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Liberty University

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# Congratulations Flames!

December 20, 2007 | Todd Wetmore

In the 36-year history of Liberty University, the athletics department has achieved numerous successes. The Flames have won nearly 80 conference titles since joining the Big South Conference in 1991 and Liberty has shocked perennial powerhouses with numerous Top 25 upsets.

However, generations from now, when the Flames faithful recall the journey to national prominence, they will forever reflect on the weekend just prior to Thanksgiving 2007. In and around Thanksgiving, the Big South Conference crowns champions in football, volleyball, and men's soccer.

## **A weekend of triumphs**

Entering the weekend, Liberty already was having a banner year. The football program was rewriting attendance records and putting up record offensive numbers each and every time it took the field.

On the volleyball court, LU women were in the process of halting Winthrop's dominance in league play. The Lady Flames beat Winthrop in the regular season and rattled off 14-straight wins.

And the men's soccer team racked up eight regular-season shutouts to crack the Top 25 nationally in win-loss percentage.

But the best was yet to come and LU athletes were determined not to allow regular season conquest to become postseason failures.

All three LU teams programs entered the waning days of their schedules with a drive and determination to claim a championship prize.

## **Spiking the competition**

The volleyball team had the shortest distance to travel to reach the postseason. LU hosted the Big South Volleyball Championship in the Vines Center. Six other Big South teams entered the 8,500-seat arena with the hopes of stopping the red hot LU team.

But not even Winthrop, winners of five-straight conference titles, could stop the wave of success Liberty was riding, as the Lady Flames swept the competition to claim its first title since 2001 and fourth in program history.

Almost simultaneously the football team culminated its championship run in Boiling Springs, N.C., with a resounding 31-0 victory over Gardner-Webb. LU's first Big South crown was the defining moment for the football program, which is under second year head coach Danny Rocco.

## **Leaders of the pack**

Just one day after the football championship, the men's soccer team erased years of championship game frustration down in Rock Hill, S.C. Liberty, runners up in its previous four title contest appearances, finally vindicated itself with a 2-1 win over archrival Radford.

One would think that three league titles over a two-day span, giving the Flames five total in the fall season following the cross country program's sweep to close out October, would be enough. But it wasn't - not when you are having a season unlike any previous campaign.

The only thing which could top a weekend of conference successes would be notoriety on the national scene, and Liberty had prime opportunity in Terre Haute, Ind., to do so at the NCAA Cross Country National Championship.

The only thing missing from Josh McDougal's star-studded resumé was the ultimate prize. Following three near misses during his previous trio of appearances at the national race, the senior outlegged Oregon's Galen Rupp to claim the national title in record fashion, becoming Liberty's second-ever NCAA national champion.

Only time will tell what the future holds for the Flames during this season of champions, but one thing is for sure, Liberty's athletics department had much to be thankful for during this holiday season.

*Todd Wetmore is Liberty University Assistant AD for Athletic Media Relations.*