

# Icers looking to stay sharp heading into second half

By Anthony Barton  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The Penn State Icers need to have a better second half of the season in order to put themselves in a good position heading into the playoffs.

## ICERS

Following a lackluster first half that saw the team lose five of its 10 games against ranked opponents, the No. 11 Icers (12-5-0, 3-3-0 ESCHL) know to make the ACHA national playoffs, they can ill afford to get swept again by ranked teams.

They were swept by Rhode Island on Nov. 12-13.

Penn State has its final game of the first half Friday against unranked Niagara.

Following the game, the Icers

begin an extended winter break.

The break will span more than two weeks and many of the Penn State players will spend it concentrating on staying in shape and resting injuries.

Sophomore forward George Saad said he knows the manager of a local ice rink in Gibsonia, Pa. and will use the connection to practice there multiple times a week.

"I definitely will try to get on the ice as much as possible," Saad said.

"Besides that, I plan on staying in shape, rehabbing my knee and getting back in the swing of things so when we come back I'm on top of my game."

While many of the Icers will have similar breaks to Saad's, a few won't have to deal with as much time off.

Two Icers, senior assistant captain Tim O'Brien, the team's leading scorer, and sophomore forward Eric Steinour, will be part of the United States World University Games team and will travel to Turkey to compete at the end of January.

During the break, three warm-up games are scheduled at the end of December for the U.S. team, including a final game against Division I University of Vermont.

O'Brien said having the warm-up games definitely changes the way he will go about handling the break.

"With the games, I'll definitely be in the gym riding the bike more and try to get on the ice as much as I can," O'Brien said.

"It'll definitely be more work than usual, but it will all be worth

it when I pull on that team USA jersey."

Coach Scott Balboni said what his players do to prepare during the break could decide how the second half of Penn State's season goes.

"We send them home with a conditioning keep in hopes they will at least keep up their conditioning off ice," Balboni said. "On top of that, we hope they rest any injuries they've been dealing with throughout the season so that they come back healthy and ready to go."

Sophomore defenseman Rich O'Brien agrees the team needs to be ready, noting their first games back are a pair of road games against No. 4 Ohio.

To prepare, Balboni said the team will return to State College a week before the other students.

With no classes, the Icers will spend extra time watching film and fine tuning their skills in time for their games against the Bobcats.

Balboni said during a team meeting Monday he stressed the importance of finishing strong, but believes this year's second half is even more important to the success of the season.

He said the team can't stumble because of the games they already dropped.

"I still think positively we can end up with a decent ranking and get into Nationals with some home-ice advantage," Balboni said.

"But to do that we have to win some big hockey games in the second half."

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## Win

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who overcame a 3-of-14 night from the field to score the Lions' last seven points. The Mountaineers' Lamar Trice answered with a funky shot, hopping on one foot across the lane and nearly traveling in the process. The Lions then held for one, setting up Battle's late-game and potentially season-saving heroics.

"We just played so poorly and I think with a lack of energy or emotion or whatever you wanna call it," Battle said. "We just didn't have it, and that carried over for us making shots and defending."

"There's no excuse for how we played."

The Lions, playing without forwards DJ Jackson and Billy Oliver, didn't get off to a great

"The only positive is we won a game down the stretch."

Talor Battle  
senior guard

start, but they went into halftime with a nine-point lead.

They shot a respectable 44.8 percent from the field in the first half and out-rebounded the Mountaineers, 22-11. Nine of those rebounds were offensive.

But to start the second half, the Lions couldn't hold onto the ball. On five of their first seven possessions of the half, they turned it over and watched their lead evaporate. The Lions finished with 15 turnovers, 11 in the second half, to just 10 assists.

After playing five games in 12 days, Battle said the team is "fatigued" and looking forward to

today's day off. The Lions now have five days to prepare for Virginia Tech, who represent the Lions' last opportunity for a statement non-conference win.

However, this isn't exactly the performance the Lions were looking for going into one of their biggest games of the season. There's only one positive that can be taken from the game against the Mountaineers, Battle said.

"The only positive is we won a game down the stretch," Battle said. "That's the only positive thing we can take out of it."

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## Battle

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DeChellis said. "And then he made the big plays at the end ... finds a way to help us win the game. And as a senior guard, who has been through the wars a bunch, he's a special kid, a special player and found a way to win."

Battle said late in the second half, he knew it just wasn't his night. So he tried to draw fouls by attacking the rim hard.

He hit two free throws to kick off his seven point stretch in the last two minutes.

Aside from a nine-point performance in a blowout of Central Connecticut State — where many bench players saw significant playing time — Battle had been averaging close to 22 points

per game. Tuesday night, though, Battle scored just two points in the first half.

"It was just the kind of night it was," Battle said. "I couldn't hit anything."

Yet the senior said he hopes most of those memories will be erased with his late-game heroics. Because for that shot — that one moment — he felt like his, normal self.

Battle wasn't the only one who felt confident with two seconds left.

Freshman Taran Buie — Battle's half-brother — said he had faith when he saw the ball in Battle's hands.

"He's our go-to-guy on the team," Buie said. "There was nobody else that was going to take that shot."

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## Respect

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and early '60s? There was no one I guess. We played teams like Army, Navy — teams like that — which I guess had lost their luster. There was no one else in the East to go along with us, to help carry the load."

Penn State was able to shed the inferior perception after 1973 Heisman Trophy winner John Cappelletti, several bowl wins, bulked-up schedules and two national championships in the 1980s before finally joining a conference — the Big Ten — in 1993.

After several years of stepping into the national spotlight, TCU and Boise State have gradually followed suit. TCU will join an automatic-qualifying conference, the

Big East, starting in 2012 and will play Wisconsin in the Rose Bowl on Jan. 1.

The Broncos defeated Oklahoma in the 2007 Fiesta Bowl following an undefeated 2006 season and won six of its last seven games against opponents from BCS automatic-qualifying conferences, as has TCU. Earlier this season, Boise State defeated then-10th-ranked Virginia Tech, but the Hokies lost only five days later to FCS James Madison of the Colonial Athletic Association (CAA).

The Broncos only loss came on Nov. 26 to then-No. 19 Nevada in overtime. The perceived inferiority left TCU out of the national championship and Boise State out of a BCS-bowl game.

Similarly, two seasons after beating Missouri, the 1971 Lions

team entered the Cotton Bowl against No. 12 Texas with one loss, a 31-11 setback to No. 11 Tennessee. Though Penn State garnered respect after drubbing Texas 30-6, Lou Prato — author of The Penn State Football Encyclopedia — said the Lions subsequently lost it in the 1972 season opener, when Tennessee beat them again, this time by a touchdown.

"Even when the East Coast teams won, nothing would ever satisfy the critics," Prato said.

In 1969, there were 11 bowls, and the top-two teams didn't meet against each other in a consensus national championship. Ohio State was No. 1 and a perennial powerhouse before its final game against Michigan, Penn State, an independent at the time, chose its bowl before the Ohio State-

Michigan and Texas-Arkansas games — both important ranked matchups at the time.

Ohio State was not bowl eligible because of the Big Ten's no-repeat rule, keeping the Buckeyes from the Big Ten-affiliated Rose Bowl because they had been to it a year before.

Ohio State subsequently lost its last game to Michigan, and Texas cemented itself as the No. 1 team after beating Arkansas.

Penn State wouldn't have a chance to play the Longhorns in the Cotton Bowl after already accepting a bid to the Orange Bowl in anticipation of Ohio State being national champions.

"If we could have waited until after the ninth game of the season and picked, we probably would've chosen to go play [Texas] down there and could've played for the

national championship," Pittman said.

"Things just didn't work out." The Orange Bowl decision stigmatized Penn State.

"They're constantly being accused of ducking Texas," Prato said. "They didn't duck Texas."

Though now a newer version, the bowl system did the same to Boise State and TCU, as the BCS forced them to play each other in their previous two postseason games — the Fiesta and Poinsettia bowls — allowing debates of the mid majors' legitimacy to continue.

"You have the weak teams in the East," Prato said. "You have the weak teams in the West. You have the weak teams all over the country."

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## D'Errico

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statistics. However, the coach said her impact is "a very high one," which is evident by D'Errico's trio of rings and the 109 straight wins she helped the program accumulate from Sept. 21, 2007 to Sept. 11, 2010.

"She brings a lot of leadership as far as making sure everybody is on the same page, and trying to be energetic," said Arielle Wilson, one of two other seniors going for a fourth title and D'Errico's roommate for three years.

"She has a big role, and means a lot, especially in terms of leadership."

But even before she came to

play volleyball at Penn State, D'Errico was no stranger to undefeated seasons, winning streaks and championships.

D'Errico helped her team win the New York state championship in each of her final three years at Byron-Bergen High School. Her team went undefeated in both her junior and senior seasons, and D'Errico finished her high school career with 57 straight wins.

She attributes her winning ways to being raised in a competitive family. Both her parents, Cindy and Dave, played volleyball at SUNY Brockport and her older sister, Brianna played volleyball at Division III Ithaca College.

"Everything we did had to be about who wins and who loses," the senior recalled. "So when you

have that childhood and you're always fighting to be the best, I think that gives you the attributes to apply not only to athletics, but academics and organizations. You always want to do your best and kind of be atop the pile when everything ends."

Cindy D'Errico, who also coached Alyssa's high school team, has been coaching volleyball since before Alyssa was born. When Alyssa was younger, Cindy would take her family to Happy Valley for the East Coast championships.

So at Rec Hall, the building in which Alyssa will play a match for the final time this weekend in the NCAA Regionals, she first came to when she was just 3 years old.

After being around the campus

from a young age, it was always Alyssa's dream to wear blue and white. However, no one could've predicted that dream would evolve into three national titles, with the chance for a fourth.

"I don't think she ever envisioned being part of that type of an opportunity," her mother said. "Tradition has certainly been very, very strong at Penn State. Even participating in one championship is a feat that is unbelievable. And then to win it three years in a row is a phenomenal feat."

But the Byron, N.Y. native never let all of the winning get to her head.

"You always have to fight to get better," Alyssa said. "There's always something you can get better at. You're never the best.

Whether it be internationally, whether it be collegiately, there is always somebody that's going to be training harder than you, playing better than you."

Ultimately, D'Errico isn't thinking about the three titles she won in high school or the three she has already won at Penn State (28-5). She's focused on the potential of helping her team to four more wins and, she hopes, finishing her career with another victory in a national championship match.

"I don't really care about the win streaks. I don't care about the amount of wins that I've had," D'Errico said.

"I'm worried about the ones that are ahead of me."

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