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by

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The Good, the Bad and the Ugly (and the Rest)

That could be the title of most Big Red sports reports but it seems to fit the current environment particularly well. Here goes.

The Good. Two teams get top billing here, each surprising in its own way. **Men's Hockey** lost a lot of talent after the early shutdown in 2020 season and cancellation of the 2020-21 season, and I, at least, was unsure how quickly they'd regroup. So far, the answer seems to be "quite quickly." The team is now 7-1 after defeating Union, 4-1; RPI, 11-3; Brown, 3-2 in overtime; and Yale, 3-0. Cornell has moved into the top-10 in both the USCHO and USA Today polls. **Max Andreev '22** scored four goals and added two assists in the rout of the Engineers and was named ECAC Hockey's Player of the Week. **Tim Rego '24** was named Rookie of the Week after scoring twice and adding an assist in the RPI game. The 11 goals were the most scored by the Big Red in over 42 years, and Max's four goals were the most in a game by a Cornell player in over 30 years.

That bit of history provides my segue to the other team on the "good" list—**Men's Basketball**—which, if y'all have been paying attention, hasn't made the "good" list very often in the past decade. But when they beat defending Patriot League champion Colgate last week, they accomplished something that even the Dale-Wittman-Foote-led powerhouse that won three-straight Ivy titles from 2008 to 2010 (and made it to the 2010 Sweet Sixteen) did not do—they started the season 3-0. One has to go back to the last millennium—1996, to be precise—to find a Cornell men's basketball team that won its first three games. The Big Red then went out and trounced D-III Wells College, 107-48. The 4-0 start is the best since 1961—back before even I went to Cornell. That 1961-62 team started the season 6-0; to match that Cornell would have to win at Penn State on Monday (a BTN-televised game) and then defeat St. Francis (Loretto PA) in Ithaca Wednesday. So what's different about this year's team, you ask. The one-word answer is "size." For the past several years—certainly since **Brian Earl** became the coach—the Red has struggled to find even one or two reliable players over 6'6". This year's team may have at least four, three of whom are rookies (freshmen or sophomores); **Keller Boothbay '24, Sean Hansen '24** and **Guy Ragland, Jr. '25** are all between 6-7 and 6-9 and all have all played significant minutes. They join 6-9, 235-lb. **Kobe Dickson '22**, who doesn't shoot that well but is a force in the middle defending and rebounding.

I thought I was done writing about good things but then I watched the Big Red wrestlers dismantle Stanford on Saturday evening. The Cardinal, now led by former Cornell coach Rob Koll (one of two major Cornell coaching departures during the pandemic), won the first match at 125 and did not win again until Cornell, with the victory secured, took an injury default at Heavyweight. Final score: 30-9 Red. And it gets better. **Julian**

Ramirez '25, wrestling for the first time in a Cornell singlet, defeated Shane Griffith, Stanford's defending NCAA champion at 165. Cornell's refreshingly over-the-top ESPN+ announcer (I didn't get his name; maybe someone can help me out on this), called it one of the greatest upsets in Cornell wrestling history. Ramirez's victory was one of three by rookie Big Red wrestlers over ranked Cardinal opponents.

The Bad. Men's Soccer was not a bad team; quite the contrary, they were likely the best team in the Ivy League. But what happened to them last week was bad—very bad, as an unfortunate tie with a one-win Columbia team cost the Big Red an at-large invitation to the NCAA tournament. So Cornell finishes the season 11-3-2 and 4-2-1 in the Ivy League, good for a third-place finish. It was the third-straight season of at least ten victories. All-Ivy Honors were announced last week and the Big Red placed three on the first team—midfielder **Tyler Bagley '21** (a unanimous selection), forward **Emeka Eneli '22** and defender **Wilson Eisner '25**—and two on the second team: defender **Jonah Kagen '22** and midfielder **Harry Fuller '21**.

The Ugly. That would be Cornell football. The team was blown out a week ago by Dartmouth, 41-7, and then finished the season Saturday with a loss at home to Columbia. The Big Red's three-QB rotation gave up five (count 'em, 5!) interceptions in a 34-26 loss. I only saw bits of the game as I was at Wrigley Field watching my wife's alma mater, Northwestern, get whupped by Purdue. But what I saw wasn't pretty. In one sequence in the fourth quarter, with the ball on the Lions' 17-yard line and the Big Red needing two touchdowns to catch up, **Ben Mays '22** threw a ball right to the Columbia defender who returned the ball for what looked like a 98-yard pick-six. But the Big Red got bailed out by a holding penalty. No matter, on the next play **Jameson Wang '25** threw a ball right to a different Columbia defender in the end zone for the INT. (Mays later threw a touchdown pass to **Curtis Raymond III '22** to bring the Red within eight but it was too little, too late.)

"Too little, too late" defines the tenure of head coach **David Archer '05**. A two-game winning streak at the end of 2019 may have saved his job then but the Red could not sustain that momentum. After eight years, Coach Archer's record is 21-59, a winning percentage of .263. It's time—indeed, way past time—for a change.

The word "ugly" reminds me of something I saw during the Cornell-Yale hockey game that I'd never seen before. I only caught a little bit of the game, between the wrestling meet and my Saturday night dinner. (Aside: we ate at, and I highly recommend, Le Colonial, a fancy Chicago Vietnamese restaurant.) Near the end of the second period a Yale player clocked **Ben Berard '23** with an elbow to the head. Berard goes down, the Yalie is whistled off for elbowing and Ben gets his own two-minute penalty for "embellishment." While I question calling embellishment whenever there is an actual offense by the other player, I've seen that before. What was unique about this was that the hit was so hard that the refs reviewed the play on the monitors and called a five-minute major on the Yalie for a flagrant foul. Wait a minute! An embellishment call against a guy who's just been dropped by a flagrant foul? That I've never seen before. What was Ben supposed to do—show a stiffer upper lip? The Berard penalty stood,

probably because it's not reviewable. IMHO, the embellishment call is overused and this incident was a poster child for reviewing and making changes to the rule.

The Rest. Cornell's very young, rebuilding women's hockey team got off to a rocky start but the past two weeks have been better as the Big Red have won three of four games, including a 2-0 shutout of No. 10 Princeton, and improved their record to 4-5-1. Perhaps moving in the other direction is women's basketball, which is now 2-3 after losses to Wake Forest, East Tennessee State and Fairleigh Dickinson and a win over Binghamton. I'm concerned. I expected the Big Red to be overmatched against an ACC team like Wake, and perhaps also against East Tennessee, but a loss to "Fairly Ridiculous" is, well, fairly ridiculous. Cornell has two good players, **Theresa Grace Mbanefo '22** (who had a monster game against Bingo, with 27 points and 13 boards) and Georgetown transfer **Olivia Snyder '23**, but not much beyond those two, and coach **Danya Smith's** use of a seven-player rotation in close games is not a recipe for success.

All Cornell fall sports teams have wrapped up play. Volleyball went out with a whimper, losing to Penn and Princeton to finish the season 3-11 in Ivy play and 7-15 overall. Perhaps they belonged on the "bad" list but Coach **Trudy Vande Berg** has accomplished enough good things in her seven years at the helm of the Big Red to be cut some slack and earn a pass for one off season. BTW, The Red did have two All-Ivy honorees: **Casey Justus '22** (2nd team) and **Jillienne Bennett '22** (honorable mention).

Both the women's and the men's cross-country teams finished in the high middle of the pack at the NCAA Northeast Regionals but neither team qualified for nationals. The women were 10th in the 36-team field, while the men were 7th in a 35-team field. One Cornell runner, **Perry Mackinnon '23**, who finished in 10th place at regionals, qualified to race at nationals as an individual and he finished a respectable 174th of 250+ runners.

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