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Sport Roundup

Liberty University

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Sport Roundup

April 12, 2010

“But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31

Liberty’s athletic teams focused on Isaiah 40:31 this past winter, and proved their strength in a variety of important contests. Despite unusually heavy snowfall and cold temperatures in Central Virginia, the Flames charged full speed ahead toward Big South Conference titles and NCAA tournament bids.

BASKETBALL

March Madness was infused with Flames flavor this year, as the women’s basketball team won the Big South Conference tournament and with it a bid to the NCAA Division I Championships. Liberty entered the championships as a No. 13 seed with a 27-5 season record, and faced off against No. 4 seed University of Kentucky (25-7) on March 20. The Liberty women led for part of the game before narrowly losing 83-77. This was the Flames 13th trip to the NCAA Championships in the last 14 years, and the fifth time as the No. 13 seed.

Four freshmen players on the team received Big South honors this season. Devon Brown and Avery Warley both were twice named the Big South Player of the Week. Freshman of the Week honors went to Jelena Antic three times and LaKendra Washington once.

Both the men's and women's basketball teams have young squads this year, but the men also have one of the youngest squads in the nation with six freshmen and five sophomores.

The men finished the season with a 10-8 Big South conference record, and two of the team's freshmen, Antwan Burrus and Evan Gordon, received Big South Freshman of the Week Honors this winter.

INDOOR TRACK

The highly successful men's and women's indoor track teams once again turned out a refined group of runners, jumpers, vaulters and throwers who are raising Liberty's profile on the NCAA Division I athletic scene. Cross country national champion Sam Chelanga captured another All-American title on March 12 when he placed second in the men's 5K at the NCAA Division I track and field championship meet in Fayetteville, Ark. Chelanga ran 13:37, one second behind Northern Arizona's David McNeill, and is now a seven-time All-American, three of which have been in the 5K.

On the women's side, redshirt senior Jamie Watson made her debut at nationals in the 800-meter dash after qualifying with an impressive 2:06.15 in this event at the Tyson Invitational in Fayetteville, Ark., on Feb. 13. Watson placed 15th overall at nationals and set school and Big South records in the 800-meter dash. She was named the Big South Athlete of the Week four times during the season.

The Flames captured both the men's and women's Big South Championship titles on Feb. 28., and went home with individual champions in 11 different events. The Liberty men scored 192 points total to runner up Charleston Southern University's 122, while the Liberty women score 182.5 points total to second place Coastal Carolina University's 145.

Chelanga and three other men's track and field standouts received Big South Athlete of the Week honors this season. Clarence Powell set a school record in the triple jump at the Hokie Invitational, propelling himself 50.6 feet. Junior pole vaulter Kolby Shepherd vaulted a personal best of 16 feet 8.75 inches on Feb. 12 at the Liberty Quad meet. The women's 4x8 team (Rebekah Ricksecker, Meghan Burggraf, Rod' Esther Castor and Watson) also set a school record this winter when they ran 9:15.21 at the Hokie Invitational on Jan. 22. Sprinter Chenoa Freeman set yet another school record when she eclipsed her own school record in the 400 by running 55.64 at the Sykes-Sabock Challenge Cup.

WRESTLING

The wrestling squad won several important match-ups during the 2009-10 season, including the NCAA East Regional Championships on March 6. This was the team's fourth straight title at this event.

The Flames had six individual weight class champions at the event, Jonathan Childress (125 weight class), Joe Pantaleo (133 weight class) Scott Clymer (141 weight class), Frank Geyeski (149 weight class), Chad Porter (165 weight class) and Nick Knowles (184 weight class), all of whom also competed at the national championships March 18-20. Of the six wrestlers, Clymer was successful at winning his first match, a 3-2 upset against Adin Duenas of California State

University, Fullerton. He just missed advancing to the NCAA round of 16, as he lost his second and third matches on day two of the tournament.

The Flames won the Keystone Classic on Nov. 22 in Philadelphia, beating out nine other schools, and finishing with 128 points total at the classic, while runner up American University had 110.5 points. On Jan. 27 the squad also topped rival Virginia Military Institute for the fourth straight year, finishing 29-7 overall at the matchup.

FOOTBALL

The Flames football squad has signed 18 newcomers for the 2010-11 season, including Scott Hyland and Desmond Rice of Liberty Christian Academy. They will have the blessing of being led by successful head coach Danny Rocco, who recently signed a contract extension through 2014. Since Rocco took over the program in 2006 the Flames have amassed a 32-13 overall record.

CLUB HOCKEY

Although hockey is categorized as a club sport at Liberty, the continual dominance of the men's division I team drew record crowds to the LaHaye Ice Center this season, with a sold-out house at both of Liberty's final home games against Oakland University on Feb. 19 and 20.

Head coach Kirk Handy called the atmosphere inside the LaHaye Ice Center on both nights "electric."

"It was the best I've ever seen it," he said. "We appreciate all the fan support we had."

The Flames won both matches against Oakland and went into the American Collegiate Hockey Association Division I tournament in March ranked No. 6. The Flames finished 10th overall with a 29-3 record. The team graduates seven players this year, three of whom were ranked at the top of the ACHA in total points scored for the season. Kyle Dodgson finished second overall with 71 points and Dave Semenya was ranked third with 66 points. Freshman Brent Boschman finished fourth with 65 total points.

The women's hockey team also won a bid to Division I Nationals and entered the tournament as the No. 5 seed. The lady Flames finished the season ranked seventh nationally and with an overall 16-8 record.

SPRING SPORTS

Liberty's winter sports teams have passed the athletic baton over to the outdoor spring sports teams, including baseball, which opened the season winning 13 of its first 18 games. The Flames' women's lacrosse made its NCAA debut, picking up its first win against Howard two games into the season.