

Coming Full Circle in Alabama



By **Samantha DelRosso**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- As freshmen in 2011, Penn State gymnasts Lindsay Musgrove and Kassidy Stauder competed in their first collegiate gymnastics competition in Tuscaloosa, Ala. Three years later, the two will return to the southern state this weekend to compete in the NCAA Championships and their final meet as Penn State gymnasts.

Appropriately, this week's Word of the Week is "Full Circle", which attributes the seniors' journey starting and ending in Alabama.

The NCAA championship meet is the meet of all meets for collegiate gymnastics teams. This meet is unlike any other. Musgrove is looking forward to the championship atmosphere most.

"It's a completely different atmosphere. Thousands of people in the stands, crazy lights, glow sticks and you get to compete on podium, which is a big stage in front of the crowd" Musgrove said.

The second Word of the Week is "Us". The team is focusing on being themselves and competing how they practice every day.

"We are coming in [to practice] and knocking out routines every day, so we just need to transfer that to the meet just like we did at Regionals and have our best meet," Musgrove said. "We've [also] been focusing on not looking at teams like Florida and Alabama and trying to be like them or be 'as good as them'. Who we are at Penn State is good enough to run with those guys."

The Nittany Lions saw No. 1 Florida compete at Regionals just two weeks ago and know that they can put up a fight against the Gators.

"Going into [Regionals] we knew they were ranked No. 1 and at the end of the meet, finishing just three-tenths behind them just shows how good we are. We have just as good of a chance as any other team to make it to Super Six," junior Randi Lau said.

Making it to Super Six means being a top six team on the first day of the competition and competing in

the second day of the event. The Nittany Lions have never made it to the Super Six.

Penn State will start the competition this weekend on floor. Musgrove is looking forward to this event most.

"We're ranked the ninth in the nation on floor. Ending on floor at regionals, every single person hitting their routines, was so awesome," Musgrove said. "At this meet, we get to start on floor, so hopefully that will get us on a good roll to finish out the whole meet."

This weekend, No. 15 Penn State will compete in the evening session on Friday with No. 1 Florida, No. 4 Alabama, No. 5 Utah, No. 8 UCLA and No. 9 Nebraska. The Nittany Lions will begin with a bye, then proceed to the floor exercise, followed by vault, another bye, uneven bars and finish with balance beam.

The Big Ten has four teams competing this weekend (Penn State, Nebraska, Illinois, Michigan). The Big Ten and the SEC have the most teams competing in the 2014 Championships (Florida, Alabama, LSU, Georgia).

As this season comes to an end, the team is beginning to reflect on the past season. At the end of the 2012-'13 season, coaches Jeff and Rachelle Thompson devised a new plan for the team. The values and fundamentals of the team were going to change for the upcoming season. The gymnasts had to sign on to this new program, without knowing what was to come. Lau, who transferred last year from LSU, said she had to buy in to the Thompson's program, but it really paid off.

"The Thompsons really care about you on a personal level. I believe in their program and what they think. Their coaching styles are so encouraging," Lau said. "I trusted them as coaches to know that their program would work and it did. Here we are on the road to nationals."

The Blue and White's mission for their first-ever trip to the Super Six begins on Friday at 8 pm.

"This opportunity is so amazing and we made it all happen ourselves," Lau said.

Floor Routines Send Lions to Birmingham with Confidence



By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - At the center of most gymnastics arenas and practice facilities lies a blue, chalk dusted, white-tape-outlined, square area. In the 39-foot by 39-foot space, gymnasts combine tumbling, dance, and stunts, while doing their best not to land, leap, or "stick it" out of bounds. For the Penn State women's gymnastics team, this complex event secured its trip to the NCAA Championships.

Gymnastics, a sport that was once dominated by men, didn't officially become an Olympic sport until 1924. Women were not allowed to compete in Olympic gymnastics until 1928, where they were allowed to compete in only one event. Floor performance was one of the last rotations added to the Olympic slate of gymnastics events; women weren't allowed to compete in floor routines until 1948.

Floor performance is the primary event where gymnasts are given a canvas for artistic expression, a canvas that coaches Jeff and Rachelle Thompson allow their gymnast to paint themselves.

"When we came to Penn State, we decided to take a backseat to the choreographing of floor routines," Rachelle said. "We allow our girls to have the most input in this event."

The Nittany Lions' first regular season meet of the 2013-'14 season was at Iowa State, where the team scored 48.600 on floor. Over the course of the next few meets, Penn State was improving dramatically in their overall floor scores.

"We didn't expect floor to become our best event," Rachelle said. "This has always been an event that is unpredictable at the start of the season. Last year we were really weak on floor, but this year, we planned ahead and got the girls ready to compete on floor early."

The coaching philosophies of the Thompsons are unique; their primary focus is building a community within their team. At the beginning of each season they break the team up into event-based teams - floor, bar, beam and vault.

"This system allows for the girls to help each other," Rachelle said. "The floor team developed sooner than any other team. I would have never guessed in October that floor would be our strongest event, but

it is.

There wasn't a meet all season that the Nittany Lions didn't improve on floor. Their consistency and improvement on floor shined in the Feb. 15 meet against No.15 Illinois. Penn State, who was ranked No. 21 at the time, was not favored to win this meet. But, heading into the final rotation of the competition, the Nittany Lions were tied with the Illini. The Thompsons and their gymnasts left Rec Hall that day with a "W" and their highest floor score of the season, 49.375.

Their fate at the NCAA Regional Championships wasn't much different; their qualification to the NCAA Championships rested on their ability to "stick" a near perfect floor rotation. And they did.

"That was a roller coaster of emotions," Rachelle said. "As a coach, I refused to look at the score board. I wanted to stay in the moment and I wanted the girls to stay in the moment. I know floor is our best event, but anything could happen."

The Nittany Lions finished their floor rotation with a score of 49.425 and secured their slot at the NCAA Championships.

"I am excited to see how we match up to the other schools of floor," senior Lindsay Musgrove said. "At this meet [NCAA Championships] we start off the competition on floor. I am hoping that that will get us on a good roll."

The Penn State women's gymnastics team was "Birmingham Bound" Tuesday night, where the team will begin competition on Friday. This is the first time since 2009 that the team earned a spot at the NCAA Championships.

"Our message all year has been 'Just be us,'" Rachelle said. "When we didn't advance last year, we asked the girls to buy into our new system and they committed to it. We tell them all the time to stay present and if we can do that in Alabama, the Super Six is in our reach. What we have accomplished this season has raised the bar for Penn State gymnastics. This is what we do at Penn State."

Nittany Lions Punch Their Ticket to the NCAA Championships



By **Gabrielle Richards**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - Following a superb performance at the NCAA Regional Championships on Saturday in Rec Hall, the Nittany Lion women's gymnastics team is headed to the NCAA Championships for the first time since 2009.

"Well, if you were in the building you know how exciting that was," head coach Jeff Thompson said. "We had the right rotation tonight."

Florida, Oregon State, Kentucky, Maryland, New Hampshire and Penn State were the teams competing in the overall team competition, with gymnasts from Brown, Cornell, Pittsburgh and the Bridgeport competing as individuals.

The NCAA gymnastics championships are very different from March Madness. According to NCAA rules, the top two performing teams and the top two all-around competitors (who are not from an advancing team) from each regional site receive automatic berth to the NCAA Championships.

After six rotations, Florida and Penn State secured those top positions with scores of 197.050 and 196.725, respectively.

"This is something that we have been working for since the day that I walked onto campus," senior Cassidy Stauder said. "We've been so close the last three years and to finally qualify in Rec Hall is the best feeling ever. It really showed the hard work that this team has put in since preseason started. It shows how close we have become as a team throughout this year and how much trust we have in one another."

The Nittany Lions started off their first rotation on vaults, where freshman Emma Sibson and junior Sydney Sanabria-Robles earned scores of 9.90. Also competing for Penn State on vault were Stauder, Randi Lau, Krystal Welsh and Lindsay Musgrove. The team finished with an overall vault score of 49.300.

"I think we all knew what we had to hit [tonight]," Sanabria-Robles said. "We had that focus and excitement in us. We knew we could do it and we just went out there and did what [our coaches] have been telling us all along: just be us and have fun."

Stauder led the team with a score of 9.875 on bars, with junior Alex Witt and Sanabria-Robles who contributed scores of 9.850 and 9.800. Also competing for Penn State on bars were Welsh, Nicole Medvitz and Samantha Musto. The team finished with an overall bars score of 49.050.

Penn State was then slated to compete on beam, which coach Thompson believed was the team's "shaky" event.

"Beam scores were a little tight and they stayed tight all night," Thompson said.

Lau and Sibson were the top beam performers for the Nittany Lions with scores of 9.800 and 9.825. The team finished their beam rotation with a total score of 48.950.

Penn State received a bye-rotation after their beam performance, giving coach Thompson ample time for a locker room pep talk.

"When I walked into the locker room [during our bye in the fifth rotation], I said to the girls 'Do you want to know the score?'" Thompson said. "And they said 'Yes, I mean we are going to see it anyways.' I told them we were down by one-tenth of a point. We knew Oregon State was going into their best event; they are ranked eighth in the country on balance beam. We also knew we were going into our best event ranked ninth on the floor exercise."

The Nittany Lions shined in their floor rotation. Sanabria-Robles, Lau and Musgrove each earned scores of 9.90, with Sibson, Welsh and Stauder earning scores of 9.850 or above. The team earned the highest floor score of the regional tournament with a 49.425, securing the birth to the NCAA Championships.

"There is no other way I would rather to leave Rec Hall than to qualify to the NCAA Championships with my team," Stauder said. "It was an incredible way to go out."

"After the season ended last year, we had a meeting and the coaches talked to us about some changes that we were going happen; a culture change and other adjustments that we were going to make," Sanabria-Robles said. "We made the commitment and now we are headed to nationals. Obviously it worked."

The Nittany Lions will make their way to the NCAA Championships in Birmingham, Ala., on April 18-20. For the first time in five years, Penn State will be competing as a full team.

"We have a lot of fun," Thompson said. "We accomplished our goal. Now we have a new goal, the Super Six."

Nittany Lions advance to NCAAs

BY RYNE GERY - rgery@centredaily.com

UNIVERSITY PARK — When Penn State finished its floor routine, the Nittany Lions faithful unrolled a white banner featuring red capital letters and an exclamation point that signaled the fulfillment of a goal that's eluded the program for the last four years.

"BIRMINGHAM BOUND!" the banner read, referring to Birmingham, Ala., the site of the NCAA Championships.

No. 15 Penn State finished second to No. 1 Florida at the NCAA Regional Championships at Rec Hall on Saturday to earn its first berth to nationals since 2009. The Nittany Lions recorded a team score of 196.725. The Gators finished with a 197.050, and No. 12 Oregon State grabbed third with a 196.525.

Penn State junior Sidney Sanabria-Robles and senior Cassidy Stauder finished third and fifth in the all-around, respectively. Sanabria-Robles and freshman Emma Sibson were tied for third in the vault to help the Nittany Lions get off to a strong start in the first rotation. And Sanabria-Robles, junior Randi Lau and senior Lindsay Musgrove each scored 9.9 to tie for fourth in the floor exercise, feeding off the home crowd's energy to clinch Penn State's spot in the NCAA Championships to be held April 18-20.

"We just really used that energy to fuel us to do awesome floor routines and come out with the win," Stauder said. "Well, not the win, but qualify. It's a win to us. It feels like a win."

Penn State went into the final rotation with a score of 147.3, trailing Florida's 147.5 and Oregon State's 147.4.

Nittany Lions coach Jeff Thompson reminded his team that it was heading into its best event, the floor exercise, where it's ranked No. 9 in the country. He told them Oregon State would also finish in its best event, the balance beam, where it's ranked No. 8 in the country. And then he told them to be themselves and have fun.

Sanabria-Robles took that advice and started the Nittany Lions final event with a bang.

She elicited roars from the fans after her first two landings and brought them to their feet by the end of her routine. When her score of 9.9 was revealed, the crowd erupted again.

And Lau picked up right where her teammate left off, matching her 9.9. Stauder recorded a 9.875, Sibson finished with a 9.850 and Musgrove scored another 9.9 to push Penn State's team score to 196.725. After Penn State junior Krystal Welsh scored 9.850 to complete the Nittany Lions' day, the fans revealed the banner. The Nittany Lions were going to the NCAA Championships.

"I think we all knew we had to hit," Sanabria-Robles said. "And we had that excitement in us, and we knew we could do it."

That confidence was the product of a change Thompson made in the program after Penn State finished fourth in the NCAA Regionals last year. The coach challenged his athletes to be more dedicated. He wanted to see them put academics first and gymnastics second. Everything else came third.

"After our season ended last year, we had a meeting and the coaches talked to us about some changes that we're going to go through," Sanabria-Robles said. "And a culture change and other adjustments that we're going to make, and we did them, and it got us this."

Thompson credited his upperclassmen for getting everyone to buy into his system this season. Stauder said she and her teammates owned that new mentality focused on taking pride in being a Division-I athlete.

It ultimately led to Penn State's success.

“At the beginning of the season, I don’t think a lot of people expected a lot from us,” Thompson said. “We graduated some superstars, and it just speaks volumes to the hard work these girls have put in, how much they believe in each other, how much they believe in the coaches and the system.”

Any sacrifice made for that system was worth it Saturday.

The Nittany Lions proudly took their place as a team at the second-place spot on the podium. They unfurled the same banner their fans did earlier in the day, another reminder their season will continue on the sport’s biggest stage.

“To me, it’s something that we’ve been working for since day one that I walked into Rec Hall at Penn State,” Stauder said. “We haven’t qualified. We’ve been so close to qualifying all the years that I’ve been here, and to finally qualify in Rec Hall is the best feeling ever.”

Penn State qualifies for NCAA Championships

By Makiala Yates | Collegian Staff Writer

Coach Jeff Thompson walked into the girls' locker room during the Nittany Lions' bye rotation before the last event and asked if the team wanted to know the score.

When they said they did, he told them that they were down one-tenth of a point to No. 1 Florida. In order to qualify for the NCAA Championships, they would have to finish in the top two, and the team was feeling pressure from No. 12 Oregon State.

"We knew Oregon State was going into their best event, they are ranked eighth in the country on balance beam," Thompson said. "We also knew we were going into our best event ranked ninth on the floor exercise. I told them to just go out there and do what they do every day in practice: Go out there and be us."

The home crowd was electric as the Lions went out and nailed their routines.

Scores of 9.900 from Sydney Sanabria-Robles, Randi Lau and Lindsay Musgrove helped move the team into second place and allowed them to qualify for the NCAA Championships in Birmingham, Ala.

As the last score was posted, the Penn State section in the stands rolled out a banner that said "Birmingham Bound," which was especially meaningful for senior Cassidy Stauder, who competed for the last time in Rec Hall.

"We had a huge fan section of our alumni and our family," Stauder said. "We really used that energy to fuel us to do well, especially during our floor routines, and it helped us come out with a qualifying spot for nationals. There is no other way I would rather want to leave Rec Hall than to qualify to the NCAA Championships with my team. It was an incredible way to go out."

Stauder, who received All-American honors two weeks ago, had another solid performance, finishing fifth in the all-around competition.

Like she has all season, Sanabria-Robles also competed well, taking third in the all-around.

"I think we all knew what we had to hit [tonight]," Sanabria-Robles said. "We had that focus and excitement in us. We knew we could do it and we just went out there and did what [our coaches] have been telling us all along: just be us and have fun."

This is the first time the team has qualified for the championship meet since 2009.

Thompson said after graduating important seniors last year, he sat down with the team and had a talk about what needed to happen to get back.

"When the last two graduated last year we went to them at the end of the season and said, 'If you want to make nationals, if you want to be one of the top team, these are the things you need to buy into,'" Thompson said.

"Everybody decided that they were going to buy into the system. We have a lot of fun. We accomplished our goal. Now we have a new goal, Super Six."

The NCAA Championships will begin on April 18.

The team plans to use its past success as a foundation to continue building.

"This speaks volumes to the hard work that these girls have put in and how much they believe in each other, how much they believe in the coaching staff and our system," Thompson said. "They have been super consistent, having a lot of fun, and we are going to have even more fun in Birmingham."

Women's Gymnastics Keys to NCAA Regionals



By **Samantha DelRosso**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - During each week this past November, the Penn State women's gymnastics coaches, Jeff and Rachelle Thompson, gave the team a letter. With this letter, the team would pick a motivating word that began with that letter. Then, during each week this season, the word they chose in November would resurface as, "The Word of The Week."

This week, the team has two words leading up to the NCAA Regional Championships this weekend - 'Wow' and 'Inspire'.

"If we do well and finish first or second, then, 'Wow. We made it to Nationals.' But we're going to have to have inspired performances in order to do that," Jeff Thompson said.

Senior Kassidy Stauder said that these two words are important because she wants to go to Regionals and "wow" everyone and make it to Nationals. If the team places first or second this weekend, they will advance to the NCAA National Championships for the first time as a team since 2009.

"We need to go in there and inspire one another and also inspire the upcoming teams to make a new tradition of making it to Nationals every year," Stauder said.

The team decided to combine the two words of the week to make an acronym. They took the first letter in 'wow' and the first two letters in 'inspire' to create 'WIN' - What's Important Now.

"This means just focusing on staying in moment. And what's important to us is hitting our routines and doing our best to progress on to the next meet," senior Lindsay Musgrove said.

Some of the gymnasts competing in NCAA Regionals found their "keys" to being successful in the meet this weekend:

Kassidy Stauder: Confidence

"Go in there with confidence and having fun. Remember that our best is good enough and do what we do every day."

Sidney Sanabria-Robles: Compete as if it were warm ups

"Stay calm and do everything as if it was warm up. In warm up, I'm not thinking about anything, and it actually turns out really good. Just stay relax and think 'warm up'."

Randi Lau: Focus

"We have to focus on the details and sticking our landings, because we are a Top 12 team and we're really capable of making it to Nationals. We just have to stay focused and finish really [well] on floor."

Krystal Welsh: Having fun

"Just have fun and do exactly what we do in practice."

Coach Jeff Thompson: Hitting routines

"The most important thing for everyone is to hit routines. If everyone hits, then it's going to come down to stuck landings."

Lindsay Musgrove: Compete freely

"We've put in all of the preparation up until now, so we don't need to stress or worry. I think just have fun and compete freely and just let ourselves do our gymnastics because we all know how to great routines. We hit them in the gym every day."

In the NCAA Regional Championships this weekend, No. 15 Penn State will take on No. 1 Florida, No. 12 Oregon State, No. 23 New Hampshire, Kentucky, and Maryland. Penn State is the No. 3 seed.

Catch the Nittany Lions at home in Rec Hall for the last time this season on Saturday at 4 p.m.

Women's Gymnastics Big Ten Roundup - We Are... Us



By **Samantha DelRosso**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - It was an electric atmosphere in Rec Hall on Saturday, as it housed the 2014 Big Ten Women's Gymnastics Championships. Fans from many of the Big Ten schools filled the gymnasium, cheering for their teams and sporting their team's colors, in hopes of a Big Ten Championship title.

The seventh-ranked Michigan Wolverines were declared the 2014 Big Ten Champions, scoring a 197.550. The Nittany Lions finished fifth with a score of 196.475.

Hosting the championship event at home provided an advantage for the Nittany Lions, having their fans behind them. But the Lions also fed off of the energy of the opposing teams' fans.

"At every championship meet, it's crazy loud," senior Cassidy Stauder said. "It's really great to feel that energy coming off of our fans, but also the energy coming off of all of the other teams. Even though they might be routing for Michigan or Nebraska, they are all routing for gymnastics."

The gymnasts themselves were just as energetic from start to finish. No. 15 Penn State began on the floor exercise and the team's energy busted through the navy blue barriers that the teams stood behind for each event.

The floor exercise was the Nittany Lions' highest score of the day, recording a team total of 49.425. Head coach Jeff Thompson expressed how impressed he was with each gymnast's performance.

"We got off to a great start. Emma [Sibson]'s floor routine was outstanding. She had very difficult tumbling and she nailed all of it. Krystal's tumbling was very difficult, she nailed all of it," Thompson said. "They got on a roll and they built off of each other."

Stauder prepared for her floor routine with a pep talk from assistant coach Rachele Thompson.

"Rachele always runs us through our entire routine from the dance, to the first tumbling pass, to what we're going to do; just a little reminder before you do your routine. And she knows all of our routines so well," Stauder said.

Stauder scored a 9.875 on the floor exercise on Saturday, 0.125 points higher than her previous routine in the meet at Michigan on March 15.

"At the Michigan quad meet, I went a tad bit crooked on my last pass, so I was definitely working on that this week, so I didn't get the deduction on being right in the corner," Stauder said. "I just felt more confident on my floor routine this week. I was really working on that in gym, fixing little things so that I could feel that confidence today."

Stauder earned All-Conference Team honors and tied for both second place on the uneven bars and fifth place overall with a score of 39.425.

"It's more about the team for me and I've always gone out there for the team, but it's cool my senior year, letting all my hard work show off to our fans," Stauder said.

In preparation for the Big Ten championship meet, Jeff Thompson focused on telling the gymnasts that what they do is good enough.

"We don't have to try to be better than what we are. That's when mistakes happen; when you're trying to do something you don't normally do," Thompson said. "[On Friday night] we talked about [the term] 'We Are...' and I wrote, 'Us'. That's who we are."

The Nittany Lions placed second on the uneven bars, scoring a 49.300. The team recorded a 49.250 on vault, which was the fourth-highest team vault score of the day. Penn State finished on the balance beam, scoring a 48.500, coming in fifth place.

In order to improve and build from this meet, Stauder said the team needs to work on confidence and knowing that "their best is good enough."

"We just need to go out there and do what we do every day at the White Building," Stauder said.

Penn State will not host the Big Ten Championships for another 10 years, as it rotates from school to school each year.

"We told the girls, you will bring your children back the next time Penn State hosts," Thompson said.

Next up for the Nittany Lions is the NCAA Regional Championships, in their home gym again. The team's goal is to finish first or second to advance to the 2014 NCAA Championships in Birmingham, Ala.

Stauder said the team will be preparing for the NCAA Regional Championships by working hard on beam, gaining confidence on beam and working on the small details to improve everyone's scores.

Penn State is expected to be the No. 3 seed in the Regional Championships meet. The Nittany Lions will start on vault and end on floor, which is the team's typical rotation at home meets.

"It's going to be the same set up, all of the equipment is in the same places, all the same mats, it's all of our stuff, we know exactly what to expect," Thompson said. "We will get to go vault, BYE, bars, beam, BYE and then come out and rock floor at the end, and we'll know exactly what [score] we need [on floor] to win."

Michigan wins Big Ten title, Penn State falters to fifth

BY GORDON BRUNSKILL - gbrunskill@centredaily.com

UNIVERSITY PARK — A bobble here or there can be all the difference in gymnastics. A fall can be downright devastating.

Knowing it needed to be nearly perfect on the balance beam — the final rotation for the Penn State women's gymnastics team — the Nittany Lions instead had two falls among its six competitors.

It dropped Penn State from being the runner-up, with an outside shot at winning, down to fifth place at the Big Ten Championships on Saturday at Rec Hall.

Setting the bar by competing in the day's early session, Michigan captured its 20th conference crown on the same floor on which the men's team earned the national title 11 months earlier.

"At first it was like, 'Oh, wow,'" senior Kassidy Stauder said of seeing Michigan's score. "But we really came together and go out there because our best is good enough. We tried to do that tonight. We came up a little short at the end, but our first three events showed how great we were."

The Wolverines, with the top team totals on three of four apparatus, finished with a team total of 197.550 to easily take the title, while two-time defending champion Nebraska followed with a 196.950.

Penn State compiled a 196.475 team total in the eight-team field, broken into two four-team sessions.

"We still wouldn't have caught Michigan — their lead was too great," coach Jeff Thompson said. "But we host the (NCAA) Regionals in two weeks ... and the goal all year has been to advance to the nationals."

The Nittany Lions had posted strong scores, fractions behind the Wolverines, on each of its first three events in the floor exercise, vault and uneven bars.

"We got out momentum going," said Stauder, who tied for fifth in the all-around race with a 39.425 total. "We were really excited and got to use that power and good scores to work off that in the next event."

Even before the evening session began, the Nittany Lions knew how tough the road ahead was.

"We were just focusing on what we needed to do," said Krystal Welsh, who was fourth in the all-around at 39.500. "We just wanted to be us, be in our bubble, and that's exactly what we did."

Penn State needed a 49.575 total — averaging 9.915 per athlete — on the balance beam just to match the Wolverines.

But freshman Emma Sibson and junior Randi Lau each fell off the beam to crush the team's hopes. With five scores counting among the six competitors, only one low round could be wiped away, and Sibson's 9.075 had to be counted.

"The balance beam is only four inches wide, and sometimes they fall," Thompson said. "We had a freshman that was very nervous before the start of the last event, we spoke with her. She looked like she was calm, she said she got herself calmed down, but she was just a little crooked. When you're off, you're off, and then when (Lau) followed her, she had a lot of pressure not to fall."

The Nittany Lions dropped all the way from second place with the way they had been rolling.

"We really hadn't had a meet like that in a while where everything was the way it is in the gym," Thompson said. "When we got to the beam, I think everyone expected us to pull it off. Krystal got us off to a good start with a wobble-free routine ... but freshmen are going to be freshmen."

Penn State had posted three of the top scores on the beam, with Stauder and Nicole Medvitz part of a

three-way tie for fourth with a 9.875 and Welsh in a four-way tie for seventh at 9.850. Sidney Sanabria-Robles tied for 11th at 9.825.

“We were psyched, but to have that one fall, we were like, ‘All right, we just have to come back,’” Welsh said. “But having two — I’m just proud of our last three girls who went out there and hit it out of the park. That’s what we needed to get to fifth place.”

Among other top Nittany Lion scores, Stauder tied for second on the bars with a 9.900, and Welsh and Sibson tied for fifth on the vault with a 9.900.

Minnesota’s Lindsay Mable in the vault, and Michigan’s Joanna Sampson and Nebraska’s Emily Wong in the floor exercise each posted perfect scores of 10.

Sampson also was third in the all-around for the Wolverines and had the top score on the uneven bars, and teammate Austin Sheppard was second in the vault.

Mable was crowned the all-around champion with her 39.650 total.

Other conference award winners included Freshman of the Year Nicole Artz of Michigan, Gymnast of the Year Wong of Nebraska and Coach of the Year Meg Stephenson of Minnesota.

Penn State will host the NCAA Regional meet April 5.

“It hurts, but we have one more shot in regionals,” Welsh said. “We’re just going to lay it out there.”

Big Ten Championships Preview - Pride of the Process



By **Samantha DelRosso, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- With "heart" and "energy", the Penn State women's gymnastics team will take on the Big Ten Championships this weekend. The Nittany Lions are hosting the competition for the first time in seven years.

Each week, the Lions choose one word for the "Word of the Week" to focus on before each meet. This week, however, with it being a championship meet, the team decided to focus on two words: heart and energy.

"The heart of our team is just amazing. Our chemistry, helping one another every time we get up [for an event]," junior Krystal Welsh said.

With the championship meet being at home for the Lions, there is sure to be a lot of "energy."

"Because it's in our house, there is going to be a whole lot of energy and we're going to bring a lot of energy too," senior Kassidy Stauder said. "It's championship season, it's championship competition. So it's that much more exciting."

Hosting the championship meet provides familiarity and the opportunity for a large cheering section for the Nittany Lions.

"I'm just so excited to hear our fans in the stands. Any time we go to Big Tens anywhere, we only have a certain amount of people there. This will have family, friends, and other athletes cheering us on," Welsh said. "It makes it so much easier to compete in our own arena, too."

The 14th-ranked Nittany Lions will be competing in Session Two at 5 p.m. on Saturday with No. 8 Michigan, No. 9 Nebraska and No. 13 Illinois. The Lions defeated Illinois and Michigan, but fell to Nebraska at home earlier in the season.

"Everyone is a tough competitor because it depends on who shows up that night," Stauder said. "But looking at the season, [the toughest competitor] would be Nebraska. We lost to them at a home meet and we definitely want to protect our house against them."

Leading up to the meet, the Nittany Lions will be doing different many things to prepare.

In practice, the group worked on the "little details".

"We're definitely going to work on sticks. That's always our only downfall," Stauder said. "At our last meet, we had an incredible meet, but we just left some tenths out there on the floor with sticks."

The night before the meet, the gymnasts and coaches come together for a team meeting. On the day of the meet, the team has a "POP" meeting. "POP" means "Pride of the Process". In this meeting, the gymnasts participate in mental routines and get themselves in the competition mode.

Welsh and Stauder found the three "keys" to being successful in the Big Ten Championships:

1. Have fun:

"We do our best when we are having fun. Our coaches always say that our best is good enough," Stauder said. "We just need to go out there and have fun and do our best."

2. Transferring what the team does in practice into the meets:

"It's important to transfer what we do in the White Building to what we're going to do in Rec Hall, not letting the crowd or the judges sitting watching let that affect us," Stauder said.

3. Confidence:

"Go out there and know that everything in the universe is going to happen the way it's supposed to," Stauder said.

"We know we're going to hit. We know we are going to do well," Welsh said.

The Coaching Clause in Marriage Vows: Thompsons In It 'For Better or Worse'



By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - It's a rather unusual thing, a husband and wife coaching, together. For Jeff and Rachelle Thompson, coaching together is a normal activity, one that has occupied 15 of their 21 years of marriage.

The year was 1991. Jeff was in his second season as a full time coach at the University of Wisconsin and Rachelle was a senior at Louisiana State University. Wisconsin had just announced that they were dropping five varsity sports that year, one of which was gymnastics.

"They made the announcement right before NCAA regionals and we had a gymnast qualify," Jeff said. "So, I went to coach her at the tournament while the head coach stayed home to fight the legal battle."

Rachelle, a three-time NCAA All-American was set to compete at the regional tournament at Auburn University.

"We were in the bookstore at Toomer's Corner and we literally ran into each other," Rachelle said.

"We knew each other, but we had never spoken to each other," Jeff added.

After the tournament, Jeff asked Rachelle to come and coach at one of Wisconsin's summer camps and a year later they were married.

No, the dynamic duo didn't do back-handsprings down the aisle, as Jeff isn't a gymnast. He is a rugby player turned gymnastics coach, a passion he developed through his master's degree in biomechanics and through his childhood involvement at the local YMCA.

"I have always been interested in the science behind gymnastics," Jeff said. "I have always been passionate about the sport. My high school graduation ring has a gymnast on the side of it and my high school didn't even have a gymnastics team. It's weird, I know."

The pair began coaching together at Auburn University in 1999. At the start of their tenure with the Tigers,

Jeff was the head coach and Rachelle served as a choreographer and volunteer coach. She was promoted to assistant coach in 2002 and associate head coach in 2006. In the duo's time with the Tigers they produced four NCAA All-Americans, four All-SEC team members, three SEC gymnasts of the year, nine NCAA Championship qualifiers and four NCAA regional event champions.

"We have learned a lot about each other over the years," Rachelle said. "We have learned to balance our working relationship and our marriage in a unique way that makes it enjoyable."

If you have the opportunity to watch the Thompsons coach, you will see Rachelle doing some of the motions of her girls' routines, while Jeff is relaxed, watching from the sidelines.

"We don't normally fight with each other, but if we do its always about gymnastics," Jeff said with a laugh.

"But, I am always right," Rachelle chimed in.

And like any smart husband, Jeff agreed.

The Thompsons traded in their orange and navy blue coaching jackets in 2010 in exchange for the Big Ten coaching position at Penn State.

"This was a huge turning point for us," Rachelle said. "We came here wanting to win a national championship."

The Thompsons had an incredible freshman-coaching season in the Big Ten. Their team placed second at the 2011 Big Ten Championships and was the No. 2 seed heading into the NCAA Regional Championships.

"I think we were blessed with two sons because every year we have 15 daughters," Jeff said.

The duo has its coaching methods down to a science, but the true success as coaches is visible in the classroom. Winning an all-around championship is always a resume-worthy accomplishment, but coupled with a strong academic record, one is unstoppable. From their time at Auburn to their current position at Penn State, there has never been a year where the two haven't had a handful of Academic All-Americans.

"Coaching together has definitely influenced our parenting," Rachelle said. "I want to coach the girls to our best ability, but I also want to prepare them for their life after gymnastics. I can teach them how to flip in the air, but I can also teach them how to do their laundry, manage their money and grocery shop."

This year marks their fourth season with the Nittany Lions and so far, they have only lost two meets and secured the first 20-win season in the program's history. Penn State is ranked No. 3 in the Big Ten and No. 14 in the NCAA standings.

"We measure our success over the past four years by looking at Cassidy [Stauder] and Lindsay [Musgrove]," Rachelle said.

"I am proud of the gymnasts and people that have become," Jeff said.

"They are just amazing," Rachelle said.

It is obvious that the pair loves nothing more than to coach by each other's side, a reality that is a primary ingredient in their coaching philosophy. For 15 years the Thompsons have spent most of their days together, in the same gym, with the same people, but they wouldn't have it any other way.

"I couldn't imagine a day without coaching with him," Rachelle said. "We are best friends."

Gymnasts will focus on details, depth in quad meet

Kendall Brodie | Collegian Staff Writer

With just two meets left before the Big Ten Championships, coach Jeff Thompson said at this point in the season the team's preparation doesn't change much from week to week.

And for a team that continues to out-perform itself and its opponents, more of the same may not be such a bad thing.

The team has bested its season-high score four times this season, which is second-highest among Big Ten teams. The Nittany Lions left last weekend's meet with their second-highest overall score, as well as new season highs on vault and uneven bars.

Thompson's group hopes to continue its strong performance as it travels to New Hampshire on Saturday for a quad meet with Bridgeport and George Washington.

"Right now, it's about hitting routines and sticking dismounts," Thompson said. "Focusing on the little things."

While the team defeated Bridgeport in last week's meet, Thompson does not believe it gives his team an advantage.

"There isn't defense in gymnastics. We could be competing against the No. 1 team or the No. 100 team — we're still going to do the same routines," Thompson said.

A large contributor to the offense this season is freshman Emma Sibson, who was recognized as Big Ten Freshman of the Week for her showing last weekend.

"She's living up to the potential, she's living up to the hype and she's doing what we planned for her to do," Thompson said.

Though Sibson is certainly a standout, for the first time in his four years at Penn State, there is no superstar on the team, Thompson said.

"Everybody has a role to play, and everybody has an equal role," Thompson said. "Our chemistry is great."

This weekend, the Lions will capitalize on nearly every gymnast's role, as the team faces its healthiest self yet.

Juniors Lexi Carroll and Alex Witt have returned from a broken finger and thumb surgery, respectively, and are expected to perform Saturday.

Junior Randi Lau, who suffered a concussion during a meet in late February, was cleared on Thursday and is expected to compete on vault and perform exhibition routines, Thompson said.

"We have more depth and more bodies than we've had all season," Thompson said. "We have to decide to stick with what we have or to try something different—whatever is going to maximize our score."

Regardless of line-up, Thompson remains confident in his team's ability for Saturday's meet and for the rest of the season.

"They're fighters," Thompson said. "They just don't quit."

Nittany Lions Close Out Quad Meet With A Win, Touching Tribute To Seniors



By **Gabrielle Richards**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - As the Penn State women's gymnastics team funneled into the locker room before Friday's meet, they knew that they had to win. The win wouldn't just signify a near-perfect home record, but it would be the icing on top of the cake for the seniors. Emotions were running high as the Nittany Lions made their way onto the mat; each teammate presented a little, handmade gift to the seniors.

The team delivered a solid, heartwarming performance in their win at Friday's quad meet. The Nittany Lions won their last home meet of the season with a score of 196.600, beating Western Michigan, Bridgeport, and Yale.

Across the board, the Nittany Lions delivered a solid performance; a great close to the home season for seniors Lindsay Musgrove and Cassidy Stauder.

Penn State started the quad meet on vault with a lineup much shorter than they are used to. After suffering injuries at last week's meet, junior all-rounder Randi Lau did not compete. With her absence, the Nittany Lions competed with five vaulters, instead of the usual six. Musgrove and Stauder scored 9.850, with Emma Sibson, Krystal Welsh, and Sidney Sanabria-Robles each scoring a 9.875, posting a total event score of 49.325.

Head coach Jeff Thompson was most impressed with his team's vault performance, the event that housed the their highest score of the evening.

"With it being senior night, I was a little worried that we weren't going to have a great night," Thompson said. "We only had five girls compete on vault and they each knew they had to hit. We got off to a great start."

The team followed suit on bars with Stauder posting a 9.925 and junior Alex Witt posting a career high 9.850 in her first meet after recovering from an injury. The team finished their rotation on the uneven bars

with a score of 49.225.

"What a great way for Alex [Witt] to come back," Thompson said. "She put up the second highest score on bars."

The Nittany Lions put up a score of 49.075 on balance beam and 48.975 on floor, sweeping the top three spots in the all-around.

"What a great way to win on senior night," Thompson said. "The kids fell back on their training and they did what they had to do to win."

Saying Goodbye to Musgrove and Stauder

Musgrove, Stauder and Coach Thompson each started their Penn State careers at the same time four years ago. In a touching video tribute to the seniors prior to the awards ceremony and in the post-match press conference, it was clear how much these seniors mean to their coaching staff. It was hard to miss the tears welling up in Coach Thompson's eyes as he reminisced on his seniors.

"It is always hard to say goodbye to seniors, but this class is different," Thompson said. "They are the first group who started and finished with us. Those girls signed up for one thing and were stuck with us. We give them a lot of credit and a lot of thanks because it would have been easy for them to change their mind and go somewhere else."

Musgrove made her transition to Penn State in 2010; she quickly adjusted to the rigorous schedule of Big Ten gymnastics and relished at the opportunity to succeed academically. The Texas native has not only been a major contributor on vault, balance beam and floor for the Nittany Lions, but she has been recognized for equally impressive performance in the classroom. Musgrove was awarded Academic All-Big Ten honors and Big Ten Distinguished Scholar Awards every season except her freshman year, making the dean's list all but one semester.

"Being able to represent such an amazing school and being a part of a team is a whole other family away from home," Musgrove said. "It has been an amazing four years."

Musgrove has competed in the NCAA Regional Championships each year of her collegiate gymnastics career. She reflected on her first time competing in Rec Hall and how that experience has fueled her passion for the past four years.

"When you compete in club gymnastics there is only one set of bleachers and you perform in front of your family," Musgrove said. "Competing in Rec Hall is just so different than that. There are fans in the stands, your classmates, and even little girls who look up to you. Being able to do what I have been training for since I was 2 is just amazing."

Musgrove will graduate this semester with a degree in bio behavioral health, with the intention of going to medical school. She hopes to use her degree to continue her passion for sports; trading in her leotard for a lab coat and become a sports medicine doctor.

"We have grown so much over the past four years," Stauder said. "I am happy I go through this experience with Lindsay [Musgrove]."

Stauder has made a lasting impact competitively on the Penn State women's gymnastics team. She encompasses the definition of consistency, striving to finish on the top of the leaderboard in every event that she competes in.

"We have been afforded such a great opportunity to be here," Stauder said. "From our professors, teammates, coaches, nutritionists, and everyone who has helped make this time the best for us, we have been given the opportunity to go so far."

As a Pennsylvania girl born and bred, coming to Penn State has always been a dream of Stauder's. In the course of her four years as a Nittany Lion she has constantly set the bar higher for herself, beating her career bests on a regular basis. This Friday's meet was no different: she set a new career high all-around

score with a 39.425.

"I wasn't really thinking about the all-around score going into the meet," Stauder said. "It's a great feeling on senior night to go out with great scores and to improve week after week."

Stauder is hoping to beat her scores of last year's Big Ten performance where she finished third in the all-around, took second on the balance beam, and tied for fifth on bars and floor. She hopes that when she turns her tassel in May that she can improve last year's scores as she has been doing all season. Stauder will graduate with a degree in elementary education and with a personality perfectly suited for teaching.

"I think what I will miss the most about those two is that they are unpredictable," Thompson said. "Every day in the gym it is always something different. This is one of the closest teams that I have ever had the pleasure of coaching. They genuinely love each other."

Coach Thompson is notorious for sharing a "word of the week" with his team. When asked if he had one word to describe his seniors he didn't hesitate when he chose the word "fabulous."

Stauder and Musgrove 'Focus On The Details' For Senior Meet



By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - Week in and week out the Penn State women's gymnastics team strives to "compete how they practice." Head coach Jeff Thompson believes that this is the key to winning big meets and scoring a lot of points. For seniors Lindsay Musgrove and Cassidy Stauder, being consistent comes naturally, but it's the little details that prove to be the most difficult.

"Gymnastics is based on the tiny little details," Musgrove said. "Nerves make you a little shaky or you might want to push harder to do better in a meet, but that never works in your favor. That is why we try to compete how we train every single day. We have been sticking all the time in practice, so we just have to keep doing the same thing."

Over the past few weeks, the Nittany Lions have not only been consistent, they have been putting up impressive scores. Coming off of a 196.150-197.225 loss to No.8 Nebraska on Feb.8, Penn State used the close match as a measuring stick of comparison, realizing they can compete against the big teams. The Feb. 15 match proved just that: Penn State beat No.15 Illinois 196.675-195.600.

"That meet against Illinois really built our confidence," Musgrove said. "We have been working on all of the little details in practice and we are hoping to see the same thing happen this weekend."

The Nittany Lions return to Rec Hall this Friday after winning a quad meet at Rutgers last weekend, besting Rutgers, Temple and Ursinus with a first place score of 195.825. Penn State will host a quad meet of its own Friday at 7 p.m., welcoming Yale, Western Michigan and Bridgeport to Happy Valley. This Friday's quad meet will be senior night for Musgrove and Stauder, who will be competing in Rec Hall for the last time before the Nittany Lions host the Big Ten Championships on March 22.

To encourage the mantra of "competing how you practice," Coach Thompson offers a "word of the week" for his Nittany Lions to use as inspiration in practice and on the competition floor. For this week, the word is "navigate." Penn State returned home last weekend with another "W," but was forced to navigate around an injury suffered by junior all-arounder Randi Lau.

"This weekend is going to be a true test of how well we did navigate with Randi being out," Musgrove

said. "We have to replace her on every event, so we have girls coming back from their injuries to compete this weekend."

Friday's quad meet is the first home meet in almost a month that is not a double dual and Musgrove said that the team would miss having the men's gymnastics team cheering them on.

"Quad meets are really exciting and full of energy," Musgrove said. "I am looking forward to the whole meet over all. It is our last home meet before the Big Tens. Right now, we are trying to get the best home scores we can get so that we will be ranked at the best sport possible."

Aspire to Succeed



By **Samantha DeIRosso**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- At age four, Penn State gymnast Sidney Sanabria-Robles was hanging and swinging on anything and everything. Her parents decided to put her in gymnastics because they thought it would be a good fit. And it was.

Eighteen years later, Sanabria-Robles, is still dominating the vault, floor, uneven bars, and beam, helping the Penn State women's gymnastics be the 20th-ranked team in the country.

Last weekend, Sanabria-Robles placed first in the all-around against No. 14 Illinois with a score of 39.245. She also received the Ann Carr Award, an honor given to the most inspirational female gymnast at each home meet. This was the second time Sanabria-Robles has won this award in her career.

"We work hard in the gym all the time, so it's always nice to get recognized, especially when you actually do what you do in practice in the meet, which is hard for me," Sanabria-Robles said.

The Caguas, Puerto Rico, native is far from her family, but they still support her from miles away.

"I talk to them all of the time. They're always paying attention and making sure I have everything I need. They are just there for me. In everything," Sanabria-Robles said.

In addition to her family, Sanabria-Robles's motivation for gymnastics comes from within herself.

"It's important to do the sport for yourself," Sanabria-Robles said. "As long as you love what you're doing and you have a goal in mind, which our goal is to make it to Nationals as a team, you will be [motivated]."

Before each event, Sanabria-Robles visualizes herself performing her routine perfectly. During the routine, she said she takes it one skill at a time and stays focused and with the process.

The key to a successful performance for Sanabria-Robles begins with transferring what she does in the gym to the meet. The next step is having confidence. Sanabria-Robles said she felt very confident in her performance last weekend against Illinois.

Head coach Jeff Thompson said in the beginning of Sanabria-Robles' Penn State career, her confidence was not where it is today.

"Her gymnastics and competition has gotten so much better because her confidence has grown," Thompson said. "She takes it one skill at a time, one event at a time, and doesn't allow herself to get overwhelmed."

Sanabria-Robles said there are many things the team does to ensure success during meets. First is staying calm and trusting that the work the girls put in is going to transfer itself in the competition. Another important aspect is staying positive. Sticking landings is also an important aspect of the sport that if done correctly, will ensure success.

"From this point forward, sticking is going to be a part of every assignment. There's no point in rewarding them for doing something that doesn't end well," Thompson said "Every step on a landing is a tenth of a point, so the more of those we can eliminate, the higher we can score."

This week in practice, Sanabria-Robles will be working on dismounts and taking her time during routines before she competes this weekend.

As a team, the Nittany Lions will be focusing on the "word of the week" this week in practice. This week's word is "aspire."

"Aspire to get to the next level, aspire to be one day better, which is our slogan for this year. One day better," Sanabria-Robles said.

The "true team" aspect of Penn State gymnastics is Sanabria-Robles's favorite part about being on the team.

"Everyone cares about each other and we go out there and give it our all and everyone is rooting for everyone to do their best," Sanabria-Robles said.

The Nittany Lions are preparing this week to travel to Rutgers, where they will participate in a quad meet against Rutgers, Temple, and Ursinus. Sanabria-Robles said preparing for a quad meet is the same as preparing for a meet against one team.

"We try to think of every meet at the most important meet because we're not going to be thinking about the meet five weeks from now," Sanabria-Robles said. "No matter who you're going against, you're still going to give it your all no matter what."

Although the team will be missing Penn State's THON this weekend because they will be competing, they created a video to show during the "Pep Rally" that recognizes Penn State student-athletes.

Women's Gymnastics 'Stickin' It' To Win

By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

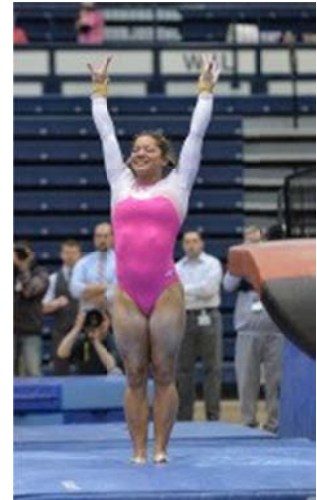
UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - When women's gymnastics' head coach Jeff Thompson walked into the press room after Saturday's meet he had one thing to say, "I knew our girls could do this."

His smile lit up the room as he tried to communicate how proud he was of the performance of his Nittany Lions.

Last weekend's meet against Nebraska was a tough one to watch; seeing the women's gymnastics team tie their season high score, but fall short of a victory because of "sticks." The team's goal for this Saturday's meet was to "stick it," and they rose to the occasion, besting No.15 Illinois 196.675-196.500.

The Nittany Lions started out Saturday's double dual with their vault routines, posting a team score of 49.000. Sidney Sanabria-Robles and Emma Sibson led Penn State's vault program, posting scores of 9.875 and 9.850 respectively.

"We weren't sticking as many vault landings today, but when we got done with our bar rotation I knew we were on a roll," Thompson said. "The girls came to win today."



Kassidy Stauder led Penn State's bar rotation with a score of 9.875, with both Krystal Welsh and Sanabria-Robles posting 9.850 in their bar routines. The team posted a total bar score of 49.125.

Stauder, Welsh and Sanabria-Robles were the top performers in the all-around. Sanabria-Robles took home the gold with an all-around score of 39.425, her first of her collegiate career.

"They [Stauder, Welsh, Sanabria-Robles] gave impressive performances today," Thompson said. "This is a huge confidence booster for them."

Heading into the floor and bar rotation, Illinois was in the lead, but the Nittany Lions quickly answered. Illinois is arguably one of the best beam teams in the Big Ten, a fact that coach Thompson was well aware of heading into the meet.

"Illinois thought they would secure a lead with their beam routine," Thompson said. "We took control in our house, and we showed them who owns Rec Hall."

The Nittany Lions and the Fighting Illini ultimately tied on beam, each posting scores of 49.175.

The most impressive display of how tough the Big Ten gymnastics competition is was during the Nittany Lions' floor routine. After tying Illinois on beam, winning the floor rotation was a must in order to for the Nittany Lions to win. Welsh posted a 9.900, along with Randi Lau, Lindsay Musgrove and Stauder each scoring 9.875.

"We were so excited to go out there and do what we do in practice," Welsh said. "We did that with every routine today. I am so, so happy."

With all of the excitement and impressive performances in this Saturday's meet, it was hard to miss all of the pink in Rec Hall. This weekend's meet was dedicated to breast cancer and the strength of those who are doing their best to "stick it" to the terrible disease.

"Wearing pink today added another element to us wanting to win," Stauder said. "Those women are fighters, they deserve to see our support and know that we are rooting for them."

For coach Thompson, this meet proved two things about his team: that his team is competitive against the elite teams in the conference and that the rest of this season will be nothing short of exciting.

"Heading into the rest of the season and the Big Ten Tournament, I can't wait to see what these girls will do," Thompson said. "We just need to keep competing how we practice. We have to keep taking charge. When you get a team down you have to keep pounding them and keep them down. That is what it takes to be a national championship team."

Women's gymnasts set season-high in upset victory against Illinois

Kendall Brodie | Collegian Staff Writer

In the four years he has been coaching at Penn State, coach Jeff Thompson said he has never had a team with a killer instinct.

But Saturday night, the Nittany Lions' performance against Illinois proved differently.

The No. 21 Lions (9-2, 3-1 Big Ten) defeated No. 15 Illinois (4-3, 2-3 Big Ten) 196.675 – 196.500 in their Flip for the Cure meet alongside the men's team, which also walked out with a win. Junior Sidney Sanabria-Robles placed first in the all-around competition, senior Cassidy Stauder placed second and junior Krystal Welsh placed third, all while achieving personal bests.

After their loss to Nebraska last weekend, the Lions focused on sticking to their routines and performing the way they do in practice.

This week, the team stuck five of its six bars routines and had no falls on beam. Penn State won three of the four events and posted a season high of 49.175 on beam, despite tying Illinois on the event.

"It felt great to take control, to take charge in our house and show them who owns Rec Hall," Thompson said.

The Lions went into floor — their final event of the night — trailing Illinois by .025 of a point, which is where the team proved its relentlessness, Thompson said.

"We killed it. We absolutely killed it," Thompson said. "When you get a team down, you just keep pounding and you keep them down, and that's what we did. And that's what it takes to be a championship team."

Welsh posted a huge 9.900 on the floor routine and season-high on the bars, while Stauder placed second on both bars and beam. Sanabria-Robles won the vault event, tying her best score of 9.875. Junior Randi Lau also scored big numbers for the Lions, tying her personal bests of 9.800 on the beam and 9.875 on the floor.

This win and the team's new season-high score is a huge confidence booster, both Welsh and Stauder said.

"We could see everybody walk in with that face, that confidence, just ready to go, and everybody hit [their routines]," Welsh said. "It brings us together even more."

The pink meet for breast cancer awareness also added another element to the victory.

"Women battling cancer are fighters and we were going out there and fighting," Stauder said. "We were competing for them, we really were."

Penn State now prepares for an away quad meet with Rutgers, Temple and Ursinus before returning home for its senior night on Feb. 28.

As the Big Ten championships approach in late March, Thompson remains confident in the team's current and future performances.

"I like where we are right now," Thompson said. "And I really like our chances."

Emma Sibson: Dedication Vaulting Her to Success

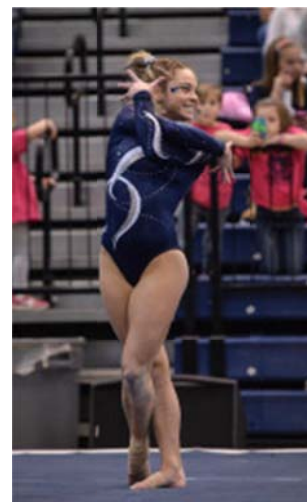
By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - Thirteen years ago, a little girl walked into her first gymnastics class in Victoria, British Columbia. The soft spoken, always smiling Emma Sibson never expected to become completely obsessed with gymnastics.

When Sibson was eight, she realized that going through the motions in a practice facility wasn't going to cut it for her; she wanted to compete. Her family moved to Allen, Texas, where she joined the Dallas based World Olympic Gymnastics Academy (WOGA) and began her competitive career.

Sibson was welcomed with open arms; even at such a young age she showed promise to her coaches'. The WOGA girls took a liking to a young Sibson as soon as she walked through the door. The team operated on a big sister/little sister support system, a system that Sibson says paired her with one of the most "influential big sisters she could have asked for." Sibson got to call none other than 2008 Olympic Gold Medalist Nastia Liukin "big sister."

"I got to train with Nastia (Liukin) and Carly Patterson," Sibson said. "I remember during the Olympic games staying up super late to watch them on television. It was crazy that I knew them and got to practice with them."



In 2004, Sibson transferred to Zenith Elite Gymnastics Academy in McKinney, Texas, where she would become a level 10 gymnast by 2008. Sibson was competing all across the state of Texas, gracing the podium at several local and regional competitions. From the beginning of her competitive career, the vault has always been her happy place.

"For me, vault is the most empowering event," Sibson said. "In every other event, you get to stick a landing multiple times. On vault, you have one opportunity to stick the landing and score points. That's what I love about it."

Sibson's love for vault helped her continue to impress judges at her level 10 competitions. In 2010, Sibson finished first in vault and floor at the Level 10 Regionals in Texas, where she then qualified for the Junior Olympic Nationals. She won the Junior Olympic Vault title and qualified to the Visa Championships and competed at the Elite Canada tournament in Quebec City, where she placed eighth in the all-around, fifth on floor and third in vault. Sibson was named to the British Columbia gymnastics team where she competed at the 2010 Canada Winter Games in Nova Scotia. Her team walked away with a silver medal, and Sibson returned to the States with a bronze medal in vault.

"Being a part of that team was definitely a high point in my career," Sibson said. "It was such a great experience."

Sibson's dedication to the sport goes without saying. She attended high school at Spring Creek Academy in Plano, Texas, a school designed for competitive athletes, where they only went to class for two and a half hours in the afternoon, giving them off in the morning to train.

After her performance in the Canada Winter Games, Sibson and her coaches had their eyes on the Olympics. But, Sibson's Olympic dreams were cut short when she broke her ankle during her senior year at Spring Creek Academy.

"I realized I wanted to go to the Olympic trials when I was competing for Canada Elite," Sibson said. "Sometimes things just aren't meant to be."

Realizing that she would never be able to grace the Olympic podium, she made it her goal to make the collegiate podium her new home; Sibson signed on to become a Nittany Lion.

"Competing in college has always been a dream of mine," Sibson said. "Penn State was the right place to make that happen."

This season, the freshman Nittany Lion has proven to be a vital component to the women's gymnastics team. Sibson is Penn State's top performer in vault with a high score of 9.950, along with contributing top performances on floor and balance beam. Sibson says that she was able to relax her nerves this season because of the seamless transition she experienced in coming to Penn State.

"My coaches made it so easy for me to go from club competition to competing in the Big Ten," Sibson said. "It is so hard to leave home and I wouldn't have been able to do it without them. Your performance is no longer just for yourself, it's for your team."

Sibson has found her home in Happy Valley on the mat, but also with her teammates. She is known to be a goofball, giving her team some laughs and making the best out of every situation. Her light-hearted attitude became clear when she asked her teammates to help her execute a prank on the men's hockey team.

"At Christmas, the guys kept working so hard on decorating their tree," Sibson said. "I decided that I wanted to steal it from them when they were at practice. So I got a few girls to help me. Their reaction to what happened was totally worth it."

When she isn't thinking about ways to make people laugh, Sibson has her eyes set on the Big Ten tournament and helping her team qualify for nationals.

"I am so grateful for the opportunity to compete for such a great school and great team," Sibson said. "Being able to contribute and be on the mat as a freshman is definitely one of the proudest moments for me so far in my career."

Her team's national goals were solidified last weekend in their performance against No. 8 Nebraska. The girls were just tenths of a point behind the Cornhuskers, which gave them the confidence they needed to keep pushing themselves, day after day in practice.

"Last week opened our eyes to what we can do," Sibson said. "We can be a top team. I have no doubt about that."

Sibson and the Nittany Lions take on Illinois this Saturday in a double dual with the men's gymnastics team at Rec Hall.

"I have grown up as competitor and as a person since coming to Penn State," Sibson said. "I am so excited to see what the rest of this season will bring."

Women's gymnastics host coach's former team

Makiala Yates | Collegian Staff Writer

Coach Jeff Thompson will see familiar colors as he leads his team this weekend.

The women's gymnastics team will take on Illinois, a school Thompson was an assistant coach at for two years.

Although the colors may look familiar, the team and coaching staff is completely different from the 1992 and 1993 Illini that Thompson coached and worked with, so his previous experience with the opponent will not provide an advantage.

"It might be an advantage if it was an away meet, knowing your way around, knowing the building, that kind of thing," Thompson said. "I could be coaching someone who is part of my family, but that doesn't help me beat their team."

The Lions are coming off a loss against No. 7 Nebraska and have been working hard this week to improve their routines.

Last weekend, Nebraska stuck 17 out of 18 dismounts compared to Penn State's seven out of 18, Thompson said.

"Every time you step out of bounds it's a tenth of a point, so those 10 add up to the point that we lost by," Thompson said. "So the one thing we need to get better at this weekend is doing a better job of sticking in the gym."

This weekend, the No. 21 Lions and the No. 15 Illini are evenly matched. Thompson said the difference will come down to who performs the best on beam and each team's last event.

One thing the team has been working on is a concept Thompson likes to call "process versus result."

"It's a sports psychology and training technique," Thompson said. "If all you're thinking about is sticking your dismount, you're forgetting to think about how to stick your dismount. Process. But if you're thinking about how to, and you don't think about sticking, you're most likely to get the result you want."

Like last weekend, this will be a double dual meet, and both men and women will be competing against Illinois.

This provides a chaotic, yet exciting, environment for both student-athletes and spectators.

Additionally, this will be a Pink Zone meet, meaning all proceeds will go directly to women's basketball for the Pink Zone. It also helps to get the teams and crowd involved.

"Both women's teams will be in pink and normally the men have pink socks or something," Thompson said. "It's funny to see them in their pink, but we expect a good crowd and it should be an exciting day."

Reviewing the Men's and Women's Gymnastics Double Dual

By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - Saturday's contest at Rec Hall was unique with both Penn State's men's and women's gymnastics teams competing together. As both teams made their way out onto the mat, they engaged the crowd in the infamous "WE ARE" cheer. The women took on the Nebraska Cornhuskers and the men battled it out with the Temple Owls.

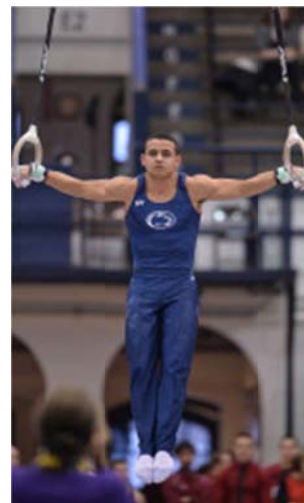
And then there is Trevor Howard...

The sophomore has been the most consistent performer for the Nittany Lions. Howard competes in all but one event. He put up big numbers on parallel bars (15.150) and vault (14.800) against Temple this Saturday.

"I love competing in double duals," said Howard. "The girls are always extremely supportive and it's great to see all of the fans and my family come out."

When Howard stepped out to compete in his high bar rotation, he was the only gymnast on the mat. In what was a chaotic atmosphere for most of the double dual, Rec Hall was silent as they watched Howard put up 14.550 points on the high bar.

"High bar was definitely my best even today," said Howard. "I have been working really hard on it in practice. To be able to come out today, stick the landing and give the crowd a show was awesome."



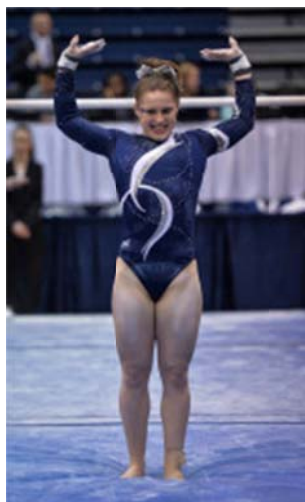
But, being the last to compete is a challenge that Howard welcomes with open arms, as he uses that pressure as preparation for National Team tryouts.

"I try to build off these types of settings and set higher goals for myself," said Howard. "Coach Jepson has me go last to help me prepare for those pressure sets."

Rec Hall's competitive setting isn't just for teams, but for siblings, too

Penn State's women's gymnastics' Krystal Welsh was especially excited for Saturday's double dual. She not only got to compete in front of her parents, but she had the rare opportunity of sharing the mat with her brother and Temple Owl, Jakob Welsh.

"I was so excited to see him compete," said Jakob Welsh. "He was the first person I looked for when I walked on the mat. We both made all-around so that makes me really happy."



Krystal Welsh finished second for Penn State, and fourth in the all-around and Jakob Welsh finished first for Temple.

Stauder's focus and bringing practice performances to competition

Kassidy Stauder is quickly becoming a household name in Big Ten gymnastics, as she owns her performances in uneven parallel bars and beam. The key to her consistent performances, she says, is her effort to perform her routines in competition exactly how she does in practice. Stauder's numbers this weekend illustrate her dedication to the notion, "practice makes perfect."

"Competing how we practice is becoming a team theme," said Stauder. "I warm up the same way for a meet as I do in practice, which helps keep my performance consistency."

Stauder finished behind Nebraska's DeZiel and Emily Wong in the all-around

with 39.350 points.

Season best score gives Nittany Lions hope, despite loss to Nebraska

No. 23 Penn State's women's gymnastics put up a fight against No. 8 Nebraska this Saturday in the double dual. Despite season best score of 196.150, the Nittany Lions fell short of the Cornhuskers' score of 197.225.

Head Coach Jeff Thompson isn't going to let this tough loss hold his team back from improvement. His coaching staff and team will look at the positives.

"We knew we had our work cut out for us heading into today's meet," said Thompson. "We got off to a great start of vault, but I think we got a little too excited."

The Nittany Lions gave the Cornhuskers a run for their money on vault, especially with the performance of freshman Emma Sibson. Sibson tied Nebraska's Jessie DeZiel with a score of 9.950.

"Today I was focused on staying relaxed," said Sibson. "I did my vault how I do it in practice, which was a personal high for me, but there is always room for improvement."

Penn State was neck and neck with Nebraska in vault, losing 49.400 to 49.150.

What's Next?

Coach Thompson is looking forward to the rest of the season, especially after his team's performance against Nebraska. With key meets in the Big Ten coming up, it is imperative for the Nittany Lions to not lose sight of the positive strides made in Saturday's dual.

"We lost events by tenths of a point," said Thompson. "We can find those tenths of a point by doing a few extra hand stands and sticking some more landings. We can only build from the team's performance today."

The gymnastics teams will compete in another double dual next weekend at Rec Hall against Illinois. The Nittany Lions and the Fighting Illini will take the mat on Saturday at 4 p.m.

Keys to the Meet - Penn State vs. No. 8 Nebraska

By **Samantha DelRosso**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. -- After a successful weekend at Ohio State, the 23rd-ranked Penn State women's gymnastics team has found the keys to being successful. Trust, starting and finishing well, being consistent, and taking what the team does in practice and applying it to the meets.

Senior all around gymnast Cassidy Stauder and head coach Jeff Thompson know what it takes to be victorious this weekend against No. 8 Nebraska in their first home Big Ten meet of the season.

Trust:

Each week, the Nittany Lions have a word of the week that they focus on. The "Word of the Week" this week is trust. Trusting themselves. Trusting each other. Trusting the coaches. Trusting the judges. Trusting their talent.

"[We are trusting ourselves to] go into the meet and [we are] trusting that what we've done in the gym every day is what we're capable of doing at the meet," Stauder said. "[We are] trusting ourselves to just let it go and let it all out there."

Starting and Finishing Well:

Previously, the team focused on a good start in the first event and a good finish in the last event. Now the team is focusing on starting well in one event and finishing well in that same event. This mindset helped the Lions defeat Ohio State last weekend. The Lions will be kicking off the competition on the vault this weekend against Nebraska.

"What I hope is that we get a great start on vault, but [also] we get off to a great start on every event," Thompson said.

Consistency:

Last weekend, Stauder set a season-high mark on the floor with a 9.775. Stauder said she and the team are working on their consistency, and are continuing to put the whole meet together as a team. The Nittany Lions hit all 24 competitive routines last weekend and hope that they can be consistent and continue this success against Nebraska.

Stauder said the team has done a great job of hitting their routines with good handstands and dismounts and being aggressive in the meets. She said she wants the team to continue this this weekend.

Thompson said the team is looking to build on the confidence that it gained from the road win against Ohio State. The team is still competing for the Big Ten regular season title. If the team continues to be consistent and victorious, they have the chance to fulfill that dream.

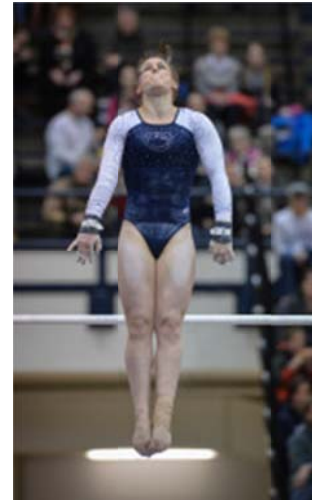
"There were so many good things last weekend that we just want to continue that feeling at home, with our crowd behind us. The atmosphere is going to be really fun," Thompson said.

Performing How They Practice

"Go White." That's what the Nittany Lions chant from the side when their teammates are performing. This means, "Go to White Building." The girls vision themselves in the White Building, where they practice, to feel like they are just at another practice, doing another routine, just like they do every day.

This weekend is a double dual, in which both the women and men's team compete at the same time. The women's and men's teams practice together, so this weekend will be even more similar to practicing in the White Building. The men's gymnastics team will be taking on Temple this weekend.

"We absolutely love double duals because we train with the guys every day, so it makes us feel even more like we're in White Building," Stauder said. "And it brings a lot more energy and fun to the meet. I



think the crowd really likes it too. They enjoy being able to see both the women and the men compete."

The women's gymnastics team has won three consecutive meets and is looking to continue the winning streak against Nebraska at home. Stauder said using the equipment that the team is used to, having family and fans there, and not having to deal with traveling gives the Nittany Lions an advantage.

The team will again host Nebraska in March during the Big Ten Championships.

"It's really cool because Big Ten [Championships] are going to be here, so it's kind of like a trial run having the Big Ten schools here," Stauder said.

Women's gymnastics faces former Nittany Lion

Kevin Alonzo | Collegian Staff Writer

Coaches take different approaches to mentally prepare their teams for an upcoming game.

There's the old "us against the world" pre-game speech players seem to rally around. Other coaches keep it simple and compile a Muhammad Ali highlight reel to get their squads going. But coach Jeff Thompson stays away from the clichés.

Throughout the week of practice leading up to each meet, Thompson emphasizes a particular word he wants his Lady Lions to absorb. The team calls it the "word of the week." There's an underlying message behind every word.

This week's word going into a Big Ten matchup against Ohio State on Saturday is "encouragement," which Thompson broke down.

Thompson stressed five themes to his gymnasts, one for each finger on a hand, such as being tough, fighting until the end and bailing teammates out after mistakes. When all five points are made, he forms a fist and smashes it into his other hand, encouraging the team to do these things.

"The thing we're working with this week with encouragement is how each finger by itself isn't very strong," Thompson said, "but when you close them together and make a fist, it's basically unbreakable."

The word of the week following the season opener at Iowa State was "drive." Ironically, the Lions had to settle for an 18-hour bus drive from Iowa, back to State College due to a flight postponement.

The team has bought into the idea so far. Senior Lindsay Musgrove views it as something that can only take pressure off of someone who is going through a tough stretch.

"It helps if you're having a bad day or you're getting caught up in yourself and your routines," Musgrove said. "Just take a step back and think about the word 'encouragement.' Let me help my teammates, let them help me."

Thompson's motivational ploy also resonates with senior Cassidy Stauder.

"One of the five things is to go out there and have fun," Stauder said. "That one definitely stands out to me because I know I perform best when I go out there loving what I'm doing and having a lot of fun."

While Penn State's fast start to the season can't be directly attributed to a word players and coaches throw around during practice, it certainly has not hurt. These words of the week are a fun way for coaches to communicate important messages with their players.

"There's been a lot of fist bumping this week," Musgrove said. "Fist bump each other or fist-bump the lion just to get that little extra motivation to do our routines."

Stauder Leads Lions in Home Opener

By **Samantha DelRosso**, *GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer*

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - Three meets into the 2014 season, senior Kassidy Stauder is off to a strong start to her final campaign as a Nittany Lion gymnast. Stauder led the Nittany Lions to victory in a quad meet against Cornell, Southeast Missouri, and UIC on Saturday, with a career-high all-around score of 39.275.

This season, Stauder has won the All-Around title and has tied for second with a score of 38.925 in a quad meet earlier this month against Kentucky, Ball State, and West Virginia. She also owns the team's top scores on balance beam (9.900) and uneven bars (9.875).

But Stauder has not always been the all-around gymnast that we see today. She has evolved into an all-around gymnast during her time at Penn State. Before coming to Penn State, she had not vaulted at the skill level she vaults at today.

She began Saturday's competition on the vault and scored a 9.725, only .050 below her career-high. Head coach Jeff Thompson commended the Palmerton, Pa., native for her effort on the vault.

"She didn't do that vault before she got to college and actually, she was pretty terrified of vaulting when she got here. She's worked through that and gotten herself in a position where when we need her, she can step up and give us a score," Thompson said.

After vaulting, Stauder headed to the uneven bars where she scored a career-high 9.875. Her performance on the bars was both the team's highest and the meet's highest score on the uneven bars. On the bars, the "little things" matter. Stauder said the team focused on this in practice before Saturday's meet.

"We took what we did last week in the competition and really focused on the mistakes that we made, like the little details, handstands, pointed toes, feet together, and sticking [the landing]," Stauder said.

In a competition earlier this month against Iowa State, Stauder's score of 9.725 was the third-highest score on uneven bars in the meet.

Stauder, who started gymnastics at age eight, said she felt very confident after completing her routines on Saturday. She noted that she is able to feel how well she did before her score is even announced. She felt most comfortable on both the uneven bars and the balance beam. On the beam, she said she felt, "really calm and excited."

She tied her career-high of 9.900 on the balance beam on Saturday. This was the team and meet's highest score on the beam.

Stauder's final performance of the day was her floor exercise. She was the leadoff for the Nittany Lions and received a score of 9.775. Thompson said she did a great job hitting her routine.

"[I am] super proud of her for being in the all-around tonight; doing such a great job, being the anchor on beam, hitting that floor routine like she did, her bar routine was our highest score. What a great, fun first home meet of her senior year," Thompson said.

Stauder said she will be working on the details and fixing the little things before the team's first Big Ten meet of the season against Michigan State on Saturday.



Women's Gymnastics Shines in First Home Meet

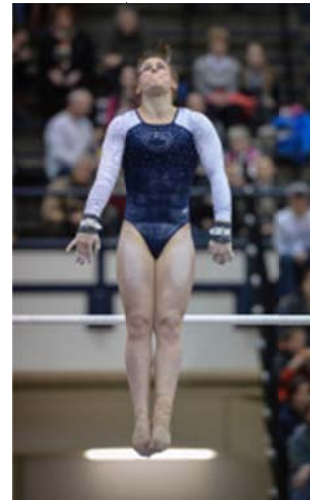
By **Gabrielle Richards, GoPSUsports.com Student Staff Writer**

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa. - As the Nittany Lions met in a huddle on the side of the mat, you knew they meant business. "We Are" echoed off the walls of Rec Hall as Penn State's women's gymnastics team headed toward its first rotation in the quad-meet this past Saturday. Aside from the Nittany Lions, Cornell, Southeast Missouri, and Illinois-Chicago were also in attendance.

Starting on vault for the Nittany Lions were Lindsay Musgrove, Emma Sibson, Krystal Welsh, Kassidy Stauder, Sidney Sanabria-Robles, and Randi Lau. Sibson had a personal best score of 9.85, taking first place over all in the event. The team finished with an overall vault score of 49.075.

"With our first two meets on the road, our scores weren't what we wanted them to be," said head coach Jeff Thompson. "We took the performances from the last two meets, came out strong and did better."

After a winning performance on the vault, Samantha Musto, Nicole Medvitz, Welsh, Stauder, Lau and Sanabria-Robles made their way to the bars as starters for the Lions. Stauder shined on the bars, as she propelled herself to first place in the event with a score of 9.875. The Nittany Lions claimed first through third place in bar routines. Stauder finished first, followed by Medvitz and Sanabria-Robles, who tied for second with a score of 9.850, followed by Welsh who finished in third place with a score of 9.825. The team finished with an overall bar score of 49.175.



"The girls did a great job today," said Thompson. "If you can get a tenth of a point higher in each routine, it really adds up and the girls came pretty close to doing that today."

Penn State's third event of the evening was beam, where Tina Postiglione, Lau, Medvitz, Musto, Stauder and Sanabria-Robles competed for the Nittany Lions. Penn State claimed first through third place on beam, with Stauder in first, followed by Lau in second and Medvitz in third. The team finished with a final score of 45.925 on beam.

Finally, the Nittany Lions approached the center of Rec Hall to perform their floor routines. Stauder, Medvitz, Sanabria-Robles, Welsh, Lau and Musto. Welsh secured first place with a score of 9.925, followed by Musgrove (9.900), Lau (9.875) and Musto and Sanabria-Robles, who both scored 9.850. The team scored a 49.400 on the floor.

Coach Thompson's reflection on Saturday's success spoke volumes to the example he believes his team can set for future gymnasts.

"A majority of our fans are between the ages of eight to 14 years old," said Thompson. "These girls are role models for them, which makes them think about their actions on and off the mat. Audience members might not be able to hear what is said on the mat, but they can read body language. Our girls need to have a positive outlook in practice, in the locker room and on the mat."

Kassidy Stauder proved to be the perfect illustration of positivity on Saturday as she claimed the all-around title with a 39.275. Stauder placed first in both bars and beam.

"Stauder is one of those girls who can turn on any switch when you need her to," said Thompson.

Penn State finished with a season-high score of 196.025.

"We are going to use this meet to propel us into Michigan State next weekend," said Thompson. "I am so proud of these girls and I am really looking forward to what this season brings. Their energy was awesome today."