Swimming and Diving aim high

By Mike Caputo
Staff Writer

The 2002-2003 Rider University swimming/diving team (RUSDT) was drenched in success, but was not submerged in it. Although the RUSDT went on to impress the MAAC with a women’s championship and a men’s runner-up at the tournament held at Loyola College last season, there is always room for improvement.

“We have a long way to go to be where we want to be, but the entire team is creating opportunities because of hard work,” said Head Coach Steven Fletcher.

Senior captains Brian Tokar and Brandon Fletcher of the men’s team and captains Melissa Morissy, a senior, and Briana Cohen, a junior, on the women’s squad headline the outstanding team unity of RUSDT.

Rider headed into Annapolis, Maryland last Saturday to engage in a meet against the nationally ranked Midshipmen of Navy and the Lafayette Leopards. The Broncs split decisions at the meet by defeating the Leopards and losing to the Midshipmen on the men’s and women’s sides.

Although the teams lost to Navy, they will not allow it to lower their confidence level.

“It was the first time Navy agreed to swim against us,” Fletcher said. “It was a big step up for us that Navy recognized us as a competitive team.”

The key ingredient to the 2003-2004 RUSDT is “being integrated,” as sophomore diver Chris Coles describes it.

“All not teams have the benefit of the swimming and diving getting along like we do and this is especially because of coach [Fletcher] melding us together,” he said. Fletcher attributed the unity to the team’s leaders.

“We had some rocky times over the years, but both of our teams [men and women] have leaders that developed over my time here,” he said.

The swimming team won many big races, while the divers placed second and third at one point. Junior Sam Engle won both the 100 and 200 backstroke while junior Rob Desande was victorious in the 100 butterfly and runner-up in the 200.

The highlight of the women’s performance was the impressive victory in the 400 free relay that consisted of Morissy, Cohen and sophomore Jen Feenstra and Rose Brenner. In addition, junior diver Erin Moore placed first in the three-meter deep.

“Even though the score was lopsided, we were very close races from our best swimmers including some split-second decisions,” said Fletcher.

Success in the upcoming season lies upon being the dominating figure in the MAAC. While the women look to defend the championship title, the men seek for vengeance against MAAC powerhouse Marist. The Marist Red Foxes emerged as champions in last year’s MAAC tournament as the team upended the Broncos despite an excellent effort.

“We must beat Marist in the MAACs. They win every year and we know the ability to do it,” said Coles.

RUSDT begins a string of three home meets when it hosts the Red Foxes in a pre-MAAC match-up on Nov. 8. The Broncs then go against the Lehigh Mountain Hawks on the 15 and the Delaware Blue Hens on the 22.

“They [RUSDT] are just so hungry to win; the men haven’t won a championship and the women want to repeat,” Fletcher says. “We want to be the best small swimming program in Division I.”

By Jared Vichko

The best team at Rider

They’re good. They’re damn good. Best ever in the history of Rider! No, that can’t possibly be, can it? Sure can. Unbeknownst to most students, the field hockey team is putting together its best season ever.

After finishing the Northeast Conference (NEC) schedule undefeated, the Broncs will have home field advantage in the upcoming playoffs next weekend.

The winning formula, which seems to be so elusive to many other Rider sports teams, all begins at the top with Head Coach Lori Hussong. Before Hussong, the team mired in mediocrity for most of the ’90s. Since her arrival in 2000, the team has won the NEC title two out of three years, coming in second in the other time. In her first season, Hussong took a team that went 4-12 the previous year and turned it into the champion. Since Rider field hockey began in 1974, there have been eight winning seasons, three in a row under Hussong.

Aside from her ability to get the best out of her players, her most enduring quality is her humility. During an interview last year, I asked her to describe her days of playing field hockey in college. Her response was a simple, “we were pretty good.” Later, I found out from one of her players that “pretty good” meant leading Trenton State to two national championships in 1981 and 1983, earning NCAA All-Tournament honors in ’82 and ’83 and being named to the 1980’s NCAA All-Decade Team.

Obviously, it’s very hard for a coach to succeed without talent. That isn’t the case here. With every starter returning except one from a team that won the NEC championship, there was definite pressure to repeat.

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