



**CCWW Sports Report No. 705
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by
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Happy Holidays! Settle back with a warm blanket, a roaring fire and your favorite holiday beverage and enjoy (at least parts of) this Big Red sports update. Not even the Grinch can ruin this season for a Cornell hockey fan.

Hockey, Hockey, Hockey

What's happening right now to the Cornell hockey teams is about as good as it gets. Men's Hockey won its first ten games before an upset loss at Dartmouth in its last game before the exam break. The Big Red are No. 3 in both national polls and have the second-best PairWise ranking (used by the NCAA tournament committee for selection and seeding). Women's Hockey has been just about as good. The Red women are 11-1-1, the only blemishes on their record being a tie at No. 6 Clarkson (while Cornell was without two key players, who were off competing for Team Canada), and a loss at No. 5 Ohio State. The Big Red are No. 4 in both national polls and, like the men, have the second-best PWR in the country.

How they got there—Men's Hockey Version. After opening the season with two wins at Michigan State, the Big Red rolled off eight more in a row, defeating, among others, No. 4 Clarkson and No. 17 Harvard, as well as always tough Quinnipiac and Boston University (in Madison Square Garden). The loss at Dartmouth just before the break was an unfortunate but understandable occurrence. Coming off a huge win at Harvard the night before, and perhaps looking ahead to exams, the holidays and a big tournament in Vegas in the new year, Cornell was a little flat early, got behind and trailed for all but three and half minutes of the game. And when the Red did get their offensive act together, they were stymied by an impenetrable goalie and an even more impenetrable set of goal posts and lost 2-1. The Big Red outshot the Big Green 40-17, including 21-5 in the third period, but it was not enough.

Still, the first half of the season was plenty good enough (and, to be honest, I always worry about teams peaking too early). The ten-game win streak to open the season was the Red's second-longest ever, eclipsed only by the 29-game win streak that Cornell began and ended the 1969-70 season with. The keys to this success, IMHO, are (1) depth and (2) defense, especially goaltending. The Cornell roster has sixteen forwards; of the top returnees, only **Cam Donaldson '21** has missed games due to injury or illness (He's missed two). Fourteen of the 16 forwards have played in at least seven games. What that's meant is that in virtually every game forwards that would skate on almost any other college team's second or third line become so-called "healthy scratches." The Big Red have gotten goals from 17 different players. The first weekend of the season, the Red got eight goals from six different players. The next weekend against Brown and Yale, ten goals from seven players; then a week later against Clarkson and St. Lawrence, ten goals from ten different players; against Quinnipiac and Princeton, seven goals from seven players. You get the idea!

At the other end of the rink, **Matthew Galajda '21** has been great. He's played every minute of every game (well, almost; he was pulled for an extra skater at the end of the Dartmouth game). His save percentage is .941 and goals-against average is 1.37, both numbers slightly better than he had during his All-American 2017-18 season. Matt stands second in the country in GAA and fourth in save percentage.

There's still a long way to go. Cornell has 18 games left, not counting the ECAC tournament and any NCAA tourney games. The Big Red start the new year with a chance at the "Fortress Invitational" in Las Vegas to show how good they are. As luck would have it, this event has turned out to have a very strong field; all four teams are in the top twenty in the PWR. The Big Red open against No. 7 Ohio State and then play either No. 14 Providence or No. 19 Army. The games are on Friday, January 3, and Saturday, January 4. I'll be there and I anticipate a good Cornell presence. There will be a tailgate before the Friday

game, which is scheduled for an 8:30 p.m. PST puck drop, following the PC-Army game. The consolation game on Saturday will be at 5:30 p.m. and the championship game will follow. If you can't make it to Vegas, the games will be streamed for a fee on subscriber-based FLO TV.

How they got there—Women's Hockey Version. The Big Red women also got off to a fast start, not giving up a goal until late in the second period of their fourth game. They did lose a game (3-1) after a long bus trip to Columbus, Ohio, but came back the next night to take care of the Buckeyes, 5-1. Both games were very physical and I think the Red felt they had been pushed around a bit on Friday. Perhaps making a statement, ten minutes into Saturday's game **Jaime Bourbonnais '20** nailed a Buckeye into the boards, picking up a five-minute major and a game misconduct in the process. While Ohio State did score a PPG to even the score at one apiece, the Red stopped the Buckeyes' other eight shots on the extended power play, and all the scoring thereafter was by the Big Red. OSU actually outshot Cornell by a wide margin for the game, 49-23, but the Red made theirs count.

Lindsay Browning '21 has been outstanding in the net. Only in that first Ohio State game did she give up more than a single goal. Her GAA (0.788) and save percentage (.965) both lead the country. In fact, her GAA is lower than her save percentage, which I don't think I've ever seen before. She's twice been the ECAC Goaltender of the Week and was Goalie of the Month for November.

As I've written before, this team is led by its three senior all-stars, Bourbonnais, **Kristin O'Neill '20** and **Micah Zandee-Hart '20**. While the team has shown more scoring depth than I expected—all six forwards on the top two lines have between 10 and 16 points—this still may be somewhat of a last hurrah before the program must rebuild. Five of the top seven scorers will graduate this May. But the signs for a return to the Frozen Four (to be held in Boston in March), and maybe even that elusive first NCAA championship, are there. So far, the Red have eight victories over teams with a PWR in the top 13: No. 5 Princeton (twice), No. 6 Ohio State, No. 7 Clarkson, No. 12 Robert Morris (twice), and No. 13 Quinnipiac (twice). Cornell has two games coming up on January 4 and 5 against PWR No. 15 Mercyhurst and then it's ECAC games the rest of the way.

Other Winter Sports

That hockey report contains most of the good news I have to share about Cornell sports this winter. The best of the rest is Women's Basketball, which is 5-4, with three remaining non-conference games before the Ivy League season starts. Men's Basketball has lost nine games in a row and is now 1-9, with two remaining non-conference games. And Wrestling has been trounced in its only two dual meets.

Those are the records; here are back-stories. For **Women's Basketball**, a reasonable goal, IMHO, is to build on last year's surprise trip to the Ivy League tournament by making it back to the ILT with a better record and seeding and a chance to win a game once there. They *may* be able to do it. The Big Red's record now is just 5-4 but the Red have been competitive in every game save perhaps one (against Texas Christian, a Power-5 conference team, currently sporting a 10-1 record). Their five wins have been by an average margin of 19.4 points. Two of the four losses were by three and four points, and in both games the Red held significant leads that they let get away. Only against TCU did Cornell fall behind by a wide margin early but even in that game the Red came back in the second half, cutting the Horned Frogs' lead to three with less than six minutes left before bowing by ten. Cornell's last game before the break was against a good (10-2) Duquesne team. The Red led by seven early, fell behind by 15 in the third quarter, but cut the lead to five with 1:35 to go before the Dukes' free throws built the final margin back up to ten.

The Red have often employed a ten-player rotation, a longer bench than I recall Coach **Danya Smith** using in prior years. I've watched bits and pieces of several games and seen the team play good defense and rebound well (The Red have yet to be outrebounded in any game)—qualities which have helped overcome a mediocre (.303) three-point shooting percentage and a negative assist to turnover ratio. Two players have stood out. Returning first team All-Ivy **Laura Bagwell-Katalinich '20** leads the team in scoring and rebounding and has five double-doubles, including a 17-point, 17-boards effort in the loss at TCU. **Theresa Mbabefo '22** is a defensive whiz and shot-blocking machine, who has turned into a strong presence in the middle. She's only a sophomore and could be All-Ivy herself before she's done.

We knew this would be a tough season for **Men's Basketball** and it has lived down to those expectations. The Big Red are on a nine-game losing streak after a season-opening win over Binghamton. They have one good player, **Jimmy Boeheim '21**, although even he has at times in close games tried to do too much, with unfortunate results. A few other players have contributed at times, such as **Josh Warren '20**, **Thurston McCarty '20**, **Terrence McBride '21**, **Kobe Dickson '22**, and **Jordan Jones '23**, but it has not been nearly enough. The Red have found many different ways to lose games. They have lost five games by fewer than five points (including an OT loss to Coppin State and one-point losses to Bryant and NJIT). They have been blown out by power conference teams (losing to DePaul by 21 and Syracuse by 19). They are 0-3 against Patriot League teams. Most discouragingly, they have twice blown big late leads (second-half leads of 20 points over NJIT and 15 points over Hartford). The shooting has not been good: the Red's field goal percentage of .411 is 293rd out of 350 D-I teams, and their three-point percentage is 343rd. I could go on but the message is clear enough—this will not be a good or even so-so season. I continue to believe that **Brian Earl** can be an effective head coach of Cornell men's basketball, but he simply needs to get more good (and very good) players.

Getting better talent is not a long-term issue for **Wrestling**. While this will not be a good season for the team, at least not by the standard we've come to expect from this program, the team's problems are not at all like those of men's basketball. In fact, maybe they're not even problems at all. Four wrestlers who would have been starters this year, including a national champion and two other All-Americans, are so good that they took the year off from school to try to make the USA wrestling team for the 2020 Olympics. (Two of those, **Yianni Diakomihalis '21** and **Vito Arujau '22**, have already qualified for Olympic team trials to be held at Penn State in April.) These four should all be back next fall joined by a recruiting class that could make the Big Red a national title contender.

But don't expect too many great results this year. Indeed, the Big Red's Ivy match-winning and title streaks are both in serious jeopardy. As I'm writing this, Cornell trails Princeton in the dual meet rankings and is ranked behind EIWA teams Army and Lehigh. The Red have just three ranked individual wrestlers, led by defending EIWA champion **Chas Tucker '20**, who is undefeated so far and ranked sixth at 133. Chaz could and should end up an All-American. **Ben Honis '20** is No. 7 at 184 but he's been a bit inconsistent and is going back to 197, where he was an All-American last winter. This weekend, the Big Red will be in Florida for the South Beach Duals. The Red will have five meets in two days, three of those meets against teams (Wyoming, Missouri and Minnesota) currently ranked ahead of them. The potential Ivy League title showdown with Princeton will be on February 9.

Final Report on Fall Sports

For the majority of Cornell teams, the season ended on a rather upbeat note. Here are the details:

Football. A recurring comment I read is that the current political polarization is driven by a natural tendency to come to a conclusion and then focus on those things that support the conclusion, while ignoring or at least discounting inconsistent facts. I must plead guilty to having this tendency. But I try (and sometimes succeed) to reexamine my opinions periodically and see if they're still supported by those pesky facts. No, I'm not about to reevaluate my views on Trumpism; I've got something else on my mind: Cornell football coach **David Archer '05**.

I've been aboard the anti-Archer bandwagon for a few years, and during that time I found much evidence to support the "Archer must go!" narrative. "He's over his head." "He doesn't really grasp what being a head coach entails." "He doesn't know how to win." When the Big Red got off to a 1-4 start this fall, I saw more evidence that I was right. When the Red defeated Brown on a late field goal, I wrote that off as a mix of good luck and some coaching from the Brown sideline that was even dumber than what our side was doing. A much-closer-than-expected 21-7 loss to Princeton on national television didn't change the narrative. Nor did Cornell's one-point loss to Penn a week later when a two-point conversion attempt with less than a minute left failed. (I thought at the time it was the wrong decision to go for two.) That's the insidious aspect of an "he doesn't know how to win" claim. When a team loses a close game to an opponent that used to trounce it, does that mean the coach's tutelage is making the team better and or

that the coach can't win close games? Your answer likely depends on what narrative you'd already bought into.

But when Cornell did the almost unthinkable, outplaying and outscoring (20-17) twelfth-ranked Dartmouth, and cruising past Columbia, 35-9, I took stock. The Red finished the season with four wins and three Ivy wins, both high water marks for the Archer era. And when I went back and re-evaluated the entire season, here's what I saw. After desultory (in my eyes, anyway) performances in 13-point losses to Yale and Harvard, the Big Red thereafter competed with intensity. The Red not only won three of their last six games, but in the three losses they were a total of 94 points better than a year ago. Last year Cornell lost to Colgate, Princeton and Penn by a total of 110 points; this year they lost those games by 16 points. Two of those losses were by a single point. The evidence is compelling: the Big Red were a much better team this year than last year. That's the fact. (And another thing I learned is that the Red accomplished this year-to-year improvement while basically remaking their offense mid-season to account for the injury loss of QB **Mike Catanese '20**.) IMHO, some (and maybe a lot) of the credit for the Red's perseverance and strong finish must go to Coach Archer and his staff. Was I wrong about my previously-expressed concerns? No. Does Cornell now give him a big raise and a multi-year extension? Hell, no. But do they give him the boot? I don't think so. That's just my opinion based on what I saw (and I watched more Big Red football last fall than anyone would consider reasonable). I have no idea how Cornell's powers that be feel but I won't be upset to see Coach Archer back for an expected eighth season.

Cornell finished the season tied for fourth in the Ivy League, its highest finish since 2006. Running back **Harold Coles '20** and safety **Jelani Taylor '20** were named to the first All-Ivy team. Cornerback **David Jones '20**, offensive lineman **Hunter Nourzad '22** and linebacker **Jake Stebbins '23** were named second team All-Ivy, and tight end **John Fitzgerald '20** and **Nickolas Null '20** received honorable mention, Null as both a place-kicker and a punter.

There were other honors. Taylor, an excellent student as well as one of the top defensive players in the Ivy League, was named a first team Division-I Academic All-American (a team that included both FBS and FCS players); one of 12 finalists for the William V. Campbell Trophy given by the National Football Foundation and the College Hall of Fame to the best scholar-athlete in all of D-I football for combined academic success, football performance and exemplary leadership; and one of 13 finalists (one from each FCS conference) for the Doris Robinson Scholar-Athlete Award for FCS football. Stebbins was named as one of 20 finalists for the Jerry Rice Award for the top freshman football player in the FCS.

And while he didn't win awards, recognition should be given to **Richie Kenney '21**, who after a rocky start at quarterback improved dramatically as the season went on. Kenney's completion percentage went from 49% in the first five games of the season to 62% in the last five and his yards per pass attempt improved from 6.9 to 8.2. The last statistic would have placed Richie 19th in FCS if done over the whole season.

Volleyball. After a wonderful start that included an eleven-match win streak and a stretch at the top of the Ivy League, it looked like the Big Red might win its first Ivy title since 2006. It was not to be. Early November losses to Princeton and Yale all but eliminated the Red from the title race. Cornell was (I think—it got complicated after Penn shut down its season early) officially eliminated on the last Friday of the season when Princeton defeated Brown (as the Big Red were beating Harvard). At that point, the Red was destined to finish third. With nothing much left to play for, Cornell was a bit flat and got upset at Dartmouth the next night in its last match.

The season-ending loss notwithstanding, it was another very solid season. The Big Red finished 17-6 and 10-4 in the Ivy League (or 8-4, if one does not count the Penn games; like I said, it's complicated). That success led to several individual awards: right side hitter **Jillienne Bennett '22** was named first team All-Ivy, and outside hitter **Madison Baptiste '22**, middle blocker **Jada Stackhouse '20** and libero **Lily Barber '20** were all named to the second team. The four Cornellians that were selected to the first or second All-Ivy team were the most since 2005.

Men's Soccer. Cornell finished strong, outscoring Dartmouth and Columbia 7-1 in its final two matches. That gave the Big Red a 10-5-2 overall record and a 3-2-2 Ivy record, good for third place, the Red's

highest finish since winning the title in 2012. Post-season honors included five All-Ivy selections, the most since 2013. Co-captains **Ryan Bayne '19**, a defender, and **John Searce '20**, a midfielder, were named to the first team; defender **Connor Drought '23** (from Mukilteo, Kamiak H. S., and the Seattle Sounders Academy) was named to the second team; and forward **Emeka Eneli '22** and midfielder **Harry Fuller '21** were given honorable mention. Searce also made the All-Northeast Region second team.

Women's Cross-Country. Two weeks after their ho-hum sixth place finish at Ivy Heps, the Big Red beat out two Ivy teams (Columbia and Yale) that bested them at Heps, as well as 33 other teams, to finish second at the NCAA Northeast Regionals in Buffalo and qualify for the NCAA championships for the first time since 2013. Congratulations to first-year head coach **Mike Henderson** and to the seven Cornell runners who got this done: **Elle Orié '21**, **Taylor Knibb '20**, **Kyleigh Spearing '20**, **Melissa Zammitti '21**, **Audrey Huelskamp '20**, **Katy Storti '23** and **Natalie Morris '22**. Elle and Taylor earned All-Northeast Region honors. (I'd like to report that Cornell kicked butt at the championships in Terre Haute, Indiana; alas, I cannot, as the Red finished 29th in the 31-team field.)

Field Hockey. Two fourth-quarter goals by **Claire Jones '22** allowed the Big Red to come from behind and beat Dartmouth in the final game of the season and finish with a 10-7 record. The Red's 4-3 record in Ivy League games earned them a third-place tie, a huge turnaround from last year's last-place finish. Congratulations to first-year head coach **Andy Smith**. Congrats also to goalie **Maddie Henry '20**, who was named the Ivy Defensive player of the year, and midfielder **Maddy Conklin '20**, who was named a third team All-American, the fourth Cornellian in history to earn A-A honors. Henry and Conklin were named first team All-Ivy and first team All-Northeast Region, while midfielder **Kirsten Pienaar '20** earned second team All-Ivy honors.

Men's Cross-Country. Like the women, the Big Red men at regionals beat out two Ivy teams (Columbia and Yale) that bested them at Heps. However, Dartmouth, which Cornell beat at Heps, and seven other teams outraced the Red, whose ninth-place finish did not qualify them to move on to nationals. On the silver lining front, Cornell fielded the second-youngest team (three freshmen, three sophomores and no seniors) of any of the 37 schools at regionals; only UConn, the team that finished just ahead of the Big Red, was younger. So "wait 'til next year."

Women's Soccer. The season started with a four-match winning streak and ended with a nine-match losing streak. The final record of 4-10-1 was, nonetheless, better than last year's 1-13-1 disaster. But it's become clear that progress will be slow. No Cornellian was named to the first or second All-Ivy team but defender **Abby Adams '20** and midfielder **Ashley Durik '23** received honorable mention.

Sailing. While most college sailing titles are decided in the spring, the women's singlehanded championships are held in the fall— in November in Santa Barbara, to be precise. **Lillian Myers '23** was the first Big Red sailor ever to qualify to race at the singlehanded nationals, and she did not disappoint, finishing fifth in the 18-women field. In fact, her finish was the best for a first year. Way to go, Lillian!

That's all for 2019. Enjoy the rest of the holiday season, best wishes for the new year, and **GO BIG RED!**