Field hockey impressive, but must finish

By Jared Vichko

Many teams would be satisfied by making it to their conference championship game and finishing second. But here at Rider, where the Broncs have reached five straight Northeast Conference (NEC) title games, finishing second isn’t an option. “We’re very excited about this year,” said senior Katie Conlon. “We basically have everyone back. We’ve been playing together for a few years and we know each other very well.”

If Conlon and her team mates appear confident, they have every reason to be. The Broncs return 14 letterwinners, including nine starters, and are led by the 2003 NEC Coach of the Year Lori Hussong. Christina Ang, the 2003 Player of the Year, will pirate the Broncs potent offense. In her three seasons, she has scored 45 goals, good for fourth all-time at Rider.

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“Lori has been a terrific coach,” said Conlon. “She makes impossible plays almost every game and always finds a way to put the ball in the cage. She’s a threat every time she gets the ball.”

Teaming up with Ang is junior Courtney Bertos, who last year finished fourth in the conference in scoring and was named NEC Rookie of the Year. Bertos has continued to improve each season at Rider.

“Bertos is very fast and quick and she uses that to her advantage,” said Conlon. “She brings a lot to the table and always makes things happen.”

If opposing teams decide to key in on Bertos and Ang, they will have to contend with the dazzling sister duo of Maddy and Ashley Bouluden. Maddy led the NEC in assists last season and is a vital component of the Broncs’ attack. Another major component of the offense is her younger sister Ashley, who was named the NEC Rookie of the Week four times last season.

“Maddy has the ability to dribble in and out of defenders with ease,” said Conlon. “She sees the field very well and does a terrific job of setting up our goals.”

If, by somehow the offense is stifled, the defense has proven to be strong enough to carry the team and keep the opposition off the board. Seniors Stephanie Corradino and Katie Sebastian have started 115 games between them providing the team with veteran leadership.

“Our defense has always been stable but they never get enough recognition,” said Conlon. “Our offense may win games, but defense wins championships. They’re very dependable.”

The Broncs may have talent at every position, but the strength of the unit is that on any given day someone can provide a spark and lead the team.

“We don’t have a single MVP,” said Conlon. “Every single person can step up for us. That’s why we work together so well.”

Rider is off to a fast start already, amassing a 7-1 record. The Broncs are taking things one day at a time, but a showdown is looming with Quinnipiac, the team that ousted Rider in the playoffs last year.

“We definitely want to take things one game at a time, but we want Quinnipiac again,” said Conlon. “They beat us last year, but this year is going to be different. We want revenge.”

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Changes made regarding Rider athletics this past summer will bring change in attitude, especially towards those teams that struggled in 2003-2004.

Barry Davis and Tori Harrison, two recent additions to the athletic department will have the greatest impact on the 2004-2005 athletic season. It may indeed take Davis many years to kick away the shadow of legendary head coach Sonny Pitarro, but he will have a great situation to start with. Davis comes into Rider during a season in which the team will be gaining a brand new state-of-the-art field along with an encouraging new class signed by Pitarro and assistant coach Rick Freeman last spring. Davis brings much experience to Rider, but most importantly a winning experience. Even though Broncs baseball underachieved this past season, things are looking up for the program.

Harrison, on the other hand, must pick up the pieces left by one of the nicest guys in college athletics, Elden Price. Price unfortunately was unable to gear the program into the right direction in his final years and Harrison must repeat a task that she was faced with during her head coaching days at Coppin State. That task is to take a team from the basement to the top. During her tenure at Coppin State, her team finished 6-20 in 1994. She immediately turned the program into a winner by guiding the team to 22 wins in 1995 earning her MEAC Coach of the Year honors. The Broncs finished 5-23 last year. You do the math.

Changes may have an impact on the season for baseball and women’s basketball, but one may ask, what about the other sports? As the Democrats say in the Kerry campaign, “hope is on the way,” especially for teams that were in the cellar of the MAAC conference.

After a terrible regular season that amounted to only two victories, the men’s soccer team matched that total in the MAAC Tournament with two unbelievable wins against Manhattan