



CCWW Sports Report No. 530
(May 16, 2018)
by
Rich Coyle '68



What did I most love about **Men's Lacrosse's** thrilling 10-9 victory over Syracuse Sunday in the first round of the NCAA tournament? Let's start with the obvious and the personal: (a) the win moved Cornell to the quarterfinals of that tournament; and (b) it vindicated my "rant" that the Big Red should have been seeded ahead of the Orange. What else? It was the Red's physicality; they not only played great defense generally but multiple times they just pounded the Orangeman holding the ball and took it away or knocked it out of his stick and out of bounds—and without being called for a foul. And it wasn't just the defensemen—like **Jake Pulver '18** and **Fleet Wallace '19**—who did this (although they got in some good licks) but the offensive guys as well. **Clarke Petterson '19** laid out a 'Cuse player in the second quarter; **Jonathan Donville '21** and **Connor Fletcher '20** tag-teamed a Syracuse player into the turf in the third quarter and then later in that period Fletcher laid on another hit that had Syracuse coach Desko screaming futilely for a flag.

What did this remind me of. There were teams known for their intimidating play—the Philadelphia Flyers of the 1970's (nicknamed "the Broad Street Bullies") or any number of Oakland Raiders teams in the 70's and 80's come to mind. But I didn't love these teams; in fact, I disliked them and, anyway, they were not only physical but dirty. I also thought back to the late Maurice Lucas, who played for several NBA teams, including the Sonics for one year in the late 1980's. Maurice rarely got called for fouls but it seemed like wherever he went he left a trail of opponents' bodies on the floor. I did like Luke quite a bit but it still didn't quite fit; he was just one guy whereas the physical play of Big Red on Sunday was across the board.

Then it came to me. Maybe I was influenced by reading about the death of Chuck Knox over the weekend. But as I look back on the emergence of the Seahawks as a force in 1983-84, what I recall most was the way the 'Hawks, led by Kenny Easley and Fredd Young, stood up to the Raiders. They won three of six match-ups during those two years by hitting just as hard as Oakland, without being labeled as a "dirty" team. *That* was Cornell on Sunday. While the Big Red pride themselves on their "blue collar" work ethic, the Red in recent years really has been a finesse team, with pretty scorers and feeders like **Eric Pittard '07**, **Ryan Hurley '10**, **Rob Pannell '13**, **Steve Mock '13** and, most recently, **Jeff Teat '20**. Usually it is the fans of Cornell, not the other team, who are complaining about high hits and cheap shots.

Perhaps the analogy doesn't perfectly fit—for one thing, I don't think of Syracuse as a dirty team so this wasn't really payback in that sense. Still, when the situation called for some physical play—"gritty" was the adjective **Coach Peter Milliman** used in his post-game on-air interview (while allowing that "ugly" might also fit)—the Big Red delivered. And it mattered. And it was sweet.

Let's review the game. The Orange scored in the first minute, but the Big Red responded with a goal by **Jordan Dowiak '18**. That's how the first quarter went. It was apparent from Cornell's first possession that Syracuse would lock off **Jeff Teat '20** by face-guarding him. Still, whenever 'Cuse would score, the Red would answer a few minutes later with a goal of their own. After one period the score was tied, 3-3.

Syracuse scored three times in the first five minutes of the second quarter to take a 6-3 lead. While the ESPN announcers were ready then to concede the game to 'Cuse, that would be the Orange's high-water mark; they would only score three more goals over the final forty minutes. **Clarke Petterson '19** (who had five goals in the game) got one back for the Red on an extra-man opportunity (EMO) to make it 6-4. The Orange scored to get the lead back up to three but from then on it was Cornell's game. Teat took advantage of a rare opportunity to touch the ball with a perfect pass to **Jake McCulloch '19** to cut the lead to two at the half.

The Big Red drew even in the third quarter. Teat used another possession to draw a penalty and Petterson converted the EMO; then McCulloch's second goal (after the Donville-Fletcher tag-team hit got the Red the ball back) knotted the score at seven. 'Cuse regained the lead at the 10:20 mark but Petterson converted a pretty feed from Donville with less than three seconds to go in the quarter and we were tied again.

Three minutes into the last quarter Petterson converted a rebound from just outside the crease to give the Red its first lead of the game. The Orange tied the game three minutes later but a late hit by 'Cuse's Solomon gave the Big Red another EMO with 5:55 left, and **Colton Rupp '19** got the game winner 20 seconds later. (The Big Red were an impressive 3 for 4 on EMOs.) Then it was hang-on time. A penalty on the ensuing face-off gave Syracuse an EMO of its own but **Christian Knight '18** made a save as the penalty was expiring. McCulloch had a chance to give the Red a two-goal lead but the 'Cuse goalkeeper stopped his point-blank shot. Another Orange possession ended when Knight made a save and gathered in the rebound. Cornell then held the ball for almost two minutes but with the shot clock turned on and about to expire the Red turned the ball over with just over a minute and a half left.

The last 90 seconds were intense. Syracuse cleared the ball into the offensive zone and immediately called a time out with 1:16 remaining. But the smothering Big Red defense did not allow the Orange to get off a shot and so 'Cuse called its last timeout with 31 seconds left. Now desperate, 'Cuse threw up wild shots with 23, 15 and 8 seconds left, none of which was close but all of which were backed up by the Orange.

So Solomon took the ball for Syracuse on the Cornell endline with 7.1 seconds to play. While I and (I expect) much of Cornell nation fought back memories of "The Game That Shall Not Be Named," Jake Pulver made the play of the year. He simply hauled Solomon to the ground before he reached the goal line extended and stayed on him until the horn sounded. Of course a flag came out but as I screamed at the TV to the puzzlement of my wife who was also watching, "It doesn't matter! It doesn't matter! It doesn't [bleeping] matter!"

I was right. Whatever penalty the referee planned to call did not [bleeping] matter. This game was OVER. The better team won and this Sunday, they get to play the tournament's top seed, Maryland, at Navy-Marine Corps Memorial Stadium in Annapolis. Game time is 9:00 a.m. PDT, and it will be televised on ESPN.

It was all good. Well, almost all. The ESPN announcers were awful. Not only were they, as usual, repetitive and prone to displays of a curiously off-putting inbreeding, but on this evening they were often simply incompetent. When Syracuse started the second quarter with the ball, they said it was because of a penalty (unidentified) on Cornell. No. It was because Syracuse was still a man down but held possession at the end of the first quarter. Then five minutes later, Knight got called for a slash. In lacrosse goalies serve their own penalties so Knight came off and **Caelahn Bullen '21** came in. The announcers said there was a penalty on Cornell (again without bothering to identify the foul or the perpetrator), missing the fact that the penalty was on Knight. They criticized the Cornell coaches for removing Knight, then when they realized he was back in the game, they criticized the Cornell coaches again for messing with his confidence by pulling him and putting him back in. (They also missed the timing of his actual return, stating incorrectly that Bullen was in the cage for Syracuse's seventh goal.) It was about 15 minutes later when they *finally* realized that Knight had left the game because the rules required it, although they made no effort to walk back their prior mistakes and ill-informed comments. Brutal. (BTW, I'm told that on the radio Barry Leonard and Tom LaFalce knew right away that Knight had left because a penalty had been called on him.)

So that's the lacrosse story. My plan was to ignore the other sports still in action (primarily rowing) to keep this a "good news" report. Unfortunately, something happened yesterday that I cannot ignore—and it's bad. According to the Cornell *Daily Sun*, hoopster **Stone Gettings '19** will forgo his senior year of eligibility, graduate early this December and then play his final year as a graduate student somewhere else. (Ivy League rules do not allow graduate students to play on intercollegiate teams.) That comes on top of **Matt Morgan '19** declaring for the NBA draft. While Matt did that a year ago, but then returned to

Cornell, many seem to think that he is unlikely to come back to Cornell in the fall. So, without the Big Red's two best players, we may be looking a long season ahead. Too bad.

That's it for this week. **GO BIG RED!**