



CCWW Sports Report No. 802 (November 2021)

by
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All right, I've put this report off long enough. I was hoping Cornell's sports fortunes would improve and I'd have some better things to report. (Spoiler alert: that hasn't really happened.) But it's past time so here goes.

Let's start with the Big Red's eight fall sports teams. The best of the lot—by a wide margin—is men's soccer. With just one game left, at home against Columbia on November 13, the Red are 11-3-1 and 4-2 in the Ivy League. Cornell is, IMHO, the best team in the Ivies but it will not win the league title. Princeton is 6-0 and has clinched the title and will be the Ivies' AQ to the NCAA tournament. Yale is 4-0-2 and is in second place, while Cornell is third. Still, there is hope that the Red will receive an at-large invite to the NCAA championships. While the fact that Yale and Princeton both defeated the Big Red is, I suppose, some evidence that they are better than the Red, Cornell did much better in its non-conference matchups, posting a 7-1-1 record, including victories over very good (and likely tournament-bound) High Point and UC-Santa Barbara teams, losing only to perennial power Wake Forest in overtime (while playing two men short). The web site RPIupdate has Cornell with the 28th best RPI in the nation, while Yale and Princeton are 68th and 70th, respectively. RPIupdate projects an at-large NCAA bid for the Big Red. We'll see how that works out. As for the two losses, Cornell dominated Yale, outshooting the Elis 20-5, but succumbed 1-0 to a hot goalie. At Princeton, the Red not only met another hot goalie (who stopped 11 of 12 shots on goal) but played more than 60 minutes down a man and still just lost 2-1.

Other than men's soccer, no Cornell team finished in the top half of the Ivy League. Field hockey was 3-4 in Ivy play (8-9 overall) and finished fifth. At one point the Big Red was 6-3, with all three losses coming by one goal—including to No. 1 Michigan and No. 11 Syracuse. But the Red faded at the end, losing six of their last eight (including a 6-0 blowout in a rematch with 'Cuse). **Caroline Ramsey '23** set a Cornell single-season records with 18 goals and 40 total points (18g, 4a). For that she was named a unanimous First Team All-Ivy selection. Other All-Ivy honorees were **Isabella Palde '23** (Second Team), **Bridget Mahoney '23** and **Aerin Park '23** (Honorable Mention), and **Kate MacGillis '22** (Academic All-Ivy).

I expected good things from the volleyball team, which finished third in the league when they last competed in 2019. Sure, they had some graduation losses but with two returning All-Ivies (1st teamer **Jillienne Bennett '22** and 2nd teamer **Madison Baptiste '22**) and the anticipation of two good recruiting classes joining the squad another top-three Ivy League finished looked to be in order. For whatever reason, that didn't happen and the Big Red with one weekend to go are 3-9 in the league (7-13 overall) and tied for sixth with Penn.

Men's cross-country finished a disappointing (to me, anyway) sixth at the Ivy Heptagonals. I expected better, as the team had finished 8th of 40 teams at the Paul Short Invitational in early October and won the Penn State National Open in mid-October, defeating three ACC teams and two Big Ten teams. But at Ivy Heps, the Big Red finished far behind Princeton, Harvard and Penn and lost a tight three-way battle for fourth to Columbia and Dartmouth. The Red's top individual finish (16th) was not good enough for an All-Ivy spot, but their top runner, **Matt Fusco '22**, was named Academic All-Ivy. Cornell has one more chance to do something as they compete on November 12 in the NCAA Northeast Regionals in Boston. The top two teams in the region qualify for the NCAA finals. Thankfully, Princeton, which dominated Heps, is in a different region and will not be there.

Women's cross-country could manage only a seventh-place finish at Heps (although the Red was just three points out of fifth). **Rebecca Hasser '23** finished seventh to earn All-Ivy first team honors, while **Isa Meyers '24**, a Seattleite and graduate of The Northwest School, was named Academic All-Ivy. When I first started writing these reports in 2012, the Big Red women harriers were not just the best team in the Ivy League but one of the best teams in the country, finishing 13th at the NCAA championships that fall. Since 2015, however, the Red have consistently been in the bottom half of the Ivies, although they did earn an NCAA finals invitation in 2019 with a strong second-place finish in the Northeast Regionals. They'll have a chance to repeat that feat later this week.

Women's soccer last had a winning Ivy League record in 1995. Since then, more often than not, they've finished in last place in the league. This past fall was only slightly better. Under new coach **Rob Ferguson**, the team won its first Ivy League match in almost five years, defeating Columbia 1-0, which allowed them to finish the season in a tie for seventh place with a 1-6 record. Overall, the Big Red were 3-11-2, a bit worse than 2019's 4-10-1. OTOH, the Red's 14 goals were the most scored since 1995. And nine of those goals were scored by rookies: **Ava Laden '24**, with six, and **Peyton Nichols '25** with three. Cornell had trouble finishing games; three times they gave up late second-half leads, losing to Stony Brook and Dartmouth and tying Albany. One player, back **Mofoluke Obiri '22**, made the All-Ivy second team.

Y'all knew I'd have eventually to write about football. It's not a pretty story. With two games remaining—against a really good Dartmouth team and a better-than-expected Columbia team (which gave the Big Green their only loss, a 19-0 shutout; go figure....)—the Big Red are 2-6 overall and 1-4 in the Ivy League, and sit in a three-way tie with Penn and Brown for sixth place. The win last weekend over Penn was nice but, like much of the good that has happened in the **David Archer '05** era, it was too little, too late. Cornell may not be the worst team in the league—that's probably Brown, which the Red somehow found a way to lose to. In non-conference games, the Big Red gave a terrible Bucknell team their only win of the season.

I've watched most of the games and went to the Harvard game—a game in which Cornell actually played pretty well. Despite having two dozen fifth-year seniors (probably the most in the Ivy League), the Big Red are not good on either side of the ball. On defense, they are seventh in total defense and seventh in scoring defense. They are

also seventh in scoring offense. The Red pass a lot but their completion percentage of 50.5% is the worst in the league. Mistakes have been a problem all year—fumbles, sacks or other plays for loss and especially penalties always seemed to come at the worst time. Cornell has converted just 9 of 24 fourth downs and its red zone conversion percentage is the worst in the league.

If you watch the games—and I do so y'all don't have to—Cornell looks like a poorly-coached team. I'll go with the simple explanation: if the Big Red *look* like a poorly-coached team it's likely that they *are* a poorly-coached team. And let's not forget the wisdom of former Giants coach Bill Parcells: "You are what your record says you are." With a record of 21-57 and a winning percentage of .269, Coach Archer does not have the worst record of any coach in Big Red history; that honor belongs to George Siefert—a record of 3-15, a winning percentage of .167. Archer's record is even slightly better than Tim Pendergast's, who posted a winning percentage of .241 (7-22). But Siefert was gone after two years and Pendergast was gone after three (and was never a head coach again). This is Archer's eighth year. I'd be hard-pressed to name *any* Division 1 coach who lasted eight seasons with a winning percentage below .270.

Oh, and as long as I've devolved into piling on, let me add one more thought. Past readers of this report may recall my prior concerns about talent evaluation. Well, IMHO, they're back. The quarterback who starts and gets the most playing time is fifth-year senior **Richie Kenney '21**, who has been inconsistent his entire career. This year Kenney has a completion percentage below 48% (not a good number), while **Ben Mays '22** (who never took a snap before his senior year) and **Jameson Wang '25** both have completion percentages over 58%. They also have averaged more passing yards per attempt and more yards per completion. And Wang has rushed for over 300 yards, has the highest rushing average on the team, and has scored four rushing touchdowns. Excluding sacks, Kenney has carried the ball nine times and gained eight yards total. This is not a close question—Wang should be the starter who takes virtually all snaps unless and until he shows that he can't do the job.

Y'all may find this hard to believe but the Big Red varsity is *not* the worst football team on East Hill. That would be the sprint football team. They finished the season 2-5. Playing a schedule that includes three games against peer schools (Penn, Army and Navy) and four against small schools, three of which this year were recently women's colleges, the Big Red finds itself being trounced by the peer schools and barely held its own against the others. In 2019—an especially bad year—the Red lost two of three games to the others, both by wide margins and lost to the three peer schools by an average margin of 55 points. This year wasn't much better. The Big Red eked out close wins over two of the small colleges, lost to Penn and Army by a combined score of 129-6, and (perhaps smartly) forfeited to Navy, on the apparent basis that it would be unsafe to play a team so much better than Cornell. Is it time to reevaluate the viability of this program? I've written on this before. If cutting this program, or turning it into a club sport, would create some Title IX "cap space" that could be used, for sure, on moving the men's fencing team to varsity from club status (They won a national club championship in 2018), and probably adding one or two other teams, it should get done. At least I think so.

That's the update on the purely fall sports. Six winter sports teams have already seen action, with mixed results. Men's hockey won three of its first four games, two of the wins, over Alaska (Fairbanks) in Lynah, coming in sudden-death overtime using the new three-on-three OT format. The Big Red lost at Harvard by a 3-2 score but then bounced back with a 5-4 win at Dartmouth, the winning goal coming with six seconds to go was **Ben Berard '23's** third goal of the game. The men lost a lot from the top-ranked 2019-20 team but return 13 upperclassmen, including three fifth-year seniors, who were regulars on that team.

When we last saw women's hockey they were the No. 1 team in the country and the top seed in the NCAA tournament that was about to start. Little is left from that 2019 juggernaut. The Big Red have started the 2021-22 season with a 1-4-1 record. They should get better as the team has 14 rookies (first years and sophomores) and just 11 upper classwomen (and one grad student, All-American goalie **Lindsay Browning '21**). Ten of the 11 undergraduate skaters are in the regular rotation.

Both men's and women's basketball started the season with solid victories (over admittedly not-very-good opposition). The men defeated Binghamton 76-69. They took a 6-4 lead two minutes into the game and never relinquished it, although the lead only hit double figures twice. **Jordan Jones '23** led the way with 20 points while **Chris Manon '24**, playing his collegiate debut, had 17 points and team-high 7 rebounds. Manon looks like he can play—and, in fact, the whole team looked quite sharp. The women had an easier time against Colgate, jumping off to a 7-0 lead and leading by 13 at the end of the first quarter. Only once thereafter, briefly, did the Big Red margin fall below double digits. The final was 53-34. **Theresa Grace Mbanefo '22** looked like she will be a force this season, recording 15 points, 14 boards, and three blocked shots. **Olivia Snyder '23**, a transfer from Georgetown, had 12 points and seven rebounds.

The other winter teams in action were men's and women's swimming and diving, which easily defeated St. Bonaventure in dual meets. Although the meets were "home" meets for Cornell, they were held in Ithaca College's Olympic-size Natatorium, as will this week's tri-meets with Harvard and Dartmouth. I'm not sure if all home meets will be held at IC, nor do I know the reason for the relocations. I can give y'all one, however: Cornell's swimming facilities suck. Unfortunately, I've not heard that the next round of sports capital improvements, e.g., relocating the baseball field to Game Farm Road, includes a new pool. I hope I'm wrong about that as the Big Red desperately need a new, upgraded pool. As for the meet with the Bonnies, I don't have much to add; The Big Red always defeat the Bonnies; beating an Ivy League team has been much tougher.

Finally, there are several sports that start in the fall and conclude in the spring, including golf, polo, sailing, rowing and equestrian. I'll only mention one here—sailing, which conducts its women's singlehanded championships in the fall. Back in 2019, **Lillian Myers '23** became the first Cornellian to qualify for nationals and finished fifth, the highest finish by a first year. After missing 2020, Lillian improved that finish to third, the highest finish by a non-senior. Lillian was followed by **Lucija Ruzevic '24** in fifth, giving the Big Red two top-five finishers, the only school to accomplish this feat.

That's all for now. **GO BIG RED!**