

# Injured roster returns to full strength

By Greg Garcia  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

It took only two minutes for the No. 11 Penn State Icercs to realize what may be in store for the remainder of the season.

## ICERS

Moments after the referee dropped the puck to start the game against No. 4 Delaware last Friday, sophomore forward George Saad raced down a puck before making a nifty pass from behind the net to teammate Taylor Cera. Cera, a senior forward, came streaking down the middle of the ice receiving Saad's pass before putting it home for the first goal of the contest.

After suffering injuries earlier in the season, Cera and Saad both returned to the lineup joining a few of their teammates, who also

were making their comebacks against the Blue Hens. Junior forward Nick Seravalli and junior defenseman Dan Loucks also were slated back for the marquee matchup before eventually settling for a series split over the weekend.

Now, for the first time all season, the Icercs (12-4-0) are finally healthy.

Coach Scott Balboni described Saad as the catalyst for his squad and was excited to finally have everyone available. Saad's presence was felt during the weekend, after scoring his sixth and seventh goals of the season in as many games.

"It felt great to lace the skates up again," said Saad, who was suffering from a deep thigh bruise. "I've been working my butt off in practice to get to back to where I am."

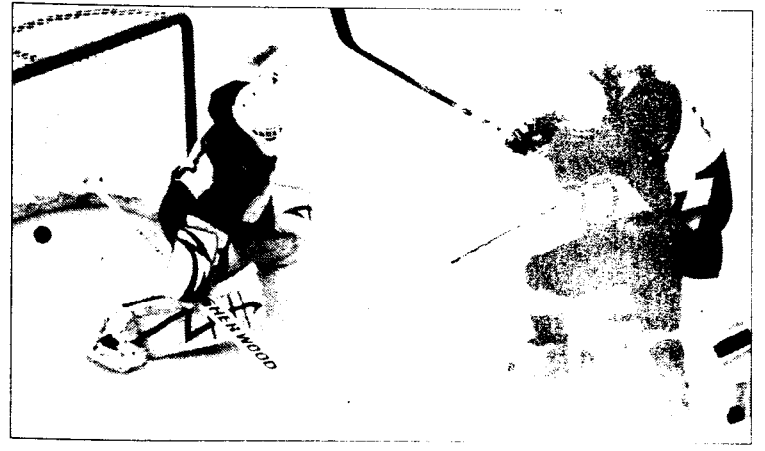
Cera felt he was close to 100 percent before taking the ice after recovering from a mild concussion.

The senior was able to rest longer due to the extended break over Thanksgiving.

"Coming back and facing Delaware was all I could think about during break," Cera said. "I feel fine now, obviously we're a little sore and banged up, but we'll be all right."

After producing a career-high 20 goals in his sophomore season, Seravalli returned after having reconstructive groin surgery on both legs. The 5-foot-8 forward is still easing his way back onto the ice, but will help improve the team's offense and add depth to Balboni's lines.

The main factor going forward will be chemistry, Cera said. Now healthy, the Icercs will need to get a



George Saad (right) scores for the Icercs against Delaware.

feel for each other on the ice, while continuing to learn to play together.

"We need to keep building off what we have," Cera said. "It

showed each other's capabilities of. We had to be ready for the first couple of games."

He added that the team's chemistry is a key factor in their success.

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# Men's volleyball signs three new recruits

By Steven Petrella  
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

Three high school seniors have signed on the dotted line and committed to play volleyball for Penn State.

Taylor Hammond, Aaron Russell and Matthew Seifert all will join the Nittany Lions' VOLLEYBALL roster for the 2011-12 season.

Russell, a 6-foot-8 middle blocker from Ellicott City, Md., will join his older brother, Peter, currently a freshman outside hitter, on the court next fall.

Their father, Stewart, walked on to the Penn State men's volleyball

team in 1983 and was eventually named a captain in 1986.

Aaron Russell was the only player from the East Coast to be selected to the U.S. Boys Youth National Team this spring. He competes for MVP Red, Maryland Volleyball Program's top team.

MVP Red coach Aldis Berzins said Aaron has all the skills to step onto the court right away and have an impact.

"He's gifted athletically for a big guy," Berzins said. "He's been playing volleyball for

a long time and he's from a volleyball family. He has a lot of game sense."

Berzins said he thinks having Aaron's older brother with him will help make the transition easier.

"He'll show him the ropes and give him the inside scoop on how to excel at the collegiate level," Berzins said. "The kinds of things [Peter] will know as a sophomore."

While the elder Russell brother will likely help his younger brother adjust to collegiate life and volleyball, junior setters Edgardo Goas and Tor Covelio should aid Hammond in his first season.

The 6-foot-3 setter led Santa Margarita Catholic High School

(Calif.) to a 19-6 record as a captain in 2010 and two consecutive Trinity League championships in 2009 and 2010.

The Eagles ended the season ranked 11th nationally.

Santa Margarita coach Bryan Cottriel said Hammond should have no trouble transitioning to the college level and has all the attributes to excel.

"He's an extremely driven individual and he's also a great leader," Cottriel said.

"The level we play at and he plays at in club is similar to the college level, so he should have no trouble adjusting."

Cottriel said a Long Beach State assistant coach described Hammond as the best setter in the

area consistently.

In college, he is likely to be a starter.

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# Time for Lions to step up intensity in tournament

By Emily Kaplan

MAYBE there's a method to their lethargy. Or maybe it's just this college journalist's humble opinion.

Penn State is not playing championship-caliber volleyball right now.

Not even close.

But then again, the Nittany Lions haven't exactly been pressed either. Their NCAA regional bracket is essentially fluff.

"It's a joke," ESPN.com college volleyball columnist Mechelle Voepel said in a telephone interview Sunday evening. "Some of the pairings this year...I really don't know what the selection committee was thinking."

There's the ultra-competitive Seattle region, where the 16 teams have combined for 24 Final Four appearances.

Then, 2,600 miles away, there's Penn

State's region, the region of enormous disparity.

Only two other teams besides the Lions have ever made it to a Final Four. Both of those squads — LSU and Arizona — were eliminated in the first two rounds.

So forgive Penn State — which just clinched its eighth consecutive Big Ten title — if it didn't quite play with full intensity against its first two opponents.

Niagara has just two players on its roster standing taller than 6-foot while Virginia Tech was playing in the program's first-ever NCAA tournament.

"Penn State definitely didn't play as well as well Penn State could play in the first two matches, because, you know what? They didn't really need to," Voepel said. "But now it's time to up the ante."

Because in this year's tournament — perhaps more than the past few seasons, where the Lions' dominance was a virtual guarantee — there are no givens moving forward.

The first weekend alone featured the tournament's No. 1 overall seed (Florida) surviving a five-set scare and the two

biggest upsets in NCAA first-round history: Before this season, seeded teams were 160-0 in the first round. On Friday night, Missouri and Tulsa, both unheralded, pulled off huge upsets against No. 5 Northern Iowa and No. 13 LSU, respectively.

Hey, the Lions know what it feels like to be upset. Midseason, they dropped back-to-back matches against middle-of-the-pack Big Ten squads Purdue and Indiana.

And they don't want that feeling of disappointment and unfulfillment to happen again — especially in the postseason, which in collegiate women's volleyball means win, or start your holiday break a few days early.

"The thing about Penn State is that even though their personnel is a little different, it doesn't quite matter," Voepel said.

"They know the feeling, this time of year of winning. This is what they're used to doing."

In the first two rounds of play in the last three championship seasons, the Lions averaged a .464 hitting percentage.

In the opening weekend of play this sea-

son, Penn State's hitting percentage was .464.

So if they want to win, the Lions need to step up their intensity. It should be a no-brainer for Oklahoma and Virginia Tech.

The Lions can't afford to be performance-minded. Midseason, they dropped back-to-back matches against Virginia Tech and Indiana.

A small consolation: The club's faithful on a good night and much to be desired.

Instead, Penn State's mental attitude is what's missing. It's not just about the past, it's about the future. It's not just about the present, it's about the future.

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