



CCWW Sports Report No. 429
(April 20, 2017)
by
Rich Coyle '68



I've been out of pocket for a few weeks with a touch of pneumonia and some other things going on but here's a catch-up. Short summary: we're having a good spring. In fact, the Big Red is in contention for the Ivy title in four of the six spring sports where that title is based on regular season record, and Cornell can qualify for the Ivy tournament and win the automatic bid to the NCAA championships in a fifth sport.

What's Going on Now

The team that cannot win the Ivy crown but can still make it to the conference tournament and win the autobid to the NCAAs is **Men's Lacrosse**, which has righted itself after a brutal 0-5 start, including four losses by blowout margins. Since that beginning, the Red have won four of six and now control their ability to make the Ivy League tourney, and give themselves a shot there to play their way into the NCAA tournament. Cornell is 2-2 in the league play, tied for third with this week's opponent, Brown. After a bad loss to conference leader Yale and a one-goal loss to Penn (when the Quakers scored the last three goals of the game to wipe out a late two-goal Cornell lead), the Big Red had solid victories over Dartmouth and Harvard. The top four teams in the seven-team league (Columbia does not play men's lacrosse) make the Ivy tournament. Cornell will finish the regular season visiting Brown this Saturday and hosting Princeton next week. If the Red win out, they will be in the Ivy tournament as the No. 2 seed. Cornell could still get in the tourney with a win over Brown and a loss to the Tigers, but that is more iffy and may come down to a coin flip. Anyway, it's a big game in Providence on Saturday at 1:00 p.m. PDT. The game will be streamed on ESPN3 as well as the ILDN.

Cornell was a mess to start the season,. The offense was disorganized and had lots of unforced turnovers; the defense was not great; the faceoff game was abysmal; and Goalie **Christian Knight '17** was having problems, posting a save percentage of just 42% in the first five games. Since then, the offense has settled in as the lineup has become more set and the players have gotten a feel for each other. **Jeff Teat '20** has been the great scorer and feeder he was advertised to be (winning two Ivy Rookie of the Week awards), and he and classmate **Connor Fletcher '20**, recently moved from attack to the midfield, have already become the highest-scoring freshman duo in Cornell history, with at least two games still left. Knight's save percentage is 56% in the last six games, and the defense around him has jelled, led by **Jake Pulver '18** and two "newcomers," **Brandon Salvatore '20**, a freshman, and **Walt Gahagan '17**, who wasn't even recruited, made the team as a walk-on three years ago and six games into this season became not only a starter, but one of the top producers of caused turnovers in the country. The Big Red are still not good on face-offs and there are still too many unforced turnovers, but those problems have been offset somewhat by an effective ride that had often gotten the Red the ball back. In its first five games, the Big Red caused fewer than six turnovers per game. In the last six, Cornell has caused eleven turnovers per game. So things are looking up.

Unlike the men, **Women's Lacrosse** has been solid all season and in a position to win the Ivy title. They are undefeated (5-0) and lead second-place Princeton (4-0) by a half-game. The Big Red host the Tigers on Saturday and a win would clinch a share of the Ivy League title. The game will be streamed on the ILDN starting at 10:00 a.m. PDT.

Cornell has already clinched a spot in the Ivy League tournament. And barring a late season collapse, the Big Red should get to the NCAA tournament even without the Ivy autobid. The Red's overall record is 10-3, and they are 11th in the RPI. They have a top-10 RPI win (over No. 9 Penn) and wins over USC (19th in the RPI) and Rutgers (22nd). The three losses are by one goal to Penn State (No. 3 RPI), by three goals to Syracuse (No. 4 RPI), and by one goal to Albany (No. 24 RPI). As for the human polls, Cornell

has been in the top-20 all reason and has been ranked as high as seventh. The Red is currently ranked 11th or 12th, depending on the poll.

I've watched portions of several games, including the first half of the loss this week at Syracuse. Cornell held the Orange to a 5-5 halftime tie. The Red are a fun team to watch. The defense is solid, giving up just under eight goals per game, good for fifth in the country (out of 112 teams). All-American **Catie Smith '17** is the top defender, and goalkeeper **Renee Poulott '17** is seventh in the country in goals-against average and 11th in save percentage. Against 'cuse, Renee had a career-high 14 saves. The offense is very balanced, with five different players having at least 20 goals. **Amie Dickson '17** leads the team in points with 50 (23 goals, 27 assists), while classmate **Catherine Ellis '17** leads in goals with 29.

Another team still in the hunt for an Ivy League title is **Baseball**. The Big Red got off to a great start in non-conference play, winning nine of its first 12 games. Ivy play, however, began with a thud, as the Red dropped a double-header to Brown. Cornell stopped the bleeding by splitting double-headers with Yale, Harvard and Dartmouth, and then won three of four last weekend at Columbia. That brought the Big Red's league record to 6-6, which may not sound great but here's the deal: for baseball, the Ivy League is divided into two divisions, the Lou Gehrig Division and the Red Rolfe Division. Cornell, Columbia, Penn and Princeton are in the Gehrig division, the four New England schools are in the Rolfe Division. The Ivy title is decided in a best of three series between the two division winners. So, while Yale (10-2) and Dartmouth (9-3) have much better records than Cornell, they're in the other division. Right now, Cornell's 6-6 record is good for second, two games behind Penn, in the Gehrig division, with eight games, including four with Penn, to play. Win the Gehrig Division and the Big Red get to play for the Ivy League title.

The Red will host Penn this weekend in a four-game series. Realistically, Cornell needs to win three of the four games which could happen because, well, the Big Red can flat-out hit. The Red have a team batting average of .299, highest in the Ivy League. Cornell's leading hitter, **Dale Wickham '18**, has a .383 average, and an OPS (on-base percentage plus slugging percentage) of .993. Unfortunately, Dale was injured early in the first Harvard game and has missed the last eight games. It is unclear when or if he will be back. Even without Wickham, Cornell has plenty of pop. First baseman **Cole Rutherford '17** is hitting .313, leads the Ivy League with 32 RBIs, and is second in the league with seven home runs. Shortstop **Ryan Krainz '18** has a .366 batting average and leads the team with seven stolen bases and an on base percentage of .472. He is also the Ivy League's toughest batter to strike out. Other .300 hitters are catcher **Will Simoneit '19** (.306), DH **Trey Baur '18** (.354), Bainbridge Islander and O'Dea High graduate **Pierre Le Dorze '18** (.352) and outfielder **Kyle Gallagher '18**, a former Cornell football quarterback who switched to baseball and is batting .304. The pitching staff is led by starters **Tim Willittes '17** and **Paul Balestrieri '17** and relievers **Peter Lannoo '17**, **Jamie Flynn '17**, and **Matt Horton '17**.

This weekend's four-game series with Penn will consist of double-headers on Saturday and Sunday, the first game each day starting at 9:00 a.m. PDT. All games will be streamed on the ILDN.

Cornell's other diamond team, **Softball**, will not be a factor in the Ivy League race although they've shown some improvement over last year. Right now they are in last place in the South Division, with a 3-9 record, seven games behind Princeton. Sometime this weekend, probably on Saturday, the Big Red will be mathematically eliminated from Ivy title contention. On the other hand, one more Ivy win and the Red will eclipse last year's win totals in both league games and all games.

That brings us to tennis. Both the men and the women are in contention for an Ivy championship, with the men perhaps having the better chance. As you may recall from earlier posts, Cornell **Men's Tennis** has been having an excellent season, twice rising as high as 18th in the national rankings. Through March, the Big Red had a 15-2 record in dual matches. The first Ivy match, an April 1 showdown between two top-25 teams, the 20th-ranked Big Red and 25th-ranked Lions, was expected to resolve whether the upstart Red or the three-time defending champion Lions were the Ivy League's alpha male. Unfortunately, Columbia rode the doubles point and wins at the Nos. 1 and 2 positions to eke out a 4-3 victory over the Big Red.

But the season didn't end on April Fool's Day. Cornell continued to win, as did Columbia and Harvard, until last Saturday when the Crimson upset Columbia to take over the league lead. That status lasted one day as, on Sunday, Cornell came from behind to defeat Harvard and create a three-way tie for first, with Harvard, Cornell and Columbia all sporting 4-1 league records. Those teams should all win this weekend, creating a three-way tie for the Ivy title with all teams at 6-1. If that happens, as I read the tie-breaking rules, Cornell will not receive the Ivies' NCAA autobid because it lost a non-league match to Columbia in the ECAC championships. So to earn the autobid, Cornell needs Columbia to lose one of its last two matches. In any event, if it wins out, Cornell will still be considered the Ivy co-champion and its chances for at large bid to the NCAA tournament should be pretty good.

The situation for **Women's Tennis** is more complicated. Cornell's ITA ranking is not that great so to get into the NCAA tournament, it needs not only to share the Ivy title but also to win the autobid tie-breaker. Right now the Big Red has a 3-2 record and is tied with Dartmouth and Penn for third in the league, a game behind co-leaders Harvard and Princeton. But because the Red has beaten both Harvard and Princeton, it holds the tie-breaker in the event of a tie with these teams. And Harvard plays Princeton. So Cornell needs whichever team wins the Harvard-Princeton match to lose its other match. But even that isn't quite enough, because if either Penn or Dartmouth wins both matches then Cornell is tied with that team as well and Cornell does not hold the head-to-head tie-breaker against either. Cornell gets in if Harvard, Princeton Penn and Dartmouth all go 1-1 this weekend. That would create a three-way tie with Harvard and Princeton, both of whom Cornell defeated. Alternatively, Cornell gets the NCAA autobid in if Penn wins twice (over Harvard and Dartmouth) and Princeton beats Harvard and loses to Dartmouth. That would create a three-way tie with Cornell, Penn and Princeton, which Cornell wins because it defeated Princeton in the ECAC championships. Got all that?

In addition to tennis, the Ivy League championship in **Golf** will also be decided this weekend in a three-day event. Cornell has never won the Ivy golf championship. Last spring, the Big Red finished fourth, its best finish since 2005, and **Luke Graboyes '17** was the individual champion. Luke and younger brother **Mike Graboyes '18** are back this year. Mike was tied for eighth last year to claim second-team All-Ivy honors, the second year in a row that the brothers were both All-Ivy.

This spring, Cornell has competed in three events, finishing 12 of 22, eighth of 14, and, most recently, fourth of 13. In these tournaments, the Big Red have beaten Brown, Penn and Columbia but have yet to finish ahead of Harvard, Princeton or Yale. A repeat of last year's fourth-place showing is likely the best we can hope for.

Other sports still going on are Men's and Women's Track & Field, Rowing, Sailing and Equestrian. I'll catch y'all up on those next week.

What You May Have Missed

Since my last report, the seasons ended for Men's Hockey, Fencing, Swimming & Diving, Gymnastics, and Polo. Here's a brief post-mortem on each.

Men's Hockey lost, 5-0, to UMass-Lowell in the first round of the NCAA Northeast Regional. The end was disappointing, but not that surprising. On paper, Lowell seemed like a bit better team. As I mentioned in my pre-game report, the Big Red did get shafted a bit by having to play UML rather than Western Michigan. In the game, the Big Red did not get any help from the zebras. A Cornell goal in the first minute was waived off after a video review. (I've watched the replay numerous times and think the ruling was in error for multiple reasons but, whatever...) Later in the game the Red got hosed again when the refs missed an obvious too-many-men-on-the-ice penalty. At the time Cornell was a man up and the penalty would have given the Big Red a two-man advantage for almost two minutes. The referee's error is really not debatable because UML scored on the play and the goal was negated after the video review showed the clear infraction. But because the video review cannot be used to call a penalty in that situation, Cornell missed getting a five-on-three advantage. After that, Cornell took a major penalty out of frustration and Lowell added two more goals and so the final score made the game seem more of a blow-out than it really was. But even if Cornell had eked out a win, they were not likely to go a lot further in the tournament.

UML lost in the next round to Notre Dame, which lost by five goals to Denver, the eventual tournament winner.

Cornell sent individuals to the NCAA championships in **Fencing** and **Swimming & Diving**. Fencers **Gabriella Zusin '18** and **Luby Kiriakidi '18** finished 16th and 17th, respectively, in the foil, while **Victoria Wines '17**, a four-time NCAA qualifier and former bronze medalist in the epee finished a disappointing 18th. The scores recorded by these three placed Cornell in 15th place (13th if one just considers the women's scores). At the NCAA swimming championships, **Alex Evdokimov '18** represented the Big Red in the 100 and 200 breaststroke. Alex finished 14th in the 100 and 13th in the 200, both good for honorable mention All-American status.

Gymnastics finished its season here in Seattle at the USAG Collegiate Nationals. Women's gymnastics is an NCAA sport, but USA Gymnastics also holds a national championship for, as Andy Noel explained in an email a few weeks back, schools which "do not offer the full complement of scholarships allowed by the NCAA." This year the championships were hosted by Seattle Pacific University and were held on the SPU campus on Queen Anne Hill. The host and eight other schools, as well as several individuals, competed and Cornell, which won the USAG national championship back in 2009, made it to the finals and finished fourth. If you've been following these posts, you'll know that the Big Red has had a pretty good year, winning the Ivy Classic, finishing second in the ECAC championships, and twice setting a new record for points in a meet. In the USAG finals in Seattle, the Red once again broke its scoring record, with a 194.950 score, but it only got Cornell fourth place. **Kaitlin Green '19**, who has been outstanding all year won two individual titles, on the balance beam and the uneven bars.

I mentioned that the NCAA also holds its own gymnastics championship and two Cornell gymnasts were invited to warm up for the USAG Nationals by competing in the NCAA regionals in Morgantown, West Virginia. **Lyanda Dudley '19** competed in the all-around and Green competed on the balance beam. Neither had her best scoring day and both finished in the middle of the pack.

Finally, Men's and Women's **Polo** competed at nationals in Santa Barbara and won their quarter-final matches before losing in the semis. The men lost by a pair of goals to eventual champion Roger Williams University. The Big Red men had a very good season, finishing with a 16-4 record. Their only losses to college teams all came at the hands of RWU, which took three of four matches from the Red. The Cornell women, coming off back-to-back national titles, had a bit of a down season, ending with a losing 10-12 record. They did however, defeat Cal Poly to make it to the national semis, where they lost by a goal to eventual champion UVA.

That's all for now. **GO BIG RED!**