Royals Enjoy Success in First Season in the Landmark Conference

The University of Scranton’s first season in the Landmark Conference produced its share of memorable moments.

The Royals won four conference championships (women’s soccer, men’s basketball, women’s basketball, and women’s swimming) and advanced to the championship in four others (baseball, men’s soccer, women’s tennis and volleyball).

About the only thing to elude the Royals’ grasp was the Landmark Conference All-Sports Presidents’ Cup. And even that was by the narrowest of margins, as Scranton finished second behind Moravian College by one one-hundredth of a point!

The Landmark Conference All-Sports Presidents’ Cup is based on a formula that rewards institutions for their finishes in regular-season conference standings as well as results in postseason tournament competition. Institutions also earn points for individual events in sports such as track and field and swimming and diving. The formula also takes into account the number of sports an institution sponsors.

In addition to the eight sports mentioned above, Scranton had two other teams – men’s lacrosse and men’s tennis – qualify for conference postseason tournaments.

The Royals were just as impressive in the classroom. One hundred and twenty-one student-athletes were named to the Landmark Conference Academic Honor Roll, which honors those student-athletes who are at least a sophomore and have a cumulative grade point average of 3.0-or-higher.

Scranton also had four student-athletes selected as the Senior Scholar-Athlete in their respective sports: Tom Bicknell (Melbourne, Australia/St. Bede’s College) of the men’s basketball team, Kathleen Daly (Bryn Mawr/Merion Merion Academy) of the women’s basketball team, Brooke Hinkley (Hallstead/Blue Ridge) of the volleyball team, and Mary Beth Vogel (Havertown/Cardinal O’Hara) of the women’s soccer team.

In addition, the Royals placed 12 student-athletes on the Landmark Conference all-Academic team: Julie Brophy (Exton/Downingtown East), women’s basketball; Justin Champagne (Mt. Bethel/Bangor Area), baseball; Jack Cook (Springfield/Springfield), men’s swimming; Ryan Kirk (Lansdale/LaSalle College), men’s basketball; Thomas Kornobis (Merrick, N.Y./W.C. Mepham), men’s lacrosse; Gina Miller (Secane/Cardinal O’Hara), women’s swimming; Erin Moreau (Nanuet, N.Y./Nanuet), softball; Rob Olechna (Scranton/Scranton), men’s cross-country; Becky Prial (Warwick, N.Y./Warwick Valley), women’s cross-country; Gary Racich (Jackson, N.J./Saint Rose), men’s soccer; Gretchen Sullivan (Kenmore, N.Y./Kenmore West), women’s tennis; and Brooke Hinkley (Hallstead/Blue Ridge).

Baseball

Justin Champagne ’11 (Mt. Bethel/Bangor Area) joined exclusive company when he became the third baseball player in Royals’ history to be named Academic all-American in a program sponsored by ESPN The Magazine last spring. To qualify, a student-athlete must be at least a sophomore and have a cumulative grade point average of 3.2-or-higher. Champagne, who holds a 3.8 grade point average in economics, played two positions for the Royals during the 2008 season. He started 27 games at third base and led the team with a .453 batting average. In addition, he posted a 5-3 record and led the pitching staff with 39 strikeouts. The other two Royal baseball players to earn Academic all-American honors were Greg Moro ’86 and Scott Sannito ’90.

Chris Bligh ’11 (Jersey City, N.J./St. Peter’s Preparatory) capped off an outstanding 2008 season by earning second-team all-Mid-Atlantic regional honors by the American Baseball Coaches Association (ABCA). In addition to leading the Royals to a school-record 26 victories and a berth in the championship series of the Landmark Conference tournament, he set two new Scranton single-season records for most hits (58) and most RBI (56).
Softball
The softball team made a dramatic turnaround in 2008, thanks to the play of Mia Collarini ’11 and Annie Zeleniak ’11. Each was named first-team all-Eastern College Athletic Conference (ECAC) South rally after a season in which the team won 27 victories and advanced to the conference postseason tournament for the first time since 2002 under second-year head coach Colleen Mahon.

Women’s Soccer
Colleen Murphy was a member of four Freedom Conference and NCAA tournament teams during her standout career for the Royals from 2000 through 2003. In January, she was named head women’s soccer coach, replacing current Director of Athletics Toby Lovecchio, who took over on an interim basis last season after veteran coach Joe Bochicchio passed away on July 24, 2007, a month before pre-season camp was set to begin. Murphy previously served as an assistant women’s soccer coach at both Elmira College and Moravian College.

Lacrosse
Kyle Frank ’11 was one of many freshmen who made an immediate impact on the men’s lacrosse team last spring. After leading the Royals in scoring, he was voted the Landmark Conference Rookie of the Year. In just two seasons, head coach Kevin Dugan has led Scranton to 19 victories, including a school-record 12 wins in 2008, a remarkable feat considering the roster included 28 freshmen among its 37 players.

Men’s Cross-Country
Chris Wasnetsky ’11
(Dunmore/Bishop O’Hara)
won the first Northeast Pennsylvania Cross-Country Classic individual championship on August 29 at the Hollenback Golf Course in Wilkes-Barre.

Field Hockey
Diana Rocklein ’09
(Islip Terrace, N.Y./East Islip) has been a mainstay on the Royal field hockey and women’s lacrosse teams throughout her career, earning all-conference honors in each sport.

Hopkins, Wodder to be Honored May 2
A dinner to honor two long-time distinguished faculty members from the Department of Exercise Science and Sport will be held on Saturday, May 2, 2009, beginning at 5 p.m. in the Patrick & Margaret DeNaples Center.

John Hopkins, assistant professor, and Dr. Gary Wodder, professor and former department chair, will retire at the end of the academic year. Hopkins began his career at the university in 1967 and served in a variety of roles throughout his 42-year tenure, including as head wrestling, cross-country, and softball coach. As wrestling coach from 1969 until 1998, he led the Royals to 180 victories in dual-meet competition. Individually, he coached nine NCAA qualifiers, three National Catholic champions, and eight Wall of Fame inductees.

He also enjoyed tremendous success as cross-country coach, developing four NCAA qualifiers, including Joe Fent, one of only two runners in Middle Atlantic Conference history to win four consecutive individual conference titles. All together, six of his former runners have been inducted into the Wall of Fame.

In 1983, Hopkins took over as head coach (while Wodder was on sabbatical) of the softball team and guided the Royals to a Middle Atlantic Conference championship and a trip to the NCAA Division III tournament.

Wodder joined the University community in 1974. In addition to his faculty position, he served as director of athletics for 23 years, overseeing a program that expanded from seven to 18 sports and was highlighted by three national championships, two in men’s basketball (1976, 1983) and one in women’s basketball (1985), along with numerous team and individual championships in Scranton’s previous affiliation with the Middle Atlantic Conference. He was also head baseball coach from 1974 through 1979 and head softball coach from 1980-1982 and again from 1984-1987. The softball team won four Middle Atlantic Conference titles and advanced to three national championship tournaments during his tenure.

Tickets are $30 per person. Reservations can be made by contacting Sandy Watson at watsonm1@scranton.edu or by phone at (570) 941-5874. All checks should be made payable to Hopkins/Wodder Retirement Fund. Donations in lieu of attendance will also be accepted.

Volleyball
Jacqueline Pisano ’09
(Exton/Bishop Shanahan) was one of five seniors on the volleyball team that made first-year head coach Matt Dunn’s job a bit easier. Pisano wrapped up her career ranked in four all-time statistical categories in Royals’ history.

Men’s Soccer
Tim Logan returned to the men’s soccer team as a graduate student this past fall and moved into the top 15 all-time in scoring in University of Scranton history.