

No. 7 Penn State Not Complacent with National Standing Ahead of CHA Tournament

Story posted March 2, 2021 in Sports, CommRadio by Kyle Cannillo

There is nothing like playoff hockey. With a 16-2-2 record, Penn State has had nearly a flawless regular season and will head into this weekend's College Hockey America tournament as the No. 1 overall seed.

With so much success this season, it's hard to imagine that the Nittany Lions still have not secured their spot in the field of eight for the NCAA Tournament. Due to the nature of the college hockey landscape, failure to win the CHA tournament might cost the Nittany Lions a chance to play for the national championship.

How is it that Penn State could miss the chance to play for the ultimate prize after losing only twice all season? Is that fair?

Ask the players and coaches and a common theme arises: "Frustrating. Really frustrating."

The CHA is largely considered the weakest conference in women's college hockey. In the existence of the conference, the CHA has never had an at-large bid granted a position in the tournament field.

"What is frustrating is the lack of respect our league gets," Penn State head coach Jeff Kampersal said about his team's future. "There are previous years to this where both Mercyhurst and Robert Morris are two really strong teams and could potentially both go to the NCAA Tournament."

Penn State currently sits at sixth in the PairWise rankings, which is a metric to determine the tournament field. However, with no out-of-conference play taking place, it's possible the committee will disregard the metric all together.

"Perception is based on last year," Kampersal said. "Once we can start scheduling non-league games and winning non-league games to bolster our schedule, that is something that needs to happen. We mathematically have put ourselves in a position better than eighth in the polls in my opinion."

Freshman Kiara Zanon is largely the reason that Penn State has seen as much success as it has. If you haven't heard by now, Zanon's 30 points is third in the nation. She is two points off Laura Bowman for tying Penn State's program record.

“We have to remain in the present,” Zanon said. “We have to stay focused on where we are at or our mind will go other places and that might interfere with what we are doing as a team.”

She shared aggravation regarding her team’s tournament chances.

“It’s really frustrating,” Zanon said. “I think we have proven ourselves this year every way possible.”

She continued, saying respect is on its way.

“People might try to make an excuse that it’s a weird year, but I think we have proved it with every game we’ve played,” Zanon said. “Robert Morris, Syracuse and Mercyhurst are all known for being good and we have proved our spot. People will start to give us the credit we deserve but it might just take some more time.”

Penn State enjoyed a seven-game winning streak and a 12-game unbeaten streak before suffering an overtime loss to Mercyhurst on Saturday. With a 9-2-1 record against teams .500 or better, it’s hard to disagree where both Kampersal and Zanon are coming from.

The bottom line is this: win two straight and they’re in. They have accomplished so much this season, but their biggest accomplishment to be had is right in front of them.

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