland and avoid their second loss.

However, if that's the case, finding an answer for Williams will be crucial as the forward averages more than four offensive rebounds per game.

Nevertheless, despite being a double-

double machine with five already this season, Williams does have his weaknesses.

The most glaring problem area for the sophomore — like many other powerful big men — is his free-throw shooting. Williams averages more than seven free-throw attempts per game and he is shooting only 56 percent from the charity stripe.

In Maryland's two losses this season, he went a combined 5-for-12 from the free-throw line, giving Penn State and other teams a blueprint on how to control him.

But the Lions are well aware it's going to take more than one or two men to defend the star player and help the Big Ten earn only its second victory in 12 chances in the yearly conference showdown.

"I've seen him play, he's a great player," guard Tim Frazier said. "He's definitely a great post player and I know it's going to be a team effort against him."

To e-mail reporter: ada147@psu.edu