

Scoring duel highlights Lady Lions' victory

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Mia Nickson, a redshirt sophomore co-captain, was coming off her first-ever start and a career-best 26 points against Texas Tech. Erin Anthony, a senior forward, is the tallest player on Army's roster and the Black Knights leading scorer.

For the first 20 minutes of Penn State's 95-65 win over Army at the Bryce Jordan Center Wednesday night, the two waged a back-and-forth scoring duel. However, Nickson and the Lady Lions defense got the better of Anthony in the decisive second half.

"We were able to run some things and I knew at halftime when our kid had the big first half that they were going to make that adjustment," Army coach Dave Magarity said. "Unfortunately we knew it, and we just didn't react to it well."

At halftime, Army trailed 48-35, thanks mostly to Anthony who had half of her team's points with 17 on a 7-for-9 shooting performance. The 6-foot-2 forward also hit 2-of-3 from beyond the arc and played all 20 minutes.

Meanwhile, Nickson played 14 minutes and shot almost as well as Anthony, going 6-for-9 from the field.

Though the forward's 14 points were six more than the next highest total, Penn State's balanced

offense would even itself out. "We have so many people that can score and so many people that can hit shots and you can post up," freshman guard Maggie Lucas said.

After her 17-point outburst in the first half, Anthony couldn't find a break to start the second half. Even when the senior managed to get fairly open on an inbound play, Nickson was able to swoop in and knock the ball out of Anthony's hands before the Army forward could turn to the basket.

"She was a really smart player. She capitalized on mental lapses when we couldn't front her or we didn't get help side defense fast enough, she really took advantage of those points," Nickson said of Anthony. "We locked down in the

second half and limited those touches."

And it wasn't just Nickson. With Army on a nearly six-minute scoreless drought, Anthony got a good pass in the post and was immediately surrounded by three Lady Lions, and the senior was called for a travel trying to recover the ball after she had it knocked away.

Despite being slowed to start the second half, the duel showed signs of life with a little over eight minutes left.

While both players broke the 20-point plane, once the lead started to inflate, Nickson sat, finishing her night with 23 points on 8-of-13 shooting.

Anthony meanwhile, went 38 minutes, finally finishing with 28

points on a 12-of-19 showing from the floor.

However, Nickson said she didn't feel like she had to stay point-for-point with Anthony and she was more focused on shutting down her opposite.

In the end, when Anthony became Penn State's focus, it was Army's lack of quality around her that spelled the Black Knights downfall.

"I feel badly for Anthony because she's such a terrific player," Magarity said.

"It's unique to get a player of her caliber at our level, and we're not surrounding her with kids that can give her a little bit more support right now."

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Win

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trailed in the contest, did a good job shutting down his team to start the second half when they switched to a zone defense.

"They forced us to have to really try to skip over them and they're so long and we're not that big," Magarity said. "So our turnovers just led to fast break layups."

"It seemed like every possession was a four-point turnaround, two we didn't get, two they got, or three they got."

Sophomore forward Mia Nickson led the Lady Lions scoring for the second straight game with 23 points to go along with five rebounds. Freshman guard Maggie Lucas added 20 points and eight rebounds, while sophomore guard Alex Bentley chipped in 10 points. Coach Washington said her team's defense needs to improve when Penn State hosts Maine on Sunday.

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Woodyard

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field during Tuesday's game, scoring two 3-pointers and a breakaway dunk for eight points, a team high in the opening half.

"He made some big shots," coach Ed DeChellis said. "He made a big shot before the half. I thought that was really crucial. I thought he had good rotation on his ball and I thought he was stepping into his shot."

With D.J. Jackson and Billy Oliver both unable to play against Mount St Mary's, DeChellis was forced to alter his lineup for the game, which he said got his offensive rotation all out of whack.

Needing a player to start in place of Jackson, DeChellis said Woodyard had the defensive experience to step in and earn the start. He made the most of it with a number of hustle plays, attacking the ball and crashing the boards to go along with his eight points.

DeChellis said Oliver and Jackson's status are still up in the air for this weekend's game against Virginia Tech so Woodyard could continue to benefit from this added playing opportunity.

"He did a nice job for us and hopefully he can build on that and have some confidence," DeChellis said. "He made open shots for us and that was the problem coming in."

Knowing Woodyard wouldn't try to do too much with the ball, the coach put his faith in the sophomore by giving him the start. The Maryland native didn't let DeChellis down to the point where the coach wished Woodyard would have been able to get more opportunities in the second half.

"I'm not even sure he took a shot in the second half and we've got to try to get him a shot," DeChellis said.

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Pair

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upset then-No. 9 Scott Giffin of Penn in the semifinals before being handed his first loss of the season by Letts.

Despite coming so close to winning his first tournament title as a Nittany Lion, Ruth is unfazed.

"It didn't really hurt at all," Ruth said. "Everybody goes down once in a while. It's what you learn from."

Just one mat away from where Ruth tore through the bracket to the final, his teammate Frank Molinaro did the same in the 149-pound class.

But just like Ruth, Molinaro's hopes for a first-place finish were pulled out from under him in his final match of the day.

In a rematch from Nov. 21 when Molinaro made his debut, a hard-fought 4-3 decision over then-No. 13 Mario Mason of Rutgers in the Sprawl and Brawl duals in Binghamton, N.Y. Mason got the best of Molinaro the second time around.

Masonry edged out a 3-1 sudden

victory win over Molinaro to take the 149-pound title.

"It's still kind of sickening to me," Molinaro said. "But I have to look forward to getting back to practice and just working harder."

Having missed the season with a broken ankle, Molinaro's conditioning is still improving from the time he missed.

The two-time All-American said he wasn't in top condition to wrestle Mason after a full day of competition at the Open, but also added that it will only be a matter of time before he's back to full strength. Ruth's and Molinaro's teammates are confident that the two will recover mentally and physically from the losses.

"It's gonna be tough for them," redshirt freshman David Taylor said.

"No one'll lose. It's not fun. But they'll bounce back."

Ruth and Molinaro are on the same page when it comes to what they'll need to do to walk away victorious the next time they take to the mat.

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Jepson

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need to make sure you check into your gyms at home," he said. "Today in practice, we need to concentrate on our landings and dismounts, notably on horse and in floor."

As practice commences, he is very soft-spoken.

He never yells, but when someone makes a mistake on a routine,

he is there before they land.

He corrects every error before it becomes a problem, because he knows there is no room for problems in Division I men's gymnastics.

The work ethic in the gym demonstrates a thirst for perfection, and for Jepson's gymnasts, that thirst is ambiguous.

"[Recruits] recognize the value of an education here," he said. "I know there have been some guys who wanted to do better academi-

cally than they could do at [other universities]."

Jepson's gymnasts credit him for keeping them physically and mentally fit during the offseason, which spans from April-December. This is especially true for the freshmen, who are in the midst of making the jump from high school to college.

"He still understands that coming out of the high school programs all the guys just got done ... trying to make national teams,"

junior Miguel Pineda said. "He still understands the goals and dreams that they have."

In addition to Jepson's vast experience as a collegiate coach, he has also coached on the international level. When going up against other countries, Jepson has noticed a higher level of intensity at the competitions. Because of America's collegiate system, there is a greater "team" aspect on the USA squad, he said.

"Most countries don't have

that," he said. "At the Olympic games, when the guys went right down to the end, competing for a medal, they looked at each other and said, 'This is just like being at the NCAA championships. We've done this before. Let's go get it.'"

No matter what level Jepson is coaching on, he always makes sure to instill a strong work ethic in his gymnasts so they never lose with regret.

"Ruth No. 1 is never beat yourself," he said.

Wilson

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of the Big Ten's leading — and tallest — ladies, Wilson still doesn't talk much. Her teammates say that's OK, though. She doesn't need to.

"Arielle's pretty quiet, but everything that she says means something," starting freshman outside hitter Deja McClendon said. "So I take every word that she says to heart."

As her collegiate career winds down — one that she hopes ends with an unprecedented fourth consecutive national championship ring — Wilson said she has grown out of her shy stage. In fact, she said she considers herself a leader.

And that's the biggest thing the soft spoken Illinois native said she'll take away from her time at Penn State.

"The last three years, I kind of just followed the lead of the upperclassmen," Wilson said.

"But as a senior I knew I had to step up with being more vocal. I want to leave this program as a

leader. I'll be proud of that."

Fellow senior co-captain Alyssa D'Errico said Wilson has always been "a beast when it comes to the physical parts of volleyball."

"But she didn't really understand the game as a whole when she was a freshman...and also, she didn't really understand the leadership and the way that a team worked," D'Errico said. "Going from there to being a senior captain this year and taking on a role of helping the team and guiding the team is just a huge huge 180 for her."

That's because by nature, Wilson isn't outgoing.

Sue Keck, the director of Wilson's high school club volleyball team, said when Wilson first joined the program in eighth grade, her mother and grandmother would come along for team trips and tournaments.

"It took her a little time to break into the team," Keck said. "She was quiet."

Wilson let her performance on the court speak for itself.

When she entered high school, she started receiving letters from college coaches.

And the mail began to pile up.

"I didn't really understand what was going on," Wilson said. "But I knew it was definitely a good thing."

High Peck: "By her junior year of high school, everyone knew who she was."

Because of that, Wilson had plenty of options when it came to choosing a college.

She took visits to a few Big Ten schools and liked what she saw. The very last stop on Wilson's agenda?

A trip to Happy Valley.

"The airport, the hotel, the scenery, I can't really describe it," Wilson said. "It was different than Illinois, but I felt comfortable there. I also appreciated how coach [Russ] Rose was so honest."

So Wilson chose Penn State, and since then has never looked back.

Neither have her teammates, who said Wilson is seriously committed to making everyone around her better.

Letters Kristin Carpenter said in the Lions' season finale — a five-set loss to Minnesota — Wilson

approached her in the middle of the match.

"I dumped [the ball over the net] a few times, and I wasn't scoring," Carpenter said. "And Arielle was just like, 'Carp, stop doing that. Now.'"

So Carpenter stopped right away.

"Arielle's a girl who doesn't speak a lot," junior co-captain Katie Kabbes said. "But when she does, everybody knows it's important, and we listen."

Kabbes would know. The two are roommates, and Kabbes said Wilson is blunt off the court, too.

Sometimes, Kabbes will ask Wilson for advice about outfits.

"And she'll tell me right up, that does not look good," Kabbes said. "She doesn't say much, but she says it like it is. [She] doesn't sugar coat anything."

Carpenter said the Lions have a couple rotations where she is stacked up right next to Wilson.

Wilson will sometimes turn to Carpenter and simply say, "Give me the ball."

"With a figure like her, she doesn't say much, but when she does it's like, 'Whoa,'" Carpenter said.

"I pick my battles, and I don't pick my battles with her."

"If she wants the ball, I'm going to give her the ball. She knows what she's doing."

Kabbes said Wilson is one of the most respected players on the team because she backs up what she has to say.

"She knows this is her last go-around, so she puts it all out there," Kabbes said.

After graduation, Wilson — a kinesiology major — would like to continue playing volleyball, perhaps overseas in a professional league.

Then, Wilson intends on attending graduate school to pursue a career as an emergency room nurse.

And the thought of handling the stress of a hectic hospital environment doesn't seem to faze Wilson — especially after growing into a leader over the last four years.

"Being an athlete on top of a student athlete has been a rocky road," Wilson said. "So emergency room nurse? That will be a breeze."

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