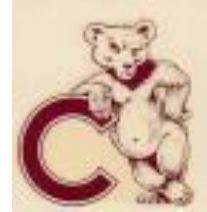




**CCWW Sports Report No. 432**  
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by  
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End of the year wrap-up and late spring catch-up, Part II. This report will be about the Cornell male athletes—if you want to read about the women, check out the last report. For the men, and as per usual, there were ups, down and straightaways. But I feel pretty good about what at least the near term holds for many Cornell teams. So here goes the final 2016-17 report on Big Red men's athletics, presented, like the women's report, in reverse order of when the team's season ended.

**Lightweight Rowing.** It took until the last day of June but the 2017 lightweight rowing season is now history. As the last team standing (actually, sitting, which is your posture when rowing), the lights get the lead story. And since they won the only Cornell team national championship this past year, top billing is deserved. The Big Red Varsity 8 was undefeated and won its third Eastern and IRA championship in the past four years. They then went across the pond to England and competed at Henley in the Temple Challenge Cup, winning twice before losing in a quarterfinal race to the eventual runner-up, the University of London, a heavyweight crew that outweighed the Big Red by over 30 pounds per man—a big advantage in rowing. Congratulations on a terrific season to **Coach Chris Kerber**, Coxswain **Gabrielle Steini '17**, and oarsmen **Patrick LeCorgne '17** (stroke), **Erik Johnson '17** (bow), **Daniel O'Neill '17**, **Sorin Koszyk '20**, **Gideon Schmidt '20**, **Joe Pinnola-Vizza '18**, **Henry Ellis '19**, and **Jack Ruske '17**.

**Track & Field.** The season also continued into June for two Cornellians who qualified for the NCAA championships in Eugene—**Rudy Winkler '17** and **James Gowens '17**. Winkler capped off his outstanding Cornell career with the national championship in the hammer throw, while James' 17th place finish in the 1500 meter run field just missed second-team All-American honors. Rudy was Cornell's only individual NCAA champion in any sport this year and gave the Big Red its first NCAA track & field title since **Muhammad Halim '08** won the triple jump in 2008.

Winkler, who won the U.S. Olympic trials a year ago and represented the USA in Rio, had another outstanding year. In the indoor season, he set new school and Ivy League records in the weight throw, then won the event at Ivy Heptagonals (setting a new Heps record) before finishing fourth, and achieving first-team All-American status, at the NCAA Indoor championships. Outdoors, Rudy, the Ivy record holder in the hammer, won the event at Outdoor Heps on his way to the NCAA title. Rudy was named the most valuable field athlete at both indoor and outdoor Heps, the outstanding field athlete in the Northeast Region for both indoors and outdoors, and shared with wrestler **Gabe Dean '17** the honor of being named Cornell's male Outstanding Senior Varsity Athlete. Oh, and by the way, Winkler, an information sciences major, was an academic All-Ivy and Academic All-American. Earlier this week, Rudy was invited to represent the USA at the IAFF World Championships.

Winkler and Gowens earned their trips to Eugene at the NCAA East Preliminary held in late May in Lexington, Kentucky. Fourteen other Cornell men qualified for the East Preliminary. **Zach Menchaca '19** raced in the 200 meter dash and joined with fellow underclassmen, **Jonathan Avery '19**, **James Norris '20** and **Andy Snyder '20** as a 4x100 relay team. **Myles Lazarou '18** and **Grant Sisseron '17** competed in the high jump and pole vault, respectively, while **Bobby Plummer '17** and **John Enkler '17** competed in the triple jump. The Big Red also sent six distance runners in addition to Gowens to Lexington: **Chase Silverman '18** (1500); **David Taylor '17**, **Mark Tedder '17** and **Dominic DeLuca '18** (all in the 5000); **Michael Wang '18** (3000 steeplechase); and **Sam Chauvin '18** (10,000).

As a team, the Big Red were unable to repeat as outdoor Heps champions, finishing second to Princeton by just seven points. One key injury did the Red in. Cornell had no one in the decathlon after **Austin Jamerson '17** pulled a hamstring before the meet. Since Jamerson is the defending Ivy champion in both the decathlon and the indoor heptathlon (and Ivy League record holder in the latter), there was every

reason to believe that if healthy he would have done well. I did the math and if Austin had finished first, second or third in the event, Cornell would have won the meet. And even with that misfortune, the Big Red still almost won. Princeton was favored by about 30 points but the Red got several great performances, especially some upsets in the sprints, and almost stole the victory. The Red's five event winners were Winkler in the hammer (of course!), Menchaca in the 100, Lazarou in the high jump (a three-peat in this event!), Tedder in the 10,000, and the 4x100 relay team of Menchaca, Avery, **Brailin Paulino '18**, and **Alex Beck '19**.

With the runner-up finishes at both indoor and outdoor Heps, Cornell has now finished first or second in these meets for 15 straight years.

**Heavyweight Rowing.** Cornell finished seventh at Easterns, a drop of two spots from a year ago, and 12th at IRA nationals, an improvement of one place from 2016.

**Golf.** As previously reported, the Big Red finished a surprising second at the Ivy League golf championships, and **Mike Graboyes '18** was the medalist. The runner-up finish tied for the Red's best ever. Mike's individual title earned him a trip to *our* coast in mid-May to compete in the NCAA's Stanford regional. Mike finished the 54-hole event eight over, not good enough to earn him a trip to the finals.

**Tennis.** This was great year for the Big Red, as they shared the Ivy League title with a 6-1 league record. The Red did not get the Ivies' automatic bid, but its national ranking of 26 easily earned it an at-large spot in the NCAA tournament field. Cornell went down to Waco, Texas, as the No. 2 seed in the Baylor Regional, and justified that seed by defeating Rice, 4-0, in the first round for its first NCAA win ever. The season ended the next day with a loss to seventh-ranked Baylor. Still, by posting a final record of 22-4 and a final No. 26 national ranking, Cornell had the best season for men's tennis in a long while—maybe ever.

**Baseball.** I've discussed this season in some prior reports. The Big Red finished with an overall record of 21-17, its first winning season since 2013, and an Ivy League record of 9-11. Not bad, but with the personnel and the strong start—winning nine of their first twelve games—I had hoped for more. In fact, the Red really was the best team in the Gehrig division; they just didn't win the critical league games. Even though it finished third in the division, Cornell had the best Ratings Percentage Index (RPI). The Gehrig co-champs, Columbia and Penn, were a combined 3-18 against the top 100 RPI teams; Cornell was 4-1, beating Binghamton twice and Michigan State and splitting with Yale. But some injuries to key players and losses to teams they should have beaten did the Big Red in.

A postscript was the MLB draft held in mid-June. Pitchers **Paul Balestrieri '17**, **Peter Lannoo '17** and **Justin Lewis '18** were all selected, the first time in program history that the Big Red had three players drafted. All three have signed, meaning that Lewis will forego his last year of eligibility. Also, **Cole Rutherford '17** signed as free agent with the Padres. Lannoo is an interesting story. He was not recruited by the Big Red and made the team as a walk-on in his sophomore year. He quickly became one of the Red's most reliable pitchers, serving as the closer in his senior year. He tied for the Ivy lead in saves with eight and was named to the All-Ivy first team. Peter's professional career has gotten off to good start. He was assigned to the Giants' short-season A team in Salem, Oregon, and earlier this month pitched up in Everett against the Aquasox, finishing one game by pitching a scoreless inning and striking out the side, and finishing another game with two more scoreless innings for his first professional save. Balestrieri is pitching, and pitching well, for the Cardinals' State College affiliate in the short-season NYP League. Paul picked up his first professional win last Sunday, giving up no earned runs in 5.1 innings. His teammate there includes a Seattleite with whom I go way back—Andrew Summerville, a graduate of Lakeside School and Stanford.

**Lacrosse.** You likely know that the Big Red had a losing record, for the second straight year, and failed to qualify for the Ivy League tournament, also for the second straight year. What you may not know is that shortly after the season ended coach Matt Kerwick resigned, and was replaced by top assistant **Peter Milliman**. The decision of Coach Kerwick to leave, "to focus on my family," was unexpected but treated by much of the Big Red "lax family," as very good news. What was not well received—and, frankly, seems to

be more than a bit strange—is the decision merely to make Milliman an “interim” coach until the end of next season, after which “[a] nationwide search will commence ... to name a full-time replacement.” If Milliman is the man, make him the head coach; if not, there was no apparent reason not to look for a permanent replacement right away.

Regardless of the circumstances of his promotion, Coach Milliman seems to have hit the ground running, displaying a level of commitment that has brought back some enthusiasm to Cornell lacrosse—a program that made the NCAA tournament twelve straight years before 2016, and went to four Final Fours in the seven years between 2007 and 2013. He’s already announced the incoming class and, for a third straight year, the class is very talented. So, if you’ve jumped off the Big Red lacrosse bandwagon, there are some good reasons to hop back on.

**Polo.** The Big Red had a very good season, finishing with a 16-4 record and losing in the national semifinals to Roger Williams University. Their only losses to college teams all came at the hands of RWU, which took three of four matches from the Red.

**Hockey.** Cornell finished with a 21-9-5 record after losing in the first round of the NCAA tournament. The Big Red finished third in the ECAC and made it to the ECAC tournament final. The NCAA appearance was the Red’s first since 2012.

**Swimming & Diving.** My comments about the women’s program in last month’s report apply equally to the men. Cornell was 1-6 in the Ivy League and finished fifth at the Ivy championships. The bright spot was **Alex Evdokimov ’18**, who won the 100 and 200 breaststroke at the Ivy championships, qualified for the NCAA championships in both events, and was an honorable mention All-American in both.

**Wrestling.** If you read my report at the end of the season, you know that more was expected of this team than an eighth-place NCAA finish (with no individual titles after Gabe Dean suffered his only loss of the year in the 184 pound finals). Still, it wasn’t all bad: Cornell went 5-0 in Ivy competition (extending its undefeated string to 15+ years), almost upset top-ranked Oklahoma State in a dual meet in Stillwater, did upset fourth-ranked Ohio State, and won its 11th-straight EIWA championship. And with ample depth at several weight classes and a strong incoming recruiting class, the Big Red should be able to handle the loss of four senior regulars without missing much of a beat.

**Basketball.** **Coach Brian Earl**’s first season was difficult, with losses of both games (21 of 29) and players (three in-season departures) as he tried to install new offensive and defensive systems. Better things should be ahead. Top scorer **Matt Morgan ’19** returns after declaring for and then withdrawing from the NBA draft. Classmate **Stone Gettings ’19**, who had a break-out sophomore season, will also be back, along with three solid supporting players. An in-coming recruiting class of six looks pretty good but will not solve the Big Red’s biggest need—size up front. Still, with the “Bill Courtney Experience” behind us, things should be, and are, looking up.

**Squash.** For the past three years, the Big Red have been relegated to the kid’s table, competing in the group of teams ranked ninth through 16th for the Hoehn Cup. This year they only finished fourth in that group (*i.e.*, 12th overall), the worst finish in at least a decade.

**Football.** The Cornell football team was a *lot* better in 2016, winning four games, twice as many as in 2014 and 2015 combined, and playing competitively in virtually every game. This year should be as good or better. On offense, key players at the skill positions return, although the O-line will need a rebuild after five seniors graduated. The Big Red will have an experienced defense with 10 starters back.

**Soccer.** In 2012 Cornell won the Ivy League title and was ranked as high as tenth nationally during the season. Last fall the Big Red won one game, was 0-7 in the Ivy League and scored just two goals in league play. Ugh! But it likely can’t get worse.

**Cross-Country.** Cornell finished sixth at Heps and sixth (out of 35) in the NCAA Northeast regionals. Not much more to say.

**Sprint Football.** The Big Red have fielded a sprint football team for 80 years. The program seems to be very well supported by the alumni, every year far exceeding its fundraising goal. But I see two problems. Of the Ivy League schools, only Penn still plays. Other than Army and Navy, the other schools in the CSFL are a motley bunch—hardly Cornell’s “peer institutions.” Also, Cornell has never been great at the sport; for the past 30 years it hasn’t even been that good. The Big Red won the league championship in 2006 but before that its last title was in 1986. Last year the Big Red was 2-5. And stating the obvious, the sport provides an athletic opportunity for about 60 male students. I’m no Title IX expert but this must have consequences.

But then I wonder if I’m missing the point. In an era in which, at many schools, athletes are increasingly separate from student body at large, the sprint football team appears to be made up mostly of regular students, people who were not recruited to Cornell to play football but who love the game and are proud to represent Cornell on the field. Maybe the team and its supporters are the ones who have it right and those of us who long for championships and national recognition, and are willing to see the admissions process jimmied to get there, are the ones whose priorities are a bit off base? Well, it’s all too deep for me but the Big Red will play sprint football for another year and I wish them well in 2017.

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So that’s the recap for the men. National championships in lightweight rowing and for Rudy Winkler in the men’s hammer throw; Ivy championships in wrestling and tennis; runner-up Ivy finishes in golf and track & field; improvement in hockey, football and baseball; and resurgences likely ahead in lacrosse and perhaps also in basketball. So I for one am looking forward to the upcoming year.

That’s all for 2016-17. I’ll get out a new report after the 2017-18 school year starts—which is not that far away. As always, **GO BIG RED!**