



**CCWW Sports Report No. 613**  
**(February 14, 2019)**  
by  
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I'M BACK.

My break from doing these reports kept getting extended but I finally realized that enough was enough—I needed leave my mule riding behind and get back on the sports reportorial horse. Twelve hours on a mule on an overnight trip to the bottom of the Grand Canyon over the Super Bowl weekend may have made me permanently bow-legged—but that's another story. Yet even while I haven't been writing about Cornell sports, I have been paying enough attention to see that things were getting pretty interesting and I needed to get y'all back up to speed. So here goes:

### **Winter Sports**

There are bunch but I suspect most of your interest is on the Big Five--men's and women's hockey, men's and women's basketball, and wrestling. So this report will be limited to these sports. Here's my take on each of them:

**Men's Hockey.** In mid-November, when last I last reported, Cornell had won four games in a row and was trying to recover from the season-opening two-game sweep at the hands of Michigan State. Even with those wins, the Big Red were 17th in the USCHO poll and unranked in the 15-team USA Today poll. Injuries were a problem, as was some uneven play by the Red's projected All-American goalie, **Matt Galajda '21**. Well, after I wrote *that* report, things got even worse; the injuries kept piling up and the Big Red lost three of its next four games, including a 4-1 loss to Harvard in a non-league contest at Madison Square Garden (the so-called "Frozen Apple"). The Red ended November with a 5-5 record, and it was looking as though people like me had seriously overrated them.

But things have changed. Beginning with a 2-1 win at Harvard on December 1, the Big Red have been 10-1-2, the only loss being in overtime to Colgate in a game in which we outshot the Raiders 43-22 and should have won. One good that did come out of that game was Galajda reestablishing himself as the top goalie. As I wrote above and previously, Galajda had a tough start to the season, getting pulled in both Michigan State games in favor of classmate **Austin McGrath '21**. Then Matt got hurt and was replaced by Austin for four games. When Matt returned the goaltending duties were split for three weekends until Galajda was brought in after Austin gave up a couple of soft goals to Colgate. Since then, Matt has been the Galajda of last year, posting back-to-back shutouts of Union and Clarkson. His GAA is now down to 1.78 and his save percentage is up to .918. The Big Red's surge now has them in first place in the ECAC, three points ahead of second-place Quinnipiac, with six games remaining. And a loss by Yale last Saturday gave the Red its second-straight Ivy League championship.

Last weekend the Big Red swept, blasting Clarkson, a team that was even with Cornell in the polls, by a score of 5-0 on Friday, and then taking care of St. Lawrence, 3-1, on Saturday. Cornell is now eighth in both polls, their highest position since they were seventh in the preseason polls. Also, the Big Red is eighth in the PairWise rankings, which will determine their NCAA seeding (and at large selection prospects should the Red not win the ECAC tournament).

That success, however, was tempered by two more significant injuries. On Friday, defenseman **Cody Haiskanen '21** received a bad cut that required two surgeries. On Saturday, Cornell's best offensive player, **Cam Donaldson '21**, went down with an apparent shoulder separation. They join defenseman **Brendan Smith '19** (who has already missed nine games) and forward **Max Andreev '22** (injured by a cheap shot in the last Harvard game) on the injured list. All except Smith will likely be out for the rest of

the regular season if not longer. In addition to these four and Galajda, five other regulars have missed multiple games due to injury.

But here's the thing: despite these injuries, the Big Red are playing very well and are in a position not only to make the NCAA tournament but to do some damage there. ICYMI, this year's NCAA Frozen Four is in Buffalo April 11 and 13; ever the optimist, I'm keeping the weekend open—I hear it's beautiful in Buffalo in April. In the meantime, the "Road to Buffalo" continues this weekend as the Red visit Brown and Yale. Both games will be at 4:00 p.m. PST on ESPN+.

**Wrestling.** Men's Hockey was not the only Cornell team to pick up an Ivy League championship on Saturday; Wrestling did the same, with a surprisingly easy 34-7 victory over Princeton. It wasn't that I thought Princeton was likely to win but the Tigers were expected to put up more of a fight. The match started at 165 pounds and the Big Red won the first eight bouts before Princeton took the last two. The match concluded yet another undefeated Ivy season for the Red; Cornell's streaks in league competition are now 17 straight championships and 88 straight dual meet wins. For the season, Cornell's dual meet record is 11-2, with wins over some ranked teams and losses to Missouri and Lehigh. The Big Red will now finish its dual meet season with matches against three ranked teams; the Red will visit 14th-ranked Virginia Tech and 13th ranked North Carolina this weekend before hosting No. 2 Ohio State on February 22. All three matches will be streamed by ESPN, the first two on ESPN3 at 3:00 p.m. PST this Friday and Saturday. The February 22 match with the Buckeyes will be on ESPN+ at 3:30 p.m. PST.

It has been a frustrating season at times for the Big Red, with injuries to some key wrestlers and some other wrestlers unavailable or performing below expectations. The low points were probably at the beginning and end of December when the Red finished a very disappointing 21st at the Cliff Keen Las Vegas Invitational and then could win only three bouts against No. 6 Mizzou. But things have come around of late. The Big Red has moved back up to No. 7 in the Intercollegiate Dual Meet rankings and No. 9 in the tournament rankings. The Red have six wrestlers ranked in the top 20 and three in the top ten. And that does not include **Jon Jay Chavez '19**, an All-American last year who has yet to wrestle this year (but still could), and a few other wrestlers who are on the cusp of making the rankings. I'll give y'all a more complete summary in two weeks after the duals with the Hokies, Tar Heels and Buckeyes.

**Women's Hockey.** The Big Red are 16-3-6, ranked sixth in both national polls and sixth in the "adjusted" PWR, are tied for second in the ECAC and will finish second in the Ivy League. One of those losses and two of those ties came back in November when the coach and three top skaters were up in the Great White North playing hockey for that team with the red and white maple leaf on their sweaters. Sounds just fine, right? So why am I feeling underwhelmed? Simply this—I thought they'd be better. After the Big Red got its full team back, they went undefeated in their next seven games (4-0-3, including a 3-1 win over then No. 3 Clarkson), in the process moving up to fourth in both polls, and looked to be on a roll. But the Red got blasted at home by Princeton, 5-0, on January 11. Cornell then went on a seven-game winning streak before losing decisively at Clarkson, 4-0, last Friday and then tying St. Lawrence on Saturday.

I had hoped this year I would see Cornell's first trip to the women's Frozen Four since 2012. That does not seem to be likely now. I don't expect the Big Red to win the ECAC tournament or to host a first-round NCAA tournament game. And the teams that will host these games all seem to be better than Cornell. So in four weeks (if not sooner) it will be "wait-'til-next-year" time. (And the Red are well-positioned to make a run next year. The core of the team (**Kristin O'Neill '20**, **Micah Zandee-Hart '20**, **Jamie Bourbonnais '20**, **Maddie Mills '21**, and **Willow Slobodzian '21**) will be back next fall; the Red will only need to replace No. 1 goalie **Marlène Boissonnault '20** and three forwards. As for closing out this year, I don't expect a repeat of what happened to the Big Red last winter. You may recall that Cornell entered the ECAC tournament with the fifth-best PWR and then everything that could go wrong did, as its PWR dropped to sixth and then conference tournament upsets gave two teams with worse PWRs autobids. That *could* happen again but it seems a bit less likely so I do think the Big Red will make the NCAA tournament and probably play a road game at Northeastern. Stay tuned.

**Men's Basketball.** Cornell is, surprisingly, 12-10 overall and, after last weekend's road sweep of Dartmouth and Harvard, in a three-way tie for second in the Ivy League with a 4-2 record. At this point I

give the Big Red at least a 50 percent chance of finishing in the top four and making the Ivy League tournament—a darned sight better than the sixth-place finish predicted for the Red. My thoughts:

- **Matt Morgan '19** is a very good basketball player. He's now second all-time in Ivy League scoring (Morgan will not catch Bill Bradley, Princeton '65, for first). On Friday, Matt dropped in 41 in Cornell's 83-80 win at Dartmouth, setting both personal and arena records. It was the first 40+ point scoring game by a Cornellian in almost 59 years.
- **Brian Earl** is very good coach. With a roster having little offensive punch beyond Morgan, Brian has kept the Big Red competitive in almost every game by employing a tenacious defense and getting more offensively than could possibly have been expected from the other players. In fact, Cornell could be 6-0 right now in Ivy play—its only two losses are by three at Columbia (when a trey to tie rimmed out at the buzzer) and in overtime to Princeton.
- If the Big Red do make the ILT, it will have done so with Morgan and mirrors. Cornell simply lacks the size and quality of players that other Ivies have. And when Morgan graduates in May, the team must try to rebuild an offense around **Jimmy Boenheim '21** and **Josh Warren '20**. Coach Earl needs to recruit better players. Last year's incoming class has not been productive. The six members of that group have logged a *total* of 154 minutes, virtually all in garbage time. And two members of that class are junior college transfers; at the risk of being overly blunt, the only good reason to bring in a JUCO transfer with just a year or two of eligibility is if he can help right away. Maybe having some success will lead to some improvement in future recruiting.

For now, there are four more weekends of Ivy basketball this winter, plus, hopefully, the Ivy League tournament at the Palestra. This weekend the Big Red host Brown Friday and Yale Saturday. Both games will be on ESPN+ at 4:00 p.m. PST.

**Women's Basketball.** The Big Red have lost their last five games in a row and now stand at 7-10 overall and 1-5 in the Ivy League. Barring a miraculous turnaround, the Red will not be going to the ILT. Like the men, the women's team need more better players. But having said that, there's a fair bit to like about the way **Coach Danya Smith** has kept this undersized, under-skilled team competing. Only two games all season have been lost by more than 13 points, to Princeton and to a very good Minnesota team. This weekend the Big Red will visit Brown and Yale. The Brown game will be on ESPN3 at 4:00 p.m. PST on Friday and the Yale game will be at 2:00 p.m. Saturday on ESPN+.

That's it for this week. I'll try to catch y'all up on some other winter sports next week. **GO BIG RED!**