



CCWW Sports Report No. 617
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by
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Bucket List

Growing up with the Red Sox in southern New England in the 50's and early 60's, I became well familiar with the mantra "wait 'til next year!" Those Red Sox teams of my youth were not very good and, not surprisingly, "next year" was usually no better than the one that came before. That changed a bit with the "Impossible Dream" Red Sox of 1967; after that season the Sox were pretty good and it was reasonable to hope that "next year" they would win it all. But by my fortieth birthday, I realized that a Red Sox World Series championship was not inevitable and might not happen soon—or ever. And a new mantra took over: "Just once before I die...." It was at the top of my mental "bucket list" before that term was even invented early in this century. And, as y'all know, the Red Sox got it done in 2004. Now I can die in peace.

But maybe not. As a sports fan, there are other teams I feel strongly about (albeit maybe not the way I used to feel about the Red Sox—there's something in my New England DNA that drove that). I enjoyed the Seahawks Super Bowl victory but I must confess I never saw it as something I *had* to see before my demise. I have more passion for the Mariners, and I certainly would love to see them win it all someday. But for now, *Numero Uno* on the list of athletic successes I want to see before I die is an NCAA championship for Cornell men's hockey or men's lacrosse. I didn't always feel that way. While I was in the old Onondaga War Memorial when the Big Red won its first NCAA championship in 1967, my junior year, the Red's other NCAA team championships—in hockey in 1970 and in lacrosse in 1971, 1976 and 1977—were things I just read about. But as Cornell games became more available on TV and online, and as I began to see more games in person, led by our family's annual pilgrimages to the NCAA Final Four lacrosse championships starting in 2004, I realized that I really wanted to see (preferably in person) a Big Red NCAA title in these sports (or at least one of them) while I'm still here and *compos mentis*.

They've been close, especially in lacrosse. Since 2004, Cornell has had some very good teams. In that year's tournament the Big Red lost by a single goal to a Navy team that went on to lose the championship game by a goal to Syracuse. In 2005 the Red lost to Duke, which, like Navy the previous year, lost the championship game by one goal. 2006 was similar, as Cornell lost by a goal to UMass, the national runner-up. You get the idea; the Red looked like it was close to having what it took to win an NCAA title. Then came 2007—this would be the year, I thought. The Big Red was undefeated in the regular season, including the win at Duke I wrote about in my last report, and a 16-15 victory over Syracuse on a goal by **Max Seibald '09** with four seconds to go. I cared enough that my son and I watched that game on my laptop at what the locals called "the see-ber" café in Marrakesh using "the wee-fee." After Cornell victories in the first two rounds of the NCAA tournament, including an OT win over a strong Albany game on a goal by **John Glynn '09** after an amazing defensive play by Seibald, we headed off to Baltimore for the final four with every expectation of a Cornell title. But winning a championship is hard, and Duke defeated the Red in the semifinal on a goal with three seconds left.

As difficult as that loss was to stomach, it was nothing compared to what happened in Gillette Stadium two years later. I won't relive it for you—it's been a decade and it's still painful. But the overtime loss to Syracuse in the championship game turned my wish into an obsession: I *must* see the Red win one more NCAA title before I go to the great beyond! Lacrosse or hockey, take your pick. Since 2009, men's lacrosse has reached two final fours, losing in the semifinals both times. The men's hockey team, while good, hasn't been to a Frozen Four since 2003, when the Big Red lost to UNH 3-2 in the semifinals. Last year the Red was No. 2 in the country before losing in the ECAC semifinals and the first round of the NCAA tournament.

With this background, I settled in front of my TV last Saturday facing the possibility that by the end of the day I would see another year slip away without a Big Red NCAA title in either sport. For men's hockey it was crunch time. The Red would play Northeastern, the Hockey East regular season and tourney champion, in Providence in the first round of the NCAA tournament. A loss and it would be "wait 'til next year." Before that game, men's lacrosse had a home game with Dartmouth. The lax season still has a month to go but a loss to Dartmouth would have made it very unlikely the Red would make the Ivy League tournament, much less the NCAA tourney. As Yogi Berra might have said, "It gets late early out there."

In the event, Cornell's title hopes survived Saturday. After a slow start, the Big Red laxers took care of business, defeating the Big Green, 15-5. Men's hockey also got through Saturday with its title hopes alive with a dominating 5-1 victory over Northeastern. They too would live to skate another day.

Unfortunately for men's hockey, one day was all the reprieve they got. On Sunday, they played Providence College in front of a decidedly pro-Friar crowd. P.C. dominated the game pretty much from the beginning. While the home-town crowd helped, the Friars just looked faster and better than the Big Red. The final score was 4-0, including an empty net goal at the end. The dagger was a P.C. goal in the last second of the second period, to make the score 3-0.

So my "... before I die" hopes for this year rest with men's lacrosse. Dartmouth is not very good and while beating them was necessary, but we're still a long way away. The Big Red have a 6-3 overall record and a losing 1-2 record in the Ivy League, and now face a gauntlet of three road games in nine days against teams that are pretty good, Harvard, Syracuse and Notre Dame. So we'll just have to see.

Recap

Here's what happened since my last report and what I thought about it.

Men's Hockey. In the two weeks before the NCAA tournament, the Big Red did what it needed to do to qualify for the NCAA tournament for the third-straight year. After losing the opener of its three-game ECAC quarterfinal series on two third-period Union goals, The Red reeled off three wins in a row, shutting out Union, 4-0; beating the Dutchmen, 4-2, in the rubber game of the series, and then administering a dominating 6-0 whuppin' on Brown in the ECAC semifinals. Those three wins assured Cornell of at least an at-large bid to the NCAA ice dance. An at-large bid was what the Red got after their 3-2 overtime loss to Clarkson in the ECAC final. The Golden Knights won the game on a controversial goal. There was an offside by Clarkson on the play that the officials missed and determined not to be reviewable.

I've read that the officiating was poor throughout the game; I was watching the wrestling championships and missed much of the first two periods and cannot really comment on that broader claim. The video reviewability of the possible offside is interesting. As I understand it, if a team is offside when it brings the puck into the offensive zone and then scores before the other team gains possession or the puck leaves the zone, the lack of an offside call can be reviewed and the goal will be wiped out if offsides should have been called. It doesn't matter how much time elapsed between when the puck came into the zone and the goal.

(As an aside, the video review process itself is tricky. The blue lines are part of the zone in which the puck was just in; when the puck is brought into the offensive zone, the blue line is part of the neutral zone. If all attacking players are on or behind the line the play is onside. Easy, right? Not really, because a player is deemed to be in the neutral zone only if at least one skate is in contact with the ice on or behind the line. Having a skate in the air above the line doesn't cut it. Try making that call with your naked eye in a close case. In fact, even with HD super slo-mo video it's not always easy, leading to painfully long video reviews of offside challenges.)

What happened to the Big Red was that the puck was touched in the offensive zone by an offside Clarkson player who immediately brought the puck out of the zone, then reentered the zone onside. A handful of seconds later, without the Knights having lost possession, the puck was in the back of the net.

The ESPN+ color commentator (former Cornell player Topher Scott '08) said as soon as the Clarkson player touched the puck in the Cornell zone that he was offside. While there was a discussion and brief review following the goal, the referees ultimately ruled that because the puck was taken out of the offensive zone and then brought back in inside the prior offside could not be reviewed. Game over.

As it turned out, it's doubtful that the loss to Clarkson hurt the Big Red's chances in the NCAA tournament. If Cornell had won the game, they likely would have been the eighth or ninth overall seed and been placed in the West regional in Fargo, North Dakota. No Cornell fan wanted that. What may have hurt the Red going forward was the loss in the Clarkson game of two key players to injury. Forward **Jeff Malott '20** suffered an ACL tear and may well miss the start of next season. And goalie **Matt Galajda '21** hurt his back when the net fell on him and did not play against Northeastern or Providence. (The Cornell brass were understandably upset that the referees did not immediately blow the whistle and that delay may have contributed to Matty's injury.) But it's hard to say that having one or both of these players would have changed the outcome.

Women's Hockey. On March 16, Cornell defeated Northeastern, 3-2 in overtime, in the NCAA quarterfinals to make it to the women's Frozen Four for the first time since 2012. The Big Red took a 2-0 first period lead on goals by **Amy Curlew '20** and **Grace Graham '20**, but the Huskies tied it with two third-period goals. **Gillis Frechette '22** won the game on breakaway goal five minutes into the overtime taking a beautiful long pass from **Diana Buckley '19**. That sent the Red down to Hamden, Connecticut, a week later for an NCAA semifinal game against second-ranked Minnesota. The Golden Gophers scored halfway through the second period and added an empty-net goal in the final minute for a 2-0 victory. **Marlène Boissonnault '19** stopped 25 of 26 shots in her final game for the Big Red.

Men's Lacrosse. The Big Red really needed to defeat Dartmouth last Saturday because on the two prior Saturdays they lost to Yale and Penn. Losing at Yale carries no shame; the Elis are the defending NCAA champion and they added the top faceoff man in the country, TD Ierlan, a transfer from Albany. Yale dominated at the faceoff x, taking 24 of 30 draws. That gave the Bulldogs 18 more possessions than the Big Red. Yale turned those 18 additional possessions into 13 more shots, 11 more shots on goal, and five more goals. Final score: Yale 16, Cornell 11.

If the Yale loss wasn't an embarrassment, the loss at home to Penn the following week surely was. The Big Red took a 7-2 lead early in the second quarter, then gave up three extra-man goals to the Quakers on two overlapping penalties, including a non-releasable slashing foul. That got Penn back into the game but the Red still led by four, 11-7, with three and half minutes to go in the third quarter. But seven fourth-period goals, including the game-winner with 17 seconds left, gave the Quakers the 16-15 win. Ugh! Five Cornell penalties resulted in four Penn EMO goals. That and a 20-13 faceoff advantage allowed Penn to eke out the win.

This is still a good—perhaps very good—team. In the preseason polls, the Big Red were ranked No. 5; they rose as high as No. 3 before losing to Penn State. This week the Red is No. 12 but that would certainly go up if the Red can beat Harvard, 'Cuse and Notre Dame. Cornell's record is currently 6-3 and I have high hopes that the Big Red will find a way into the NCAA tournament field. Cornell has a final four quality offense, and **Chayse Ierlan '22** has given the Red solid goaltending. The Big Red's clearing game has been solid and the Red have caused an average of three more turnovers per game than their opponents. But Cornell needs to improve on faceoffs and it needs to cut back on penalties. The Big Red have taken 50% more penalties and penalty minutes than their opponents. While the Red has generally been good at killing these EMO's, in at least one game, the EMO goals given up were a major reason Cornell lost.

Wrestling. The Big Red finished seventh at the NCAA championships, the twelfth-straight year that Cornell finished in the top ten. **Yianni Diakomihalis '21** won the title at 141, the tenth time in those 12 years that the Red had an individual champion. In addition to Yianni D, Cornell had three All-Americans, and all three got there by beating their pre-tournament seedings. **Max Dean '21**, the No. 5 seed at 184, pulled off the upset of the meet, beating top-ranked and undefeated Myles Martin of Ohio State (who had defeated Dean rather easily a month ago in Ithaca) in the semi-finals. Perhaps spent by his emotional

semifinal win, Dean lost the next night to a Northern Iowa wrestler whom he had previously beaten several times and settled for second place. **Vito Arujau '22**, seeded No. 8 at 125, finished fourth, and **Ben Honis '19**, seeded ninth at 197, became an All-American by finishing eighth.

Basketball. For the first time since 2008, both the men's and women's teams got to play in the post-season. No, it was not the NCAA tournament that both teams played in that year after winning Ivy League titles. But it was something. The women qualified for the Ivy League Tournament for the first time since the league starting using a tourney in 2017 to select the team to get the Ivy AQ to the NCAA tournament. Cornell played Princeton in a semifinal game and got torched, 68-47. **Sam Widmann '20** led the Big Red with 10 points. The Red finished the season with a 12-14 record. Looking forward to next year, graduation losses are minimal. First-team All-Ivy **Laura Bagwell-Katalinich '20** returns, and the one senior who graduates averaged fewer than 15 minutes per game.

The men also got to keep playing, as they were invited to the Collegeinsider.com tournament. In the first round they played Robert Morris and for most of the game it looked like the Big Red would win and get to play a second-round game at home. In the end it did not happen, as Bobby Mo came back, the game went into overtime and the Colonials pulled away in the extra session for a 98-89 victory. **Jimmy Boenheim '21**, who keeps getting better and better, led the Red with 31 points, seven rebounds, a block and two steals, while **Matt Morgan '19**, playing in his final game for the Red, had 24 points and six assists. Cornell finished the season with a 15-16 record; the 15 wins was the highest total since the Sweet Sixteen season of 2009-10.

Fencing. Cornell sent three fencers to the NCAA championships and on the strength of their performances finished 14th, its highest finish since the NCAA took over the sport. (Cornell does not have a men's team; when just the women's results are tallied, the Big Red was 10th, which matches its 2016 finish.) **Esther Bentolila '22** earned second-team All-American honors in the sabre, while classmate **Megan Eno '22**, who was first-team All-Ivy and won the silver medal at the Northeast Regional in the epee, earned honorable mention All-American status.

Those are the highlights. **GO BIG RED!**