

Crossing the final finish line of season

By Mike Caputo



Mike Caputo Measuring perfection

Going undefeated in a season in any sport virtually guarantees a trip to the playoffs. In the case of the 2003 University of Southern California (USC) Trojans football team, a near perfect season wasn't enough to make the Bowl Championship Series (BCS) National Championship held at the Sugar Bowl in New Orleans.

The fate of the Trojans was based on a combination of numbers crunched out of a computer and a bunch of people sitting at their desks with a cup of coffee clicking on their selections. Wait, this sounds familiar. Al Gore got more votes in the 2000 Presidential election, but still lost because of computers and human manipulation. I will leave that for others to judge.

Fortunately, the Trojans (13-1) earned the national championship that they deserved. The unfortunate part was that it had to be "shared." I thought being the champion meant being the best out of everybody. No, not in Division I college football. A victory of any point total by the Trojans in the Rose Bowl would only allow the mere honor of sharing the championship. That is because the "undisputed" champion would be decided in the BCS Sugar Bowl, which matched up 12-1 LSU with 11-2 Oklahoma. Don't even ask why Oklahoma made the title game coming off a beating from Kansas State in its conference final. It just happened.

Not all undefeated teams are fortunate in college football to win a national championship or share one for that matter. In some cases, teams with perfect records apparently did not do well enough to earn an invitation to a bowl on New Year's Day. An example of this is Marshall University of the Mid American Conference (MAC) in 1999. The MAC (no, not *that* MAAC), has been known to build strong teams capable of taking down

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Mixed emotions flowed through the minds of the men and women's cross country teams on the flight home from the Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) Championships this weekend.

The women reflected upon a satisfying seventh place after earning eighth place the year before.

"We are really happy with our finish," said sophomore Jennifer Lee. "We did not expect seventh place."

Junior Deanna Montufar said she believes that the improvement from last year will pay dividends.

"We came a long way from last season," she said. "This year just gets us a spot closer to win the MAAC next year."

Junior Beth Bond had the top finish for the Rider women by placing 13th in a field of 93 runners with a time of 22:41.88 in a 6k course. Sophomores Laura Carpenter, Lee and Jill Loveland finished in 28th, 53rd

and 62nd to round out the top finishers for the Broncs.

"We all stepped it up this weekend and ended up having a good season as a whole," said Montufar.

The women's team had a final score of 154 behind Marist, Iona, Loyola, Manhattan, Siena and Fairfield. Marist was the champion with a score of 40 with Iona finishing as runner-up with 64.

The men on the other hand had thoughts of missed opportunities and unfulfilled desires.

"We planned on third place and definitely nothing less than fourth," said freshman Paul Matuszak.

Unfortunately, neither one of these goals were attained by the men, as the Broncs ran for sixth place in Orlando with a score of 161. Rider lost to

teams that it previously defeated in meets during the year such as Siena and Loyola. The other teams that placed ahead of the Rider men were Iona, Manhattan and Marist. Iona was the undisputed champion by putting up a score of 15 with Manhattan in a distant second place with a score of 57.

"We could have performed a lot better," said Matuszak. "We destroyed Siena in the home meet, but lost to them over the weekend."

Freshman John Smith impressed once again on the 8k course with a 13th place showing in a field of 105 runners. Smith ran for a time of 26:04.11. Matuszak finished in 26th place, while junior Matt Ciociola placed 42nd. In his final meet for Rider, senior Matt Catinella finished in

60th place with a time of 28:26.11.

"We really didn't show up to run," said Matuszak.

Smith and Bond will be Rider's only participants in next weekend's NCAA regionals. The rest of the teams will be hard at work in the indoor season.

"We will be cheering for John and Beth," said Matuszak. "But we will also be working hard, now more than ever, as we train indoors."

As questions take over the men's locker room, optimism swirls around the girls' squad.

"We definitely have the potential to be even better next year," said Montufar. "And we will build on for years to come."



Struggling swimming and diving ready for powerful rival Marist



By Mike Caputo

Losing has not been a normal occurrence to the men and women's swimming and diving teams in recent years led by Rider Coach of the Year Steve Fletcher. After being swept by LaSalle at home on Saturday though, one would never know that the teams have only one win combined so far.

"We are a team that pulls it together at the end of the season," said sophomore Brandon Modrov.

Rider entered this season with a different identity than in years past, especially the men's team. Coming off a Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference (MAAC) championship in 2003-2004, the men compete as the hunted.

"We know that we have a target on our back," said Modrov. "Winning a championship for the second time is much harder."

The women, unlike the men, claim to have the same mental approach as every year.

"Our focus is the same every year,

which is to win the championship," said senior Briana Cohen.

The failures in the early stages of the season can be attributed to injuries and illnesses on both the men and women's sides. With players on the sideline, Rider still managed to perform well this weekend against the Explorers of LaSalle. The men lost 131-112, while the women fell 129-114.

"Injuries have been hurting us," said Modrov. "If we had a full team, we would have been more competitive."

LaSalle has improved this season and posed a challenge for the Broncs. The decision was in question until the end and it had to be determined by fourth and fifth place finishes.

Senior Sam Engle led the men by winning the 200 individual medley and the 200 backstroke. Sophomore Lauren Urbanski took the 50 freestyle and 200 butterfly to lead the women. The 400 medley relay was won by both Rider teams, while the women were victorious in the 400 freestyle relay.

In diving, freshman Dylan Korn was second place in the one and three meter

dives for the men. For the women, senior Lisa Ferragano placed third in both the one and three meter dives.

"They pushed us to swim better," said Cohen. "We know it was going to come down to a close meet."

On Saturday, the Broncs travel up to Poughkeepsie to take on MAAC powerhouse rival Marist. The Red Foxes will be looking to avenge last year's men's loss to Rider in the championships. The Rider women, who were the runner-ups in the MAAC Championships last season, will have the similar mission against its defending champion Marist counterparts.

"We will be ready for Marist," said Cohen. "We get psyched up no matter how our past meets went."

No matter how the Broncs do this weekend at Marist, there is still plenty of season left to go meaning enough time to prepare for the MAAC Championships in February. Modrov believes that the regular season is a learning process for the big meets in February.

"We have to learn from the races during the season so we can swim our best later on," said Modrov.

The team felt it did not show up with its "A" game in the first against Siena.

"We did not come to play against Siena," said junior midfielder Aileen Ascolese.

Head Coach Kevin Long plans on the team staying the course and not using any new strategy in the playoffs.

"We are not going to change our strategy, we need to play better and to continue to attack," said Long.

Loyola is the favorite and

is the number one seed because of its undefeated conference record. The Greyhounds went 3-0 against Iona, Rider and Siena combined, and did not allow a goal to these three play-off teams. In fact, Loyola has only allowed one goal in the nine conference games. Loyola will face off against the fourth seed Iona Friday afternoon at 3p.m. Iona was 5-2-2 in conference play, but scored more goals and allowed fewer than Rider.

The team believes that it

will take more than strategy to sweep the difficult competition that it will face this weekend at Fairfield.

"The key to winning this weekend will be coming together as a team and playing for each other," said Ascolese.

Rider will have to play its best soccer in order to have a chance at winning this weekend. The graduation of six seniors also signifies that this may be the Broncs' best shot at a title in years to come.

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Rider will face the number two seed Siena on Friday night at Fairfield. Siena went 7-1-1 in their conference schedule.

The Broncs will hope to avenge the MAAC season opening 2-1 loss to Siena in October. The Rider defense allowed two goals in the first 20 minutes and the deficit was too large to overcome.