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Sports round-up

December 01, 2009 | Sarah Funderburke

Liberty University's athletic teams brought home a pile of gifts for this holiday season, including many Big South Player of the Week honors and record-breaking games.

CROSS COUNTRY RUNNER BRINGS HOME NCAA CHAMPIONSHIP

Christmas came early for Kenya native Sam Chelanga as he dominated the field in the NCAA Division I National Championship in Terre Haute, Ind., in November. Chelanga, the fastest man in the nation in the 10K, posted a 28:41 at the championship run, setting a course record by 22 seconds and finishing 25 seconds ahead of second-place finisher David McNeill of Northern Arizona. Stanford's Chris Derrick, who defeated Chelanga at the Pre-Nationals and was favored to take the national title, finished third.

Derrick said Chelanga's opening 14:09 for the first half of the race was "suicide," but that Chelanga is on a different level than the rest of the field. No one has run the NCAA Division I Cross Country Championship faster than Chelanga since 1979, when Washington State's Henry Rono finished the race in 28:19.6.

Chelanga, who is a junior, is now a six-time All-American. He is the third NCAA Division I national champion from LU.

Teammate Evans Kigen also posted impressive results at the National Championships, running 30:01 and placing 20th in the highly competitive field.

The men's team won the overall title at the Big South Cross Country Championships for the fifth year in a row, with Chelanga, Kigen, David Ricksecker, and Jake Reed all being placed on the All-Conference team. Junior Mark Hopely was named to the All-Academic team and head coach Brant Tolsma received the men's Big South Coach of the Year award.

The Lady Flames also saw success this season on the trails. Junior Dacia Bushman placed second overall at the Big South Conference Championships, and led the women's team to win the overall title. Both Bushman and freshman Jennifer Klugh, who placed third in the event, were named to the All-Conference team, and Bushman also received All-Academic team honors.

FOOTBALL

Flames fans continue to have something to be thankful for on the football field, as Coach Danny Rocco and his support staff pushed the football team toward the top of the Big South Conference once again. At Liberty's Oct. 17 homecoming game, the Flames won the contest against rival Coastal Carolina, 58-13 — the second-largest margin of victory in Big South history. Seven Liberty players received Big South Player of the Week honors this season: Matt Bevins (K), Aldreakis Allen (RB), Mike Brown (QB), Tommy Beecher (QB), Mike Larsson (K), Matt Bevins (K/P), Aldreakia Allen (RB), Brent Vinson (DB), and SirChauncey Holloway (RB). Player of the Week honors were also given to the entire Flames defensive squad. The Flames finished the season 8-3 overall and 5-1 in the Big South, tied for first with Stony Brook.

SOCCER

The men's and women's soccer teams have spent the season playing amidst construction crews and equipment while the new Osborne Stadium was being completed. None of the players have complained however, as a gift from alumnus Richard Osborne ('80) and wife Karin has helped Liberty to build a new 868 seat-grandstand and press box. The stadium will also receive a new scoreboard and a 5,000-square-foot operations center.

The women's soccer squad fought its way to the 2009 Big South regular season title. The team improved vastly from its 2008 season record (3-12-2) and finished 9-7-3 overall. Goal keeper Karen Blocker and offensive teammates Silvia Betancourt and Maria Owen were named to the All-Conference first team. Owen led the Flames in goals for the season with seven total. Other conference honors were given to Senior Rachel Wisheart, who was placed on the All-Academic conference team, and Head Coach Jessica Hain, who received Big South Coach of the Year honors.

The Liberty men's soccer team finished the season with a 12-5-3 record, and narrowly missed being crowned the Big South Conference Champions. Three members of the squad were named to the first team all-conference list, forward Darren Amoo and defenders Michael Ward and Chris Mandell. Amoo finished the Flames season at the No. 8 spot in the nation for goals per game. Out of 20 games this season Amoo had 14 goals. Goalkeeper Andrew Madero was also nationally ranked at the end of the season. His .864 save percentage placed him at the No. 8 spot nationally for Division I goalies. All-academic Big South team honors were given this season to Ward and teammate Juan Guzman.

VOLLEYBALL

The women's volleyball team made LU fans oh so jolly when they were crowned the 2009 regular season co-champions of the Big South Conference. LU shared the title with competitor UNC Asheville, the only conference team the Flames lost to in regular season play. Individual honors were given this season to Chelaine McCarty who was named a Collegiate Volleyball Update Top Performer, a first-team all conference selection and an all-academic team selection. Freshman Loren Thomas received Big South Freshman of the Week honors twice this season, and Kelly Haseman was the Oct. 26 Big South Defensive Player of the Week.

Although this bountiful fall sports season has left Liberty fans feeling blessed and full of good cheer, winter sports are already gearing up for their turn in the spotlight. To get your fill of basketball, indoor track& field and other winter sports teams head to www.libertyflames.com.

For Liberty University Athletics News and Schedules Visit www.libertyflames.com.