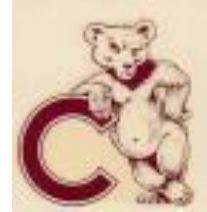




CCWW Sports Report No. 615
(March 7, 2019)
by
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Road Trip

Takeaways from my weekend in Ithaca (February 22-24):

1. In case y'all have forgotten, it's cold in Ithaca in February. For weeks I'd been checking the forecast weather, looking for assurance that (a) I could get there; and (b) Sunday's outdoor lacrosse game against Lehigh would not be played in a blizzard or, worse, weathered out. I took some comfort when it appeared that Friday would be a good day to fly and the forecast for Sunday was for temperatures of over 50°—albeit with showers and 20 mph winds. What I underestimated was how bloody cold it would be on Friday and Saturday.
2. Ohio State has a lot of good wrestlers. Based on the rankings, I thought that when the teams met on Friday the Red would be favored in three matches and maybe, just maybe, they could pull off a couple of upsets. It was not to be; the Red won just three matches and lost the meet, 25-9. That doesn't sound great but it actually felt worse in real time. There seems to be no clear rule as how the meet opens. Most meets start at the lowest weight and progress up to heavyweight. Other times, there's a random draw to select which match goes first. And sometimes, like last Friday, the starting point is selected so that the meet ends with the feature bout of the evening, in this case the 141-pound match between Cornell's top-ranked **Yianni Diakomihalis '21** and the No. 3-ranked Buckeye. So the meet started at 149, went up to heavyweight and circled back to 125, 133 and then 141. The effect of that order was that the early matches heavily favored the Buckeyes. In fact, OSU led 25-0, and much of the steam was gone from the crowd, before the Red got its first victory.

In retrospect, there were few surprises and most of those favored the Big Red. As expected, OSU easily won at 149 and 157, scoring a tech fall and a major to lead 9-0. I thought we were in for more hurt at 165, where **Andrew Berreyesa '22** has struggled this season. But Andrew put up a good fight, got stronger as the match went on and held the 12th-ranked Buckeye to a regular decision. I had hopes that **Brandon Womack '20** could win at 174—he was ranked slightly higher than his opponent—but after Brandon lost by a point the Big Red trailed 15-0. While Cornell seemed to have a chance for an upset or two in the next three bouts, it did not happen. **Max Dean '21** and **Ben Honis '19**, each ranked 7th in his weight class, lost easily to Buckeyes ranked first and second, respectively. And **Jeremy Sweany '19** put up a game fight against the No. 11 Buckeye heavyweight but lost by a single point.

The meet did finish on a high note for the Big Red. **Vito Arujau '22**, ranked eighth, defeated a lower-ranked Buckeye, 6-0, to remain undefeated at 125. (Vito did lose a bout at 133 earlier in the season.) Then the Red finally got an upset at 133 when No. 13 **Chas Tucker '21** defeated the sixth-ranked OSU wrestler. And Yianni D won the feature match to close out the evening.

In the end, the meet changed very little. Both schools' tournament and dual meet rankings were unchanged. The only significant effect on an individual ranking was that Tucker moved up three spots into the top-ten.

3. Lynah is a bit long in the tooth but still a good place in which to watch a hockey game. There's not a bad seat in the house and, for the two games I attended, the crowd was quite into it, even though the weekend I was there was part of a short "February Break." While I would not object to

having a posher facility (à la Pegula Arena at Penn State), Cornell has several more critical sports facility needs, like a covered full-field practice space for lacrosse (especially) and other sports and a fifty-meter pool.

4. Cornell Men's hockey is not only capable of beating every team in the country but is also capable of losing to almost anyone, especially a team with a hot goalie. The latter trait was on full display on Friday night as the Big Red lost in overtime to RPI, a team that came into the game with a 9-18-3 record. The game started without me as I was next door at the wrestling meet; by the time I made it into Lynah late in the second period the Red were down, 2-1. The Big Red tied the game in the third period, only to lose in the last minute of overtime on a fluke goal off a deflection. But I wouldn't call the Red merely unlucky; it should not have been so close that an unfortunate bounce could make a difference. Cornell outshot the Engineers, 37-16, and won almost twice as many faceoffs. With that possession and shot differential, the Big Red should have won the game by at least a couple of goals.

Saturday night was better: at least Cornell won. It was close throughout, with the Big Red taking an early 1-0 lead, Union tying the game at one, and the Red regaining the lead in the second period and finally clinching the win with an empty-net goal in the final minute. Union actually outshot the Red, 31-20.

Excluding that empty-netter, the Big Red scored just nine goals in the four game-stretch ending with the Union game. I can't claim to know why Cornell cannot score more. I read a comment in the eLynah forum after the Union game that the Red need to make better passes. Maybe so, but I guess my take is that they need to make *fewer* passes. Too many offensive zone possessions ended with an unnecessary extra pass leading to a turnover without getting off a shot. During the Union game I found myself more than once screaming "shoot the puck!" As my daughter's peewee coach (a wonderful guy and coach, btw) would say, "100% of the shots not taken don't go in."

5. If it can solve some faceoff and goalie issues, the Cornell men's lacrosse team should make it to the NCAA Final Four and has a real chance to win its first NCAA championship—indeed, Cornell's first NCAA title in any sport—since 1977. I capped my sports weekend at Schoellkopf for Sunday's lax game with Lehigh. The weather sorta cooperated—it rained before and after the game but not during, although the wind and lack of sun made it seem quite a bit cooler than the forecast 50 degrees. And I was rewarded with an offensive show and a big Big Red win, 14-9. But it didn't start out that way. Halfway through the opening quarter, the Mountain Hawks led 5-0 and the Red goalie (**Caelahn Bullen '21**) had yet to make a save. I (and I suspect most of the crowd) were ready to change goalies. (Bullen had a rough game in Friday's 19-16 win at Hobart and got pulled once in that game.) But Bullen got better—a *lot* better—and the Big Red offense began to click. It was 5-2 after one period, 6-5 Lehigh at the half, 9-7 Lehigh after three and then a 7-0 Cornell run in the final period yielded the final five-goal margin. And Bullen, after that horrendous start, stopped 14 of Lehigh's last 18 shots on goal.

One of the big questions going into this season was how the Big Red would respond to the strategy of shutting off All-American attack **Jeff Teat '20**. That strategy was employed by several teams at the end of last season and it had the effect of significantly disrupting the Red's offense. My observation of the Lehigh game was that the visitors did not try to lock off Teat in the first half, briefly tried it at the beginning of the second half but abandoned the strategy after Jeff broke free for an easy goal.

6. Even with the marginal weather, I was reminded on this trip how much I love Cornell and how comfortable I felt being there. I can't say exactly how many times I've been on campus since I graduated in 1968; I know that since my older daughter Rachael graduated in 2004, I had been there just once—in 2012—before I went to my 50th reunion last June. I've seen a fair number of Cornell sports events in the past fifteen years but those events took place somewhere else—on campuses in Hanover or Allston or New York City or Durham, NC, or Madison, WI, among others;

or at NCAA tournaments in Philadelphia, Baltimore, Foxborough, Jacksonville, Des Moines and St. Louis. And while I enjoy the camaraderie of the small group in a hostile venue, this was different. I felt, in a small sense, like I was “home.”

In Like a Lamb

I spent the first weekend of March in Arizona, catching two spring training games and a Canucks @ Coyotes hockey game, visiting relatives, hiking in the parks around the Phoenix area, spending a day at the always glorious Desert Botanical Garden, and enjoying the Mexican food. And, yes, it was 75° every day, with few clouds in the sky. Yep, March surely came in like a lamb. My opportunities to follow the Big Red were limited but I did the best I could. Here’s what I can tell y’all.

- **Men’s Hockey.** I won’t go through all the math, but after its three-game winless streak, culminating with that OT loss to RPI, not only did Cornell’s hold on the ECAC regular season title become precarious but, perhaps more importantly, the Big Red’s PairWise Ranking took a hit that could hurt its prospects for an at-large NCAA bid should the Red not win the ECAC tourney. Since then, Cornell has righted the ship, at least somewhat. Last Friday, the Red defeated St. Lawrence to assure itself of a top-four ECAC finish and first-round tournament bye. Still, Cornell needed to win at Clarkson on Saturday to take the ECAC title outright and secure the top seed in the tourney. The Big Red almost pulled it off. Two goals in a two-minute second-period span gave the Red a 2-1 lead that they held until the last minute of the final period. But Clarkson scored with its net empty and an extra skater on the ice. The overtime was scoreless so the Big Red settled for a tie, which gave them a share of the regular season title (and a share of the “coveted” Cleary Cup) but not the tourney’s top seed—that went to Quinnipiac. So the Red get to rest up this weekend and prepare to host a best of three series at Lynah starting on March 15 against the second-lowest remaining seed in the tournament.
- **Women’s Hockey.** While I was Ithaca watching the men play, Cornell’s women took care of business on the road, trouncing RPI, 8-2, on Friday to clinch the ECAC regular season title and the top seed and home ice advantage for the entire ECAC tournament. The next night, the Big Red wrapped up the regular season by edging Union, the worst team in the league, 2-1. That low score might have been a warning sign; it was the eighth time this season that the Red had scored fewer than three goals (although, surprisingly, they only lost two of those games; the other six were wins or ties).

Last weekend the Big Red hosted RPI in a best of three ECAC quarterfinal series—and the Red’s inability to score cost them a game. On Friday, the Red took 65 shots to RPI’s seven but it took almost 16 minutes of overtime before Cornell had a 2-1 victory. Saturday was similar, but worse. The Red outshot the Engineers 49-10, but lost 2-0 (including an empty net goal at the end), sending the series to a third game. The Big Red finally won the series on Sunday, defeating RPI 6-1. Again the Red outshot RPI by a wide margin, this time, 61-8. In the three games, Cornell put 175 shots on goal and scored eight times. That’s an impressive save percentage of .954 for the RPI goalie.

Cornell will now host the semifinals and finals of the ECAC tournament. Win the tourney and Cornell gets an automatic bid to the NCAA tournament. Right now the Red are fifth in the PWR behind Clarkson. I assume that with an ECAC title, the Red would jump over Clarkson, which gets them to fourth in the PWR and lets them host a first-round NCAA game, probably on Saturday, March 16. If the Red do not win the ECAC tournament, they’re at risk of (a) dropping to sixth in the PWR, and could even (b) miss the NCAA tourney if enough upsets occur in the conference tournaments.

- **Men’s Basketball.** Remember those lions and lambs I started this section with (well, actually, just lambs but y’all know the saying). The lambs would be men’s hoops. After starting the Ivy season 5-2, and looking like a shoo-in for an Ivy League Tournament place, Cornell lost five straight and

its current 5-7 league record puts it outside the ILT looking in. And the last four losses have been UGLY, as the Big Red lost by an average of over 18 points. The Red finish the season at home this weekend hosting Harvard and Dartmouth. Making the ILT is still possible but Cornell would have to win both games and get some help. It could happen but don't bet on it. If it does happen, **Matt Morgan '19** needs to be in top form for his last two games at Newman Arena. In the last four games, Matt has averaged just 14.8 ppg, less than two-thirds of his season average and has seemed (to me, anyway) out of sorts at times.

- **Women's Basketball.** Maybe not lions but definitely not lambs. After starting the league season 1-6, the Big Red have swept two of the last three weekends and, like the men, are at 5-7, a game out of fourth and the last ILT spot. And I kinda like their chances of making the ILT a bit better than the men's. Here's what would get them there: (a) sweep Dartmouth and Harvard while Yale loses to either Penn or Princeton, the Ivy co-leaders; or (b) beat Dartmouth while Yale is swept by Penn and Princeton. Either could happen.

Win or lose this weekend, **Coach Danya Smith** deserves a shout-out for what she has been able to accomplish with this team. A few weeks back I pointed out that the team was "undersized" and "under-skilled" but had hung in against better opponents and had lost only two games all season by more than 13 points. Those are still their only two losses by more than 13 points and they almost avenged one of them when they took Princeton to the wire two weeks ago before losing by four. And I note that in Andy Noel's blast wrap-up email this week, he made similar comments after the Red swept Brown and Yale for the second time, noting the "energy," "firm resolve," "determination" and "uncommon effort" the team displayed in defeating two teams that were more probably more talented.

Finally, while the team may not have as much talent as some other Ivy League teams, one Cornellian, **Laura Bagwell-Katalinich '20**, the Penn transfer, is a legitimate first team All-Ivy who gets better and better. Laura has averaged 16.7 ppg for the season but is at 22.3 in the last four games.

- **Squash.** What, you ask? Since when has the CCWW Sports Report given men's or women's squash the time of day? The answer is, "when they do something likely to be of interest." And that happened last week. You want a lion? At the College Squash Association's individual national championships, women's player **Siva Subramaniam '22**, who started her first year at Cornell in January, upset the previously undefeated top-seeded player in the country in the semifinals before falling in the finals in four sets to finish second. When Siva joined the team, the Big Red was 1-7 and ranked No. 12; with her playing in the No. 1 position, the Red won seven of its last ten matches and won the "B" division Kurtz Cup to end the season ranked No. 9.

To complete the squash picture, the Cornell men continued to scuffle. The Red had a 6-12 record and finished 13th in the country. While this improved upon last year's 16th place finish, it marked the fifth year in a row that the Big Red ended the season relegated to the "B" division Hoehn Cup tourney.

- **Lacrosse.** The Cornell men continued their winning ways, defeating Albany, 17-16, with **Connor Fletcher '20** getting the game winner with 14 seconds left. The Big Red had led 16-11 but the Scoobies went on five-goal fourth-quarter run to tie the game with 1:13 left. The Red continue to have faceoff and goaltending issues but the offense has carried them and, with the win, Cornell moves up to No. 2 in the country. They will put that ranking on the line immediately as they play No. 4 Penn State on Friday and No. 1 Towson on Sunday. The games are in Charlotte, North Carolina, as part of something called the Crown Lacrosse Classic. I will be down there to watch but I'm afraid there is no TV and, absent a last-minute change, no internet streaming.

The Cornell women are 2-2, bouncing back from close season-opening losses to Villanova and Penn State to post easy wins over Harvard and Colgate.

While I'll be at the lacrosse games in North Carolina, there are some opportunities to catch the Big Red this weekend on "the ESPN family of networks." Here's the rundown:

- Men's basketball vs. Harvard, Friday @ 4:00 p.m. PST (ESPN+)
- Women's basketball at Harvard, Friday @ 4:00 p.m. PST (ESPN3)
- Women's hockey vs. Princeton, Saturday @ 10:00 a.m. PST (ESPN+)
- Women's lacrosse at Columbia, Saturday @ 10:00 a.m. PST (ESPN+)
- Women's basketball at Dartmouth, Saturday @ 2:00 p.m. PST (ESPN+)
- Men's basketball vs. Dartmouth, Saturday @ 4:00 p.m. PST (ESPN+)
- ECAC women's hockey championship game, Sunday @ 11:00 a.m. PDT (Remember, spring forward, fall back!) (ESPN+)

That's it for now. I realize I've skipped a bunch of sports and one of these weeks I will get around to giving y'all a report on those. But once again, I'm out of time and space.

GO BIG RED!