

Resume, fan base hurt in loss

By Andrew J. Cassavell

THERE'S a funny thing about scheduling quality nonconference opponents to try and boost an NCAA tournament resume.

If you don't win those games, it usually doesn't mean much.

In the Penn State basketball program, a lot has been made recently about strength of schedule, specifically outside the Big Ten. Two tournaments ago, Penn State was on the outside looking in because of its November and December cupcake-fest.

Well, when the schedule came out this season, three opportunities against BCS conference teams loomed. After a 62-39 loss to Maryland last night, the Nittany Lions are now 0-2 in those games, with Game 3 — a December 12 trip to Virginia Tech — the toughest of those contests.

"That's two games we had an opportunity to really help ourselves and our resume, and we let these one's slide," said senior point guard Talor Battle, who, as happened so often in last season's January swoon, led the

Lions in scoring while the rest of the team went cold.

But aside from the all-important March resume, there may be another, more important effect of last night's loss on the Penn State hoops program. Many of the 9,078 who came to the BJC, might not be coming back — at least not this year.

If the Lions lose to a Virginia Tech team that took Big Ten frontrunner Purdue to overtime Wednesday, they'll enter Big Ten play without a defining win.

Then, Penn State will play two of its better conference home games of the season against the Boilermakers and No. 6 Michigan State while the student body is on its winter break. For all the heat Penn State takes for poor attendance, in a normal year the Bryce Jordan Center would sell tickets when those types of big names come to town.

They sold tickets last night, after all. And the fans were treated to an early December basketball game in every sense of the phrase. The Lions were 3-for-27 from 3-point range and allowed 19 Maryland points off turnovers.

Perhaps worse for the program, Nittany Lion fans, who haven't gotten to watch the team much this year, didn't get to see the biggest bright spot of the early season. Jeff Brooks, who came into the contest averaging 16 points, missed significant

time with foul trouble and finished with just six on Wednesday. His early foul trouble took both the Lions and the crowd out of the game.

The whited-out crowd was as loud as it would be all night in the first four minutes, and when the Nittany Lions jumped out to a lead their early mistakes were aggressive ones. Multiple jumpshots hit back rim — a classic sign of over-excitement — and on a fast break sophomore point guard Tim Frazier overran his own dribble.

But those forgivable aggressive mistakes quickly turned to unforgivable sloppy ones, and the chance at a statement win was lost.

We'll be making Super Bowl picks or talking pitchers and catchers by the time there's another marquee game at the Bryce Jordan Center — at least one with the student body actually on campus.

Last Saturday the university opened dorms early for students to get back in time for an end-of-season football game against Michigan State.

It's a safe bet fans won't be clamoring for residence halls to open a bit early when the basketball team hosts the Spartans Saturday, Jan. 8.

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MY OPINION

MEN'S BASKETBALL

Loss

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Terrapins (6-2) have won six-straight games in annual head-to-head competition between two of the country's premiere conferences.

The Lions jumped to a 7-0 start in the first half, thanks in large part to Maryland's six turnovers in the first four minutes.

Yet Penn State shot just 3-for-11 from the floor during that stretch — and didn't improve much from there.

The Terrapins cruised to an 11-2 run to take a lead they would never relinquish.

"We came out running the floor well, playing defense," senior Jeff Brooks said. "The next thing you know, it's just a cold streak. We

"This is just one of those games that you just want to forget about."

Talor Battle
guard

just couldn't make baskets."

Toward the end of the first half, as Penn State drove to the basket, one fan shouted: "Just shoot layups!"

The Lions were also hindered by foul trouble, with seniors Brooks and D.J. Jackson benched for the last ten minutes of the first half with two fouls apiece.

Battle finished the night with a game-high 21 points. No other Penn State player had more than six points.

"We just couldn't convert anything into the basket," coach Ed

DeChellis said. "Sometimes there were some tough shots, trying to take tough shots...I think the kids worked hard, they competed."

"[They] just couldn't make enough baskets to kind of get us going and continue to get us going."

With eight minutes left in the second half, a large contingent of fans began to file for the exit.

"This is just one of those games that you just want to forget about," Battle said.

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Fouls

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away the Lions' early momentum.

"I started out kind of hot," Brooks said. "I got an offensive rebound, stuck it back and then I got a dunk. The next thing I know I had two fouls and I was on the bench for 11 minutes. I think that's going to be stressed a lot for the rest of the season, trying to stay out of foul trouble early."

Brooks, who has been a catalyst for Penn State so far this season, never got going after his second foul as he said it took away any rhythm he had.

With the fouls adding up early, the Lions were forced to make adjustments and dip into their bench to try to contain Maryland's strong frontcourt.

Nevertheless, Penn State remained competitive in the first half.

"It hurt us a little bit."

Talor Battle
guard

"It hurt us a little bit but we were still right in the game with a chance to come back in the second half down six," Talor Battle said.

However, other than Battle, none of the other Lions were able to contribute much as the early fouls set them back for the rest of the game.

Maryland's Jordan Williams and his linebacker physique didn't help either. Over and over again, the 6-foot-10 and 260 pound forward barreled to the hoop at will with the Lions unable to keep up playing in foul trouble.

Aggressively double teaming Williams early in the first half, the foul trouble forced Penn State to ease up on the Terrapin forward

and altered how Penn State went after Maryland's bulky frontcourt. With Brooks and Jackson watching from the sideline, Penn State's bench couldn't muster any offense as it contributed only three points all game.

Jeff Brooks finished the game with four fouls while Jackson, Tim Frazier and Billy Oliver all picked up three apiece.

With Penn State's depth thin up front, Maryland was able to do what it wanted to accomplish by forcing DeChellis to sub his players out often. However, the early foul trouble never altered the Terrapins gameplan despite affecting Penn State's.

"We did feel we had more guys playing and if we could get to the bench that would be a good thing for us but that's the way we play," Maryland coach Gary Williams said. "In other words, we didn't change anything."

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Nickson

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said. "I haven't seen an increase in her energy and her intensity [for this game] because she's always intense, she's always focused and she's always ready to go."

Nickson said there's no added motivation because of the opponent.

She said she left the program

on good terms and still talks with some of the Eagles players on a weekly basis. In fact, it was a Boston College player who first informed Nickson the two teams would be playing.

Though she's excited to go back and play at Boston College's Conte Forum, Nickson said it's just another game.

This season, Nickson is averaging 8.1 points per game and 3.7 rebounds per game off the bench.

The Lions will be trying to win

their first ACC/Big Ten Challenge game since the 2007-08 season when they beat No. 10 Duke. And Nickson is glad she's a part of the team trying to do it.

"It's a great decision for me to come here," Nickson said.

"The support, academically, is phenomenal. I wouldn't trade that for the world. Regardless, this is where I'm supposed to be. I know that."

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Rookies

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defensive lineman and made the switch this summer.

Obviously, Okoli would never discuss Eliades' career-ending injury in a positive light. After Eliades got hurt against Temple, Okoli said as much.

But the truth of the matter is that when he heads into his senior year, he'll have nine starts under his belt. What has he learned in those starts?

"Just with the reads, everything's slowing down," Okoli said. "I'm getting better at pass rush and I'm getting better at punching."

Okoli's situation is by no means the only one. Defensive linemen Jordan Hill and DaQuan Jones earned time because Jack Crawford and Eric Latimore missed games because of injuries. When Nick Sukay and Andrew Dailey went down at safety, red-shirt freshman Malcolm Willis filled in nicely.

His current safety counterpart, Drew Astorino, said he's been pleasantly surprised by the young players who may have been thrust into the spotlight prematurely.

"They've done great, they really have, and they've stepped up," Astorino said. "I can really speak for Malcolm because he's right there on the field making plays. I'm speaking to him every time, and he's really been phenomenal."

All season long, Joe Paterno has called this year's team a

"We came closer as the year went on."

Doug Klopacz
center

young one. He even cited the youth as one of the deciding factors in his desire to return next season.

Senior center Doug Klopacz won't return, but he said the three returning starters on the line have come together as the year went on, and they'll continue to develop.

"We came closer as the year went on," Klopacz said. "It was the first time a lot of us were really playing together in a lot of the early games. With a few games under our belts, I felt we really came with cohesiveness."

As for his open center spot, Klopacz said he expects to see a competition between sophomore Matt Stankiewicz and freshman Ty Howle. He said of both of them, "Everything a center needs to have, they have it."

For the most part, when the 22 starters take the field for next season's opening game, many will have gained vital experience in the 2010 campaign.

"You're going to go back and look at every single game and every single person that is coming back is going to be better," Astorino said. "We're going to jell more, and we're going to get it done."s

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Quilico

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"How am I going to tell her that I want to quit?" I found out she quit, and it just made my decision a lot easier because it would have been hard to go through that whole experience without her."

Eichler went back home to USC, while Quilico found a home as a defensive specialist on the Penn State women's volleyball team. Now a senior heading into her final NCAA tournament this weekend, opening up with a first-round matchup against Niagara at Rec Hall, Quilico has no regrets about her journey.

Growing up in Thousand Oaks, Calif., Quilico always thought she'd stay near home to play college volleyball. But as she got older and traveled more, she realized getting a new experience in a different place would be a great opportunity.

That's when she looked at Penn State, met coach Russ Rose and realized Happy Valley was the place for her.

However, Boston College offered Quilico a full scholarship while she had only a partial offer from the Nittany Lions. When her best friend committed to play for the Eagles, it was a convenient alternative for Quilico.

Though she had a short stay in Boston, Quilico enjoyed her time there.

"I loved the school. I had a great experience there. Boston is a magical city," Quilico said.

"I just wanted something more out of my volleyball and my college career, and Penn State was perfect."

She's certainly got a lot out of her time as a Lion, as Quilico has been part of the 2008 and 2009 NCAA championship teams.

Her drive to succeed can be traced back to her time growing up in California. In an attempt to be like her older brother, Dan, Quilico played roller hockey. Along with 11 years of gymnastics where she flipped and tumbled, she developed a fearless attitude. That's often on display during Penn State matches when she's continuously hustling and constantly diving on the court.

During her high school years, Quilico was the libero for Gene's Team Volleyball Club, coached by volleyball great Gene Selznick — who coached Misty May-Treanor and Kerri Walsh.

As the libero for the 2006 Junior

Olympic bronze medalists, Selznick said the 5-foot-1 defender had quickness, good hands and great technique.

He said Quilico was a "marvelous volleyball player" and "the best libero in the country" when she played for him.

Selznick believed defensive ability was on display during last season's national championship victory against Texas — saying she was as big a part of the final few points as anyone.

"She dug all the balls. She did it all," said Selznick, captain of the U.S. National Team for 17 consecutive years.

"They couldn't put one ball down on her. She dug them all up and they put them away. I gave her all the credit for the end of that tournament."

Coming up with great performances is something made possible for Quilico by the two Hall of Fame coaches she's worked with. The senior said Selznick and Rose have a very similar coaching style, as well as alike personalities. She said each coach holds players to a high standard on the court, but they're caring and supportive off the court.

With her time at Penn State nearing its end, Quilico and the Lions will look to finish the year strong in pursuit of the program's fourth straight NCAA championship.

According to Rose, Quilico got off to a strong start in her effort to help the team defend its title. He said of all the seniors, he was most pleased with her performance in the regular season finale against Minnesota.

"Cathy is bright, is a good listener and is a fearless kid. Those are great characteristics," Rose said. "When it comes to giving someone a scouting report and telling them what to do and where to go, she's great."

Though it took her a little longer than expected to become a Lion, Quilico is happy she's here. She said Penn State is the right place for her, and she loves the program more than anything. As a senior looking back, she said wouldn't alter the course of her journey.

"I learned so much. I've met the greatest people. I've experienced amazing things," Quilico said. "I have a whole new family, and I have a new tradition of this school. All the experiences this team has gone through, I couldn't ask for anything better."

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