



## CCWW Sports Report No. 702 (September 2019)

by  
Rich Coyle '68



Time to get serious about Big Red fall sports. This is the report where I tell y'all what I think will happen this fall and what to look for. This year I took to heart Yogi Berra's sage caution, "It's tough to make predictions, especially about the future," and decided to wait a few weeks and then focus my predictions on the past. Here's a few: Women's Soccer will start the season 4-0; Field Hockey and Men's Soccer will each take down a ranked team on their first weekend of action; and Volleyball will win its first match ever in the state of California. OMG! Whaddayaknow, I got 'em all right! Now I'm gonna tell y'all what's going to happen the rest of the way. DO NOT, repeat, DO NOT take any of this to the bank!

**Women's Soccer** got the new school year started for the Big Red with a match in August against Iona. The Red won, 3-1. Of course, Cornell won last year's opener for its only win of the season. But this year a strange thing happened. Cornell won its next three matches as well, giving the Red a 4-0 start for the first time since 2005. But there's still a long way to go (and that 2005 team that started off 6-0 finished 7-7-1 and in last place in the Ivy League, the first of nine consecutive last place finishes). Still, four-and-oh is better than a poke in the eye with a sharp stick.

I saw reports before the season about how the team was going to have a new focus, with more emphasis on speed and offense. Third-year Coach **Dwight Hornibrook** told Cornellbigred.com, "We're going with the concept of 'attack first; ask questions later.'" While that might sound a bit Trumpian, he may be on to something. The Big Red scored seven goals in its first six matches which, while it may not sound like a lot, is just one fewer than the Red scored in 15 matches last season.

The win streak ended when Cornell lost to a very decent Albany team on a late goal and then tied Binghamton. The Big Red are 4-1-1 and if they do not win another match, they have improved vastly on last year's performance. And the Red are doing it with a very young team. Last year Cornell had only three seniors and six juniors on a 23-women roster. To replace the three graduating seniors, the Red have added nine first years, four of whom are starters. In fact, of the cumulative starts by Big Red players so far, more than half were made by underclasswomen. **Ashley Durik '23** leads the team in shots and scored two second-half goals to provide the margin of victory against Iona. Classmate **Nicole Shulman '23** has gotten most of the starts in goal (but she'll miss a handful of games while she competes for Israel in the UEFA U-19 championships). I got to watch the Bingo game while writing this report. I was impressed with **Evanthia Spyredes '24**, **Jadyn Matthews '24**, **Sydney Waiters '23** and, especially, Durik, who, IMHO, is a very special player.

Will they win an Ivy title this fall? Very doubtful but it does look like the foundation is being laid for success this year and beyond. Prediction: a winning (7-6-2) season.

**Men's Soccer** is also on a rebuilding program, one that is at least a year ahead of the women's. The Big Red accomplished last year's breakout season with just one senior, **Ryan Bayne '19** (who's back this fall as a red-shirt fifth-year senior). Last fall the Red were 11-6 and 4-3 in the Ivy League. They should be even better this year, and the preseason media poll has the Red finishing third in the league, behind only Princeton and Dartmouth. With everyone back from last year (including four All-Ivy players), plus another strong freshman class, this is a very deep and talented group that should challenge for the Ivy League title.

They're off to a decent start. After losing their opener at Michigan, Cornell came back to defeat 16th-ranked Michigan State in overtime in East Lansing. The final was 2-1. **Harry Fuller '21** got the Red on the board first and after a Spartan goal sent the match into OT, **Will Citron '23** got the game winner. That earned Citron the Ivy League's first Rookie of the Week award. That was two weeks ago. Last week Cornell hosted and dominated a surprisingly competent Fairleigh Dickinson squad (which was coming off

wins over Gonzaga and a ranked UConn team). The final was only 1-0 but Cornell held large advantages in shots, shots on goal, and corner kicks. **Emeka Eneli '22**, last year's Ivy Rookie of the Year, scored the Big Red goal. On Tuesday the Red fell in overtime to Syracuse, evening its record at 2-2. As in the FDU game, Cornell had more shots and shots on goal but 'Cuse led in the stat that counts, more goals. The final was 3-2. **George Pedlow '20** and Bayne had the Big Red scores. The Big Red can now look forward to a pair of highly winnable matches—against Canisius and Siena. The Red will have a real test at the end of the month when they visit the University of Akron. The Zips have the best record in the country over the past ten years, have been to 12-straight NCAA tournaments, and were in the finals last fall. After that, Cornell begins Ivy League play at Penn.

Same question as above: Will men's soccer win the Ivy title this fall? I give them a one in three chance. Predicted record: 10-5-2—a slight improvement over last year but achieved against a much tougher schedule.

One final reason to care about this team: the roster is graced with three (3) Western Washingtonians. Mercer Islander **Ryan Hill '20** missed all last year with an injury but he scored two game-winning overtime goals in 2017. Ryan hasn't touched the pitch yet this season and he may not yet be 100%. **Caleb McAuslan '21**, from Everett and Archbishop Murphy H.S., is not a starter but has played in every game but one since he came to East Hill in 2017 and has recorded two goals and four assists. And Mukilteo's **Connor Drought '23**, a graduate of Kamiak High, has started every match in his brief Cornell career.

**Volleyball** is also off to a solid start. After two tournaments, Cornell is 4-2 and both losses were close defeats requiring five sets. Last weekend, the Red accomplished two things no other Cornell volleyball team had ever done: they won a match (two, actually) in the State of California and they beat a California team. While these feats did not get any play in the Cornell athletics web site or in the *Sun*, those of us on this coast know that our coast in general and California in particular are the epicenter of high school and college volleyball. Going back about 30 years, the Big Red had (by my count) played 15 matches against California schools and lost them all. That streak ended Saturday evening with a resounding four-set victory over the University of San Francisco. (Earlier in the day, the Red pummeled Utah State in three not-very-close sets, to gain the first of its two wins on California soil.)

Coming off a 9-5 Ivy record last year, and with all four All-Ivy honorees returning, Cornell is primed to have a good year. Those four, along with five other regulars and a couple of first years, are showing that this could indeed be a very big year. In the season-opening Cornell Invitational, **Jada Stackhouse '20** and **Jillienne Bennett '21** were named to the All-Tournament team, as the Big Red finished second with a 2-1 record, losing to Hartford in its last match. Last weekend, at the Bay Area Invitational, the Red was again 2-1 (losing a very close five-set match to St. Mary's), and Stackhouse and **Jenna Phelps '20** made the All-Tournament team. This weekend the Big Red will travel to Buffalo to play three teams with a combined record of 4-23. Look for the Red to start Ivy League play with a 7-2 record.

Where this end up? I would love to predict a Big Red Ivy title but it is more probable that the Red beat out Yale or Princeton but not both. Neither the Elis nor the Tigers have good records so far this year but each has been playing a much tougher schedule than Cornell. Predicted record: 18-5 (11-3 and a second place Ivy finish).

**Field Hockey**, like women's soccer, is another sport where the Big Red is looking to turn things around after a difficult 2018. So far, so good. The Red opened the year with an upset 2-1 win over then-No. 18 Syracuse, then defeated Lock Haven, 3-2, in OT. Last Sunday, Cornell lost for the first time, but they played 14th-ranked St. Joe's tough, and the final was 4-2. While the Big Red start four seniors, including two who earned All-Ivy honors last year, this is a relatively young team (and with a new coach in **Andy Smith**). The usual starting lineup has three first years and two sophomores. The leading scorers, with two goals each, are **Caroline Ramsey '23** and **Claire Jones '22**. Jones was Ivy offensive player of the week for Week 1.

Prediction? The Big Red have 14 games left, including their entire Ivy slate, a rematch with Syracuse and games with Cal and a ranked Albany team. I'd expect a 50-50 split and a final record of 9-8.

**Football.** Ah yes, football. Y'all knew I'd get there eventually. Well, I can report that the Big Red are still undefeated; their first game is Saturday at Marist. I'll be in Poughkeepsie to watch as I figured I can't call for the coach's head without the best possible intelligence. Am I optimistic about the season? Not even a little bit. But I'll take any shred of hope I can find. And the recent comments by **David Archer '05** suggesting that he now understands that he needs to learn how to coach seems like a small step, at least, in the right direction.

Defense: The Big Red lost its defensive leader, linebacker **Reis Seggebruch '19**, but seven starters return, led by **Lance Blass '21**, co-captain **Jelani Taylor '20**, second-team All-Ivy **David Jones '20**, and **Cyrus Nolan '20**. But assuming we have essentially the same players as last year, with a bit more experience, is that enough? In 2018 the Big Red gave up 297 points, 54 more than a year earlier. Not all points were the responsibility of the defense; there was a pick-six by Colgate and those two brutal kick returns for touchdowns by Columbia. And six more scores, mostly touchdowns, came off turnovers in Cornell territory. But the defense wasn't great and maybe some better defensive schemes will improve the outcomes. One can always hope.

Offense. The Big Red's best offensive performer, running back **Harold Coles '20**, returns. Three other running backs who contributed last year are also back. But gone are Cornell's starting quarterback and three-fifths of the starting interior offensive line. So far, Coach Archer has been coy about who his starting quarterback will be and suggests that **Mike Catanese '20** and **Richie Kenney '21** will get about equal playing time. Before he got hurt last year, Catanese played in four games, primarily in running situations, but he was also an effective passer in small doses. Kenney played a little but is essentially an unknown quantity. If a quarterback can be found, the receiving corps could be pretty good. Last year's two leading receivers, Coles (out of the backfield) and wideout **Owen Peters '20**, are back, along with **Eric Gallman II '21**, who looked like a potential deep threat before he got hurt early in the 2017 season. If Eric is now fully recovered, he would add another dimension to the offense. And there's a wild card, **Phazione McClurge '21**, a good cornerback who is switching to offense and will provide some more speed and athleticism.

There are really four keys to whether the Big Red can have an effective offense. First, they need to rebuild the offensive line. Co-captain **George Holm III '20** and **Nick Busher '21** return but the other projected starters have almost no varsity experience. And Holm and Busher are changing positions. Second, one of the QB candidates needs to emerge, be effective and stay healthy. Third, Coles absolutely needs to stay healthy. And last, but not least, the play selection needs to improve.

Special Teams. The Big Red have a good kicker and punter in **Nickolas Null '20**, assuming he recovers from an injury that cut short last season and will probably keep him out of Saturday's opener. David Jones—an honorable mention All-Ivy kick returner will do these chores again. And while Cornell's kick coverage was generally satisfactory last season, there was a total meltdown in the Columbia game when both a punt and a kickoff were returned for touchdowns. That cannot happen again.

Do I have a prediction? It looks to me like another 3-7 year, maybe 4-6 if the Red get a few breaks. If Cornell cannot get by Marist this weekend, expect a long season.

**Cross-Country.** Both the men and the women are coming off disappointing seasons. At Ivy Heptagonals last October, the Big Red women finished seventh and the men eighth. The last time both teams did this poorly was 30 years ago, in 1989. Will this year be better? Perhaps. For the women, the issue is competing with the vast strides (no pun intended) being made by the other Ivies. The Big Red had a bad race at Heps but even when they ran much better at NCAA Northeast regionals (and moved ahead of two other Ivies) they still faced a phalanx of really strong teams. But there's hope. Four of the Red's top six finishers at regionals are back, led by **Taylor Knibb '20**, who finished fifth overall and advanced to the NCAA finals. Joining this group should be **Gabrielle Orié '21**, who was hobbled last year but finished seventh at Heps as first year in 2017, earning first team All-Ivy honors.

For the men, the situation is bleaker. They were last at Heps last year and beat out only one Ivy at regionals. Both the men and the women were in action last week at the Yellowjacket Invitational in Rochester. Using mostly first years, the Red won both races against a field of mostly D-III schools. The

first real competition is this Friday at the Iona Meet of Champions at Van Cortlandt Park in the Bronx. After that, we'll have a better idea what to expect the rest of the way.

**Sprint Football.** Cornell won its opener against Alderson Broaddus, a Baptist university in Philippi, West Virginia. This was AB's first sprint football game ever, but the Big Red had to overcome a 14-0 first quarter deficit before going on to win, 38-21. Cornell running back **Will Griffen '20** scored four touchdowns, all on short runs, and was named the CSFL offensive player of the week.

(I consider myself reasonably knowledgeable about U.S. colleges and universities but, I confess, I'd never heard of Alderson Broaddus before it showed up on Cornell's schedule. AB's teams are called the Battlers (or perhaps it's the "Golden Battlers," I couldn't quite tell), apparently a reference to the fact that Philippi (then in Virginia) was the site of the first land battle of the Civil War. (FYI, the Union won, with two unfortunate consequences: (1) the victory started George McClellan on a path to become the general-in-chief of the Union army until he was removed from command by President Lincoln; and (2) the Union army was overconfident as a result of the victory, leading to the decision to drive on Richmond, which ended with the decisive Union defeat in the First Battle of Bull Run.) Why AB seized on this connection is unclear; the schools that make up the current university did not exist until after the Civil War and, in any case, they were not in Philippi until much later. Their mascot, Skirmish (which may be a more appropriate name for the "battle" of Philippi), seems to be a rather neutral battler as he's dressed in a Civil War era uniform with both navy blue and gray (and gold) in it.)

An article in the *Sun* cut right to the crux of what the sprint football season is really about—beating Penn, something the Big Red haven't done since 2012. The Red have five other games left, but they won't beat Army or Navy and they shouldn't lose to Thomas Aquinas, Mansfield or Post. So success or failure in all likelihood comes down to Friday night's home game against Penn. Last year's game was tied after three quarters before Penn got a field goal and touchdown to win by nine points.

**Other Sports.** The country club, water and horseback sports all have competitions in the fall before they finish up with championships in the spring. Two of those sports are worth a mention. First, **Golf**, which is coming off a disappointing 2018-19, got the new school year started well with a victory at the Alex Lagowitz Invitational at Colgate and a close third-place finish at home in the Cornell Invitational. The win in Hamilton was Cornell's first tournament win away from home since 2007, and third place in Ithaca was a darned sight better than last year's tenth-place showing. The other result worth noting is in **Sailing**. While most sailing championships are contested in the spring, the women's singlehanded title is decided in the fall. Last week **Lillian Myers '23** became the first Big Red sailor to win the Mid-Atlantic singlehanded conference championship and qualify to race at nationals in November in Santa Barbara.

Back in a month. **GO BIG RED!**