



**CCWW Sports Report No. 529**  
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by  
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Seems like old times.

No, I'm not talking about the Big Red **Men's Lacrosse** team's dominating win over previously top-ranked Yale—although wins over Yale were a regular occurrence in the “olden days,” like 22 straight between 1967 and 1988, and a 14-game Cornell winning streak between 2000 and 2012. And I'm certainly not talking about the Red winning the Ivy League Tournament. Winning the ILT has not been a regular Big Red accomplishment; since the ILT was instituted in 2010, Cornell had won just once, in 2011, and that was the last time the Big Red even won a tournament game.

No, what made it seem like old times was the Red's mistreatment Sunday at the hands of the NCAA Lacrosse tournament selection committee. In 2007, Cornell won every game during the season and was ranked No. 1 in all the polls. For that the Big Red was rewarded with the No. 4 overall seed in the tournament. The top seed was given to Duke, a team Cornell defeated in Durham during the regular season. The Red were the better team that day—I know, I was there. So the two best teams in the country met in the semifinals rather than the finals. (And Cornell lost on a last-second goal that negated a furious Big Red comeback—but that's another story.)

That the selection committee had bollixed the 2007 seedings was widely accepted, and a year or two later the committee amended their criteria to improve things. But their addiction to screwing things up generally (or screwing Cornell in particular—take your pick) was apparently too powerful and this year they relapsed. The result was to leave the Big Red unseeded and make them play their first-round game at Syracuse. “Congrats, Big Red for blitzing the No. 1-ranked team in the country. Now go play a road game in the stadium of another team you also manhandled.” (And to rub salt in the wound—at least, my wound—the game will be the last game on Sunday. Happy Mother's Day, Big Red fans! Hope you didn't have dinner plans.)

After Sunday's 14-8 beatdown of Yale, the Big Red not only had a better record and a better RPI than Syracuse, but had defeated the Orange, 13-8, less than a month ago. Usually, the committee uses head-to-head results to separate closely-matched teams. Not this time. No, the committee decided that Syracuse would get the seed because of its better record against common opponents. What B.S.! Every selection criteria system I've ever heard of uses record against common opponents as a tie-breaker only if the teams cannot be separated by head-to-head results. Furthermore, the reason Syracuse had a better record against common opponents was that 'Cuse defeated Colgate and the Red lost to Colgate. But consider the context of those games: Syracuse got to play a Colgate team that was playing out the string in the last game of a season that had gone utterly downhill. When Cornell faced 'Gate it was the Big Red's first game of the season (after just a few weeks of practice) while Colgate, then undefeated, had already played two games.

Notice also, that the metric they used was *record* against common opponents, not *performance* against common opponents. That allowed the committee to ignore the fact that Syracuse was pistol-whipped by a very good Albany team, 15-3, while the Big Red almost beat that same team two weeks later, losing 11-9 on two late goals by the Scoobies. In fact, the committee chairman admitted that no “eye test” was used. So it was irrelevant to their deliberations that Cornell looks to all observers like a very good team and Syracuse does not. The voters in the *Inside Lacrosse* media poll, who do use an eye test, on Monday ranked Cornell 7th and Syracuse 11th.

Okay, enough ranting. Selection committee be damned. I'm ready for the Big Red to go into the Carrier Dome on Sunday with a huge chip on their collective shoulders and run 'Cuse right out of the place. So

let's turn our focus to the reason Cornell was in a position to be mis-seeded by the selection committee—the two games the Big Red won in New York City this past weekend to win the Ivy League Tournament and the automatic NCAA bid that comes with it.

I was on the East Coast and drove down to NYC to attend the Friday games. The opener was Yale against Penn, followed by Cornell against Brown. I saw most of Yale's dismemberment of the Quakers. Wow! When I left the Cornell tailgate to watch, Yale was ahead 6-3 in the second quarter. From that point on the Bulldogs outscored Penn, 15 to 1, until Penn picked up a couple of goals in last minute. In the nightcap, Brown employed a strategy similar to what Princeton had effectively used a week earlier when the Tigers defeated the Big Red in the last regular season game. Brown's strategy was to face-guard Cornell's star attackman, **Jeff Teat '20**, denying him the ball as much as possible. And it mostly worked. The Cornell offense, which came into Friday's game as the most efficient offense in the country, often looked out of synch. Cornell scored just seven goals and Teat only had one goal and a pair of assists. But the Big Red defense was great, especially goalie **Christian Knight '19**, who played the game of his life. Christian allowed only four goals and tied his career high with 19 saves. But it was more than just Knight's play. The entire defense was stellar, giving Brown no easy shots. Just one of the Bears' goals came in settled six-on-six play. Brown scored twice on EMOs, and once into an open cage when Knight's clearing pass was intercepted, about the only mistake he made all night.

Late Friday I decided to drive back to Vermont the next day to attend an event there rather than stay over for Sunday's final. Whether I did the right thing is debatable; two of my reasons for leaving—that it would probably rain in New York on Sunday and that Yale would likely win—turned out to be invalid. But, to be fair to me, in thinking that the Big Red would lose to Yale, I was not alone. In fact, the ESPN announcers held the belief that Yale would win so strongly that they clung to it well into Sunday's game, even after the Red began to trounce the Bulldogs on the field.

I watched Sunday's game on ESPNU and—notwithstanding the oft-annoying ESPN announcers—it would be hard to imagine a better two hours of sports viewing. Yale elected not to try to shut off Teat and the Cornell offense regained its mojo. Teat had six points on a goal and five assists. **Clarke Petterson '19** had three goals, and **Jordan Dowiak '18** (whose family I had a chance to visit with at the tailgate on Friday) and **Colton Rupp '19** each had a pair. Indeed, of the nine starters on attack and the first two offensive midfield lines eight had at least one goal. Some evidence of how successful Cornell's offense was at creating quality chances was that Yale's goalie only stopped two of Cornell's 16 shots on goal.

The defense was also outstanding. Knight had another terrific game, with 16 saves, and was properly rewarded with the tournament MVP award. But it was a total team effort. **Dom Doria '21** covered Yale's Gaudet, who had seven goals against Penn, and held him scoreless. Yale's best feeder, Morrill, who had four assists against Penn, was generally covered by **Jake Pulver '18** and held to just one assist. Yale's only consistent offensive threat was Reeves, who had five goals. Even here, however, Cornell made a defensive adjustment—essentially a combination of face-guarding and double-teaming him—and Reeves was held scoreless for the last 27 minutes of the game. Oh, and by the way, the Cornell defense contributed two goals. The first, a fifty-yard laser into an empty net by Pulver, put a fork in Yale's "ten-man ride" and opened up a three-goal lead early in the fourth quarter. The final goal of the game was by long-stick defensive middle **Brandon Salvatore '19** with less than a minute left. And, ICYMI, (You can't make this stuff up), Pulver's highlight-reel goal came seven years to the day from major surgery Jake had in high school to treat ulcerative colitis that threatened to derail his lacrosse career. Way to go, Jake!

Also, a big shout-out must go to **Luca Tria '21**, who took over the primary face-off duties from the injured **Paul Rasimowicz '20**, and held his own against Yale's Mackie, one of the best in the country, winning 10 of 22 restarts.

As I wrote above, the season continues for the Big Red on Sunday. **The game at Syracuse will be at 4:15 p.m. PDT and will be televised on ESPNU or you can catch it on the WatchESPN app.**

Most of the other Cornell spring sports have wrapped up or will do so this weekend. Track & Field, Rowing and Sailing continue for bit longer. For most teams, it's been a year of baby steps—forward or backward. I'll provide a more complete rundown in a future report.

For me, the capper of weekend occurred Monday night on our flight back to Seattle from Boston. We flew over Ithaca, and one of the Alaska Airlines pilots pointed it out and then proceeded to tell the passengers how Cornell had lit up the top team in the country the day before, concluding with a hearty, "Go Big Red!"

As always, I'll conclude this report the same way. **GO BIG RED!**