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‘This is not your shame’

Penn State professionals shed light on dating violence

By Rachael Keller
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Dating violence is defined by Penn State in AD85 Title IX Sexual Harassment as “violence committed by a person who is or has been in a social relationship of a romantic or intimate nature” with the survivor.

According to Kristi Patrickus, Penn State’s Title IX coordinator, dating violence can be seen in many different kinds of relationships, from casual hookups to long-term relationships.

Dating violence and domestic violence are definitionally different, according to Patrickus. Domestic violence is slightly more elevated than dating violence in that it includes felony and misdemeanor crimes.

Patrickus said these definitions are intentionally kept as broad as possible so they can apply to a wide variety of relationships.

“The way I describe (dating violence) is that it’s a pattern or a web of abuse where one person uses a variety of tactics to gain and maintain power and control over an intimate partner or someone they are close to,” Becca Geiger Wallen, former associate director of the Relationship Violence Outreach, Intervention and Community Education Center (R-VOICE), said.

According to Wallen, 18-24 year olds are at a higher risk of relationship and sexual violence.

“It’s much more common than we realize, and it’s not something for the victim-survivor to be ashamed of,” Wallen said. “It’s shameful to control and abuse somebody.”

Wallen said often when people imagine abuse, they habitually think of physical violence because it’s something others can perceive.

“I think a lot of college students



Megan Miller/Collegian

The Boucke Building on Feb. 27, 2025 in University Park, Pa. R-VOICE and OSMRR, which are located in Boucke, offer resources and help for survivors.

... myself included before I got into this work, thought the difference between a healthy relationship and unhealthy relationship was physical violence,” Wallen said. “As long as my partner isn’t physically hurting me, then my relationship is OK or healthy, which isn’t necessarily the case.”

Jennifer Pencek, the executive director of Centre Safe, said abuse starts whenever a person feels they are being treated as less than they should be.

Centre Safe sees on average 900 domestic/dating violence survivors, 200 sexual assault survivors and 200 families that need emergency shelter per year, according to Pencek.

Some lesser known but still common forms of abuse can include psychological, emotional and verbal damage, Wallen said.

These methods of abuse can be seen when someone is belittling, isolating, guilt-tripping, manipulating, blaming and accusing their partner.

Wallen said often an abuser will make it seem as though they have their partner’s best interest at heart — saying they don’t act how they normally do around a friend or family member and pushing them to stop contact.

Spencer Peters, director of the office of Sexual Misconduct Reporting & Response (OSMRR), said he has seen more of an overlap between dating violence and stalking.

Digital abuse can play a role in the overlap, like how abusers can use digital methods to stalk their partner’s location through social media.

Financial abuse is also common, but not thought of as often because many may believe a couple needs to live together to have this dynamic, according to Wallen. That’s not always the case; an abuser could ask their partner to quit their job or hold loans over their head.

Wallen said she often equated financial abuse to

academic abuse, which can be seen when an abuser sabotages the academic success of their partner.

Sexual abuse is often thought of as something done by a stranger and not someone’s partner, Wallen said. She said pressuring, coercing or manipulating someone’s partner into having sex is still sexual abuse, no matter the relationship.

Peters said he sees friends of people in abusive relationships that are getting better at identifying toxic behaviors. He said it could be a result of more education on these topics, whether in high school or Penn State.

“There’s a lot more attention to some of these topics, so I think it’s helpful that friend groups understand they’re trying to support their friend, and there’s resources out there to help do that,” Peters said.

Wallen said she advises friends of survivors to focus on the

survivor and not the partner.

She said no matter what is happening in the relationship, survivors still have love and care for their partner. If friends try to talk about a person’s partner, they can get defensive and maybe even cut contact with that person, Wallen said.

She recommends asking the friend how they are doing, subtly bringing attention to abusive behaviors without belittling the relationship and ensuring survivors know they have support.

“Listen to people, which sounds really simple, but I think it’s actually one of the hardest skills because a lot of us try to fix things for other people or we insert ourselves into situations,” Pencek said. “Listen to what someone is sharing with you, because whether they are talking about an abusive relationship they’re in, or they’re talking about sexual assault, they’re really trusting you with that information.”

Centre Safe, R-VOICE, OSMRR and Title IX all offer confidential resources and help for survivors at any stage, including counseling, safety planning, support, shelters, education, investigations, hotlines and advocacy.

Students can visit the OSMRR in 120 Boucke Building, Centre Safe at 140 W. Nittany Ave. and the R-VOICE Center in 222U Boucke Building.

“We need to talk more about how to love better (and) how to communicate better, whether it be romantic relationships (or) friendships,” Wallen said. “How we can all communicate and live, work, love together. That’s why it’s so important to highlight that this is not your shame.”

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Commonwealth closure reactions

By Kiera Ginn
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State issued a statement announcing commonwealth campus closures prompted by declining enrollments, demographic shifts and financial pressures. The announcement was made ahead of the Faculty Senate meeting Tuesday, during which faculty questioned the lack of transparency and consultation in the decision-making process.

It was confirmed that Abington, Altoona, Behrend, Berks, Brandywine, Harrisburg, Lehigh Valley, Great Valley, Dickinson Law, the College of Medicine and the Pennsylvania College of Technology will remain open.

That leaves 12 campuses under consideration for closure as early as the 2027-28 academic year—Beaver, DuBois, Fayette, Greater Allegheny, Hazleton, Mont Alto, New Kensington, Schuylkill, Scranton, Shenango, Wilkes-Barre and York. No decisions have been made regarding which campuses and how many will be closing, according to President Neeli Bendapudi.

While Bendapudi said it’s guaranteed that any student who begins their degree at Penn State will be able to complete it, 2+2 students and alumni still have concerns about the stakes.

Jeffrey Ballou, alumnus of Penn State’s Greater Allegheny campus and candidate for the Board of Trustees, said the news of campus closures is saddening and sudden.

“The news of a potential closing of any campus is, frankly, devastating and recognizing that it’s because people aren’t simply figures on a balance sheet,” Ballou said. “These are people’s lives.

These aren’t just the transient students that come and go. These are faculty, staff.”

Ballou said there were members of the board of trustees who were not in the loop when the announcement was made.

“Some trustees told me they were absolutely blindsided, and they’re asking hard questions about why did they not hear this at their own meeting last Thursday and Friday,” Ballou said.

Similar to Ballou, Serenity Fullem, a 2+2 student who studied at Penn State Fayette, found the recent announcement frustrating.

“Back at Fayette, I remember when the first budget cuts and buyout was first announced for commonwealth campuses,” Fullem, a third year studying psychology, said. “I was in a meeting with one of my professors, and another professor came in, and they were talking about it, and I know a lot of professors felt really betrayed by that specific happening.”

Fullem said closing campuses could limit opportunities for the surrounding communities.

“(I’m) frustrated because I understand that a lot of those communities are dwindling in population ... but taking away those campuses takes away an accessible opportunity for improvement and education in those areas, which is more important than ever,” Fullem said.

Fullem said closing these campuses will impact the local communities and the learning opportunities the campuses provide them.

“We went to Penn State Fayette for a lot of community things,” Fullem said. “They support the arts by doing theater (and) performances occasionally. We went

there from fifth grade all the way up to when we graduated high school for academic league.”

Ballou said the land-grant mission is to provide opportunities to the communities throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the closing of campuses leaves both the land grant mission and communities across Pennsylvania behind.

“The whole point of a land-grant mission is to have life better than your parents or your grandparents, or whoever raised you and sent you to Penn State,” Ballou said.

Matthew Howard, a 2+2 student who studied at Penn State Scranton, said many small colleges in the area are struggling, and this campus closure could further limit opportunities.

“Some people maybe want to be closer to home ... so (people) don’t have to ... spend as much money and as much aggravation to get a degree,” Howard, a fourth-year studying meteorology, said. “I’ve seen some people do that.”

Ballou shared similar sentiments.

“We’re closing off that on-ramp to be able to feed, to keep enriching and reinvigorating that sense of a soul of not leaving behind populations who want to better themselves,” Ballou said. “That separates us from other universities, that we actually have a heart and soul of why we do what we do, beyond the first-class education. And that’s what stands to be lost.”

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Matthew Kemper/Collegian

Fez, the winner of Movin' On's Battle, performs in Schwab Auditorium on March 4, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

Movin’ On declares opener

By Jonathon Chiu
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State Movin’ On held its annual Battle at Schwab Auditorium to showcase the musical talent of Penn State students and select the Movin’ On 2025 opening act.

The lineup included Golden Achumba, Swervo Staacks, Forrester Grey, Amelia & The Bad Men, Fez, Just, Little Blue & The Stargazers and The Sunday Love Club.

The event was sponsored by Celsius, whose products were handed out to audience members as a complimentary refreshment. There was also a giveaway of various items ranging from Spikeball sets to tickets to the Governors Ball Music Festival in New York City.

Dominic DiFrancesco, the director of public relations, said he hoped the Battle can bring the Penn State community together to celebrate the performers.

“I want every student performer, regardless of who wins, to feel that they got the love and admiration they deserve from the Penn State community,” DiFrancesco, a third-year studying marketing and music-vocal performance, said. “I hope that everyone has a great time and a great experience.”

He also hoped the judges could find an “incredible opener” for the festival, which they were positive would be the case given the participating acts.

Ty Tkacik, a class of 2024 alumnus, said he has fond

memories of Battle from performing in previous years as the drummer for Alvarius.

“I came out to support Battle because I’ve been playing music since I came to State College,” Tkacik said. “I’ve made it a little bit of a point to make it out to each battle of the bands because I think it’s really fun, and I think it gives a good kind of taste of some of the local music around state college.”

After each act displayed their musical talents to the crowd, the judges selected Fez as the winner.

Tyler Suman said there were a few participants whose performances he believed made them worthy of being chosen as the victor.

“It was a close call between Fez and Forrester Gray,” Suman, a doctoral student studying political science, said. “But if I had to pick a front runner, both before and after all the performances, it would have been Fez.”

Samuel Escourt said Fez’s victory was something that was well deserved given their performance during Battle.

“I will say Fez winning, I think, is extremely well deserved,” Escourt, a fourth-year studying music technology, said. “They put in the f—ing work all the time. They’re so tight. They really know how to play their respective instruments and the styles and stuff that they play are just very nonstop and full of energy and a lot of fun, so it makes sense.”

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Chris Eutsler/Collegian

Students walk along Pollock Road near Old Main together during the first day of classes on Jan. 13, 2024 in University Park, Pa.

Penn State must support students, staff in pending closures

OUR VIEW

Penn State must communicate its process in pending commonwealth campus closures

Penn State must make greater efforts to communicate with and support its students, faculty and staff with pending closures of up to 12 of the commonwealth campuses looming.

According to a statement from President Neeli Bendapudi, the university is currently undecided on which campuses will close, and the closures won't occur until the end of the 2026-27 academic year.

Bendapudi said declining enrollments, demographic shifts and financial pressures prompted the pending closures. This decision is sensible from an economic perspective — the university can redirect or save funding if there's less distribution — but it demonstrates a shift in the administration's attitude toward commonwealth campuses.

Bendapudi said she wanted to explore every possible avenue before considering closures when she became the president in 2022. Now, less than three years into her presidency, Bendapudi has assigned Vice President for Commonwealth Campuses and Executive

Chancellor Margo DelliCarpini, Interim Executive Vice President and Provost Tracy Langkilde and Senior Vice President and Chief of Staff Michael Wade Smith to recommend which campuses to close.

She expects to make her final decision by spring commencement.

The statement said Penn State exhausted its reasonable alternatives to keep the current number of campuses. Its extensive efforts must remain intact in its communication and support for students, faculty and staff once the closures occur.

Penn State has given minimal details about how it's deciding which campuses will close and the outcomes for those affected.

Bendapudi said DelliCarpini,

Langkilde and Smith will release data "in the coming days" to clarify the factors informing their process. According to the statement, the administration will explore internal reassignment, provide career transition support for faculty and staff members and provide a supportive path for students to complete their degrees.

Although early in its pending closures, Penn State's ambiguous language for promised tremendous change isn't helpful for those concerned. As the closures move closer, Penn State must be transparent in justifying its decision and its strategies for assisting students, faculty and staff members affected.

The pending closures also inspire questions about Penn

State's 2+2 Plan. The plan satisfies students who seek smaller campuses and lower tuition during their Penn State education. Students spend two undergraduate years at a commonwealth campus and the remaining two at University Park or a different commonwealth campus.

Bendapudi addressed the current 2+2 Plan students in the statement — the 2026-27 academic year closures give enrolled students time to transition to another Penn State campus. But the statement fails to address enrollments past fall 2025 and its support for students who still choose to attend commonwealth campuses despite some closures.

Bendapudi said the university must move forward with a sustainable structure for the commonwealth campuses where the campuses with the most opportunities for success and engagement can thrive. The sentiment, although logical, diminishes the pain of students and faculty at these campuses and the care the surrounding community will need. The bonds formed and cultures shared in the commonwealth campuses selected to be closed will be lost.

Many commonwealth campuses serve as centers for community events, offer facilities for local and club sports and provide dual enrollment opportunities for high school students. With the broader losses, members of the closed commonwealth campuses will turn to Penn State for assistance.

Penn State must be more outspoken in its support for students, faculty and staff affected by the pending commonwealth campuses. It must outline its deliberation, detail its plan for those affected and stand firm in its position.



Cartoons by Nate Campbell

MY VIEW | JUSTIN LINN

Tale of two winters: State College vs. Barcelona

Winter is a season of contrast, depending on where you are in the world. For me, this year has provided a stark reminder of how different the experience of winter can be.

Living in Barcelona for the semester, I've found the season to be relatively mild and enjoyable, but certainly nothing like the frigid conditions my friends back at Penn State are enduring.

While Barcelona's cool but comfortable temperatures allow for outdoor activities and a Mediterranean winter charm, State College is locked in what seems to be an unrelenting deep freeze, with snow and ice making every walk to class a battle against the elements.

This contrast in temperature isn't just a matter of comfort; it's a reflection of broader climate patterns and the way winter affects daily life, mood and even productivity.

Comparing the two places, it's clear that where you spend your winter can make a significant difference in how you experience the season.

Anyone who has spent a winter in State College knows it's not for the faint of heart. This year has been particularly brutal, with temperatures dipping into the teens and wind chills making it feel even worse.

Snowfall has been frequent, creating a picturesque but harsh environment where icy sidewalks and freezing winds become the norm.

The cold in State College isn't just a nuisance; it impacts everything.

Students bundle up in layers upon layers of clothing, trying to stay warm on their treks across campus. Plans are often adjusted or canceled due to severe weather conditions, and the shorter daylight hours can make the long semester feel even more exhausting.

Beyond the discomfort, the cold can affect mental and physical health. Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is a real concern for many, as the lack of sunlight and the constant gray skies can lead to a drop in mood and motivation.

Productivity can also take a hit. Who wants to study when their hands are too cold to type?

Even simple tasks, like getting groceries or heading to the gym, become daunting challenges when faced with freezing temperatures and icy roads.

In contrast, my experience in Barcelona this winter has been nothing short of pleasant. While it certainly isn't warm — temperatures typically range from the high 40s to the low 60s — there's

no biting cold, no heavy snow and no need to wear five layers just to step outside.

Barcelona's winter allows for outdoor activities that would be unthinkable in State College this time of year. Walks along the beach, outdoor dining with heaters and even light jackets during the day make for an enjoyable winter experience.

The sun is out more often than not, and the city's energy remains vibrant, unlike the hibernation mode that seems to take over cold weather State College.

Another key difference is the way the city is structured for winter. At State College, the focus is on survival, getting from one place to another as quickly as possible while avoiding frostbite.

In Barcelona, winter is just another season, with people still gathering in plazas, taking leisurely strolls and enjoying the outdoors. It's a distinct contrast that makes the season feel less like something to endure and more like something to appreciate.

The contrast between winter in State College and Barcelona isn't just about weather; it's about lifestyle. In a place like State College, winter forces people indoors, affects mental well-

being and creates challenges that students and residents alike must overcome.

In Barcelona, winter feels like an extension of fall, a minor inconvenience rather than a dominating force.

This contrast also raises questions about climate and adaptation. State College, like much of the Northeast, is experiencing harsher winters that seem to come earlier and last longer. Climate change plays a role, with shifting weather patterns leading to unpredictability.

Some years bring milder winters, while others, like this one, remind us of how extreme the cold can be.

Barcelona, on the other hand, benefits from its Mediterranean location, where winters are moderated by the sea and extreme cold is rare.

As someone experiencing both climates within a year, I can confidently say that winter in Barcelona feels like a blessing, while winter in State College feels like a test of endurance.

While both have charm, State College's snowy landscapes and cozy winter vibe does have its moments. But there's something to be said for a winter that doesn't leave you questioning why you left the house in the first place.

Justin Linn is an abroad columnist for The Daily Collegian.

“There’s something to be said for a winter that doesn’t leave you questioning why you left the house in the first place.”

Justin Linn

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‘She can score’

Jayla Oden’s slasher mentality has been difference maker for women’s basketball

By Noah Aberegg
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Ever since Jayla Oden transferred to Penn State in May 2023, she has been a difference maker.

While her stats haven’t been jaw-dropping, her hustle and physicality on the court have made her a star on every team she’s played for.

As a 3-star point guard coming out of high school, Oden worked to make a name for herself in a field of many talented stars. Not only did she excel on the basketball court, but Oden was also talented on the track, lettering during her time at McDonogh School.

In her sophomore season, Oden and her teammates ran the eighth-fastest 4x200-meter in school history at the time, crossing the line in 1:46.50. While many high school athletes compete in multiple sports, Oden has carried her track speed into her collegiate basketball career, consistently being the fastest on the court.

Oden was the top-ranked guard coming out of Maryland and was awarded the USA Today High School Sports Award as the 2021 Maryland Girls Basketball Player of the Year. After starting three seasons for the Eagles, Oden committed to Illinois, where she spent the next two years.

In her first season with the Fighting Illini, the Baltimore native started five games, averaging six points. Over a third of Oden’s points came from the free-throw line, where she found herself 60 times as a tough and scrappy freshman.

The next year, Oden increased her shooting percentage and started nearly half of the season. Looking for a new opportunity, she came to Penn State in the spring of 2023, keeping her head low while working hard.

“I’m just staying true to myself every day,” Oden said at the 2023-24 local media day. “I come in mentally and give it my all. I just want to honestly do what I have to do as a combo guard, as a guard that (Coach Carolyn Kieger) keeps pushing.”



Kate Hildebrand/Collegian

Guard Jayla Oden looks to her teammates during the Penn State women’s basketball game against Canisius on Nov. 7, 2024 in the Bryce Jordan Center.

Oden’s hard work during the offseason paid off, as she went 5-for-5 in her first game as a Lady Lion, scoring 10 points with four rebounds against Bucknell.

“Jayla is an extremely hard worker,” former Lady Lions guard Makenna Marisa said following the Bucknell game. “She’s super skilled and is a great addition to the team, and we’re super excited to have her. She played such a great game.”

After a slower game where Oden scored only four points in 20 minutes, she dropped 14 against Kansas, helping the team win its third straight game. She caught Kieger’s attention in just her third game for Penn State.

“She just came in off the bench ready and locked in today,” Kieger said. “She can score. She proved that tonight, scoring from all three levels. She can slash, she can shoot the three.”

In the first two games of the season, Oden passed up on many 3-point opportunities, attempting shots exclusively within the arc. Kieger pulled her aside before the game against Kansas and told her, “It’s time to shoot triples.”

Oden then proceeded to shoot lights out from behind the arc against the Jayhawks, going 4-for-4 from deep.

“She came up there ready to shoot,” Kieger said. “She was ready and obviously went forth tonight, it’s amazing.”

A month later, Oden scored a career-best 18 points against Saint Francis behind a trio of 3-pointers. At this point in the season, her defensive capabilities were also at an all-time high, recording two steals in three of the five games the Lady Lions played in December.

“She’s attacking downhill, which she does extremely well,” Marisa said, “and her defense has been impeccable. On the defensive end, she’s just getting off pressuring, and as athletic as she is, she really helps us on the defensive end.”

As Oden progressed during her first season with the blue and white, her confidence continued to grow as she saw more minutes down the stretch.

Following one year in Happy Valley, Oden was thrown into a leadership role in Year 2, with all but four players leaving the program. However, she used this to better herself, thriving off the pressure that leadership presents both on and off the court.

“(The team) has helped me a lot with my confidence, and Coach Kieger has had numer-

ous conversations throughout the season,” Oden said. “This year, it’s the same mission. I’m in a different role this year, so I’m just focusing on what I need to focus on and then getting my teammates in the right spots.”

Through Penn State’s first eight wins, dealing out dimes was the team’s specialty, and Oden played a large role in that.

“The best thing about this team is they’re so unselfish and don’t care who gets all the credit. All they want to do is win,” Kieger said. “That’s refreshing when you have a group that cares about Penn State more than themselves, and I think that’s what’s really going to be our bread and butter this year, sharing the basketball.”

With eight new players on the team, Oden, Grace Hall, Moriah Murray and Alli Campbell emerged as leaders, helping to craft this early season success.

“Being a transfer, I’ve looked up to Moriah, Alli, Jayla and Grace,” redshirt sophomore center Gracie Merkle said. “They’ve really stepped up with the transfers under their wings and freshmen under their wings, and they’ve just been very vocal, helping us out whenever we need, or (if) things aren’t going our way.”

Let them cook

Predicting future Penn State NFL combine performances

By Avery Hill
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

The annual NFL Combine in Indianapolis has come and gone. Now, let’s look towards the future.

Penn State has talents across the board who could raise some eyebrows in the combine.

Here’s my prediction of what current Penn Staters could put up when they enter the NFL Draft.

Nick Singleton, running back:

40-yard dash: 4.32 seconds
Bench press: 27 reps
20-yard shuttle: 4.22 seconds
Vertical jump: 40 inches

At 6-foot, 227 pounds, Nick Singleton is an athletic freak. The Saquon Barkley comparisons will be flying once Singleton makes his way in the NFL Combine. I think he beats out Barkley in all but one category.

Speed is the first thing that stands out with Singleton. He said he ran a 4.33 40-yard dash in the 2024 offseason. It’s likely he stays in that range, if not faster, come the combine next year. Barkley’s a bit stockier and ran a 4.4, so a 4.32 40-yard dash is certainly plausible.

With his power to accompany, Singleton should be able to knock out at least 25 reps, five less than Barkley did.

Those won’t be the only events he shines in. Singleton squatted five reps of 570 pounds a year ago, which projects him to have a max squat of at least 615 pounds. It’s a nod to his explosiveness, which will help him eclipse a 40-inch vertical and a sub-4.25 20-yard shuttle.

Zane Durant, defensive tackle:

40-yard dash: 4.63 seconds
20-yard shuttle: 4.33 seconds
Bench press: 33 reps

Former teammate Dvon J-Thomas said Zane Durant can run a 4.45-second 40 and bench

455 pounds for five reps. Durant said not quite — He runs a 4.6 40-yard dash but can in fact bench 455 pounds five times.

Either way, Durant is an explosive athlete, and though he doesn’t get the love in the box score, the combine should be his time to shine.

Durant’s knock is being undersized at 6-foot-1, 288 pounds. But so was Aaron Donald. The Rams legend was listed at three pounds lighter, but ran a 4.66 40-yard dash and got 35 reps on the bench.

Donald’s obviously one-of-one, but Durant could put up a 4.63 40-yard dash and get at least 30 reps on the bench.

Durant’s 20-yard shuttle should be a testament to the reputation he’s built as a freak athlete.

Cooper Cousins, interior lineman

Bench press: 35 reps
3-cone drill: 7.33 seconds

Cooper Cousins threw up 17 reps on the bench in May 2022. Yes, he was very much still in high school.

He was under 300 pounds at the time, but now he’s up to 6-foot-6, 320 pounds.

Cousins’ work ethic has become a major topic for the young linemen, so it’s likely his numbers skyrocket as he’s not draft eligible until 2027. Coming into college, another area he received praise for is his short-area agility, so I expect a great 3-cone time from Cousins, especially considering his massive frame.

He’s likely to be a highly touted prospect. Cousins’ combine numbers should be the icing on the cake.

Tony Rojas, linebacker

40-yard dash: 4.48 seconds
20-yard shuttle: 4.24

As shown with his pick-6 against SMU in the 2024 College Football Playoff, Tony Rojas has got some wheels.

He played running back at Fair-

fax High School and showed it then. He leaped from 200 pounds to 236 pounds, but it’s evident he can still move.

Rojas ran a 4.4-second 40-yard dash in his visit to Penn State, according to The Athletic’s Audrey Snyder. With the added weight, he was also reportedly up to a 4.5-second 40-yard dash last offseason.

Rojas’ draft range isn’t solidified yet with injuries derailing his 2024 campaign. His athleticism should allow him to perform well in the combine and give a little boost to his stock.

Max Granville, defensive end

40-yard dash: 4.49 seconds
10-yard split: 1.55 seconds
Broad jump: 10-foot-7

Max Granville is ahead of the development curve, given he’s supposed to be in his first semester of classes and didn’t enroll until 2024 fall camp. He started at 223 pounds, but ate 12 eggs a day to bulk up to around 245 pounds with aims to hit 252 pounds come the season.

Granville has a ton of tread in his tires, and what has stood out the most is his explosiveness.

He was Abdul Carter’s back-up in the “prowler” package last season, a pass-rushing formation, so it’s likely he puts up impressive numbers when he enters the draft.

The trajectory of Granville’s career has yet to be laid out, so it’s not guaranteed he’ll earn a combine invite. But even then, his pro day should be his time to shine.

If it’s not his speed and explosiveness that stands out, it’ll be his strength. He was a man among boys at Fort Bend Christian Academy. Expect that to reappear as he continues to put on weight through his career.

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Esteban Marengo/Collegian

Fans wait in line on Dollar Dog Night at Medlar Field at Lubrano Park on April 16, 2024.

Dollar Dog W

By Andrew Deal
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Last season, Dollar Dog Nights at Medlar Field at Lubrano Park were a massive success, with fans showing out in numbers.

The Nittany Lions faithful broke multiple records, but an early and surprising Dollar Dog Night in 2025 left the team up in the air about the turnout.

“We didn’t know what to expect, but coming off of last year, we expected something good, and Penn State showed out tonight,” senior Joe Jaconski said.

The Penn State crowd did just that, with a staggering 4,049 fans showing up on a chilly 50-degree night and eating almost 6,000 hot dogs throughout the night, which forced the concession stands to offer \$1 sodas because of the unexpected turnout.

After the lines died down on both sides of the concourse, fans took their seats to watch the first Nittany Lions home game of the season.

“Anytime we have a chance to put our team here in front of these fans, I’m going to do it,” coach Mike Gambino said. “I can’t tell you how awesome it is and how much fun it is to play in front of this group of fans and students.”

The crowd didn’t just show up for hot dogs. The fans played a major role in the game, as Penn State defeated Fairleigh Dickinson, 7-6, in the home opener.

It wasn’t just the blue and white who were excited to play in front of this crowd, as the Knights were also eager to play

in front of the raucous environment.

“We didn’t have a game scheduled, and we saw what the weather was going to be. I called (FDU coach) Manny (Roman) and asked, ‘Do you want to play?’ He said, ‘100%. There, on a Tuesday, in front of those crowds? 100%,’” Gambino said.

Throughout the game, students serenaded the pitcher with the popular “Ball Five” chant after a four-pitch walk in an attempt to get into the pitcher’s head.

“The students are changing the program, like this is a legit college baseball atmosphere,” Gambino said. “I will tell you, we have recruits here tonight, and some of these guys we got from the transfer portal are coming here to play in front of these students and these fans.”

Many fans toughed out the cold and rose to their feet for the final strike. Reliever Chase Renner shut the door, forcing a flyout and sending the crowd into a frenzy.

“It’s being talked about in other media and stuff. This town, these students and these fans are legitimately changing the program,” Gambino said.

The Nittany Lions will remain home for their first Big Ten series against Indiana.

Penn State’s players embraced the environment, relying on noise from the students and the crowd as they secured their eighth straight victory.

“All I gotta say is, Dollar Dog Night, baby,” Renner said.

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The California kid

Reese Laubach's coast-to-coast journey from Golden State to Hockey Valley

By Maggie Hardy
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Everyone loves a hometown hero. Before 2022, the NHL's San Jose Sharks had never selected a Bay Area native, but with their last pick in the seventh round of the 2022 Entry Draft, the team got some homegrown talent. Luckily for the Sharks, the California kid is shaping up to be a star once he heads back out West.

Penn State sophomore forward Reese Laubach's hockey career has taken him coast-to-coast throughout the years, from the sunny beaches of San Jose to the snow-covered mountains of State College, with a few stops along the way.

The journey has to start somewhere, and Laubach's love for the sport began in the Golden State, which isn't a fact you hear very often.

"When I was growing up in San Jose, hockey wasn't a huge thing," Laubach said. "When I was there, we only had three or four Triple-A level teams in our whole state."

The hometown roots only grow deeper for Laubach, as one of those Triple-A teams he landed on was his future franchise's youth program, spending four years competing for the San Jose Jr. Sharks.

The forward skated in 171 games for the Jr. Sharks, recording 177 points while capturing state titles in 2017 and 2019.

Laubach's journey led him away from the warm weather and about 2,000 miles from his hometown, where he attended prep school in Minnesota at Northstar Christian Academy.

"It was tough for me to go from playing youth hockey, obviously in San Jose, to going to a prep school up in Minnesota for two years, which I absolutely loved," Laubach said.

"It was a tough schedule, but I loved it. There were great people there."

While in Minnesota, the forward enjoyed a solid few seasons, competing in 139 games and generating some staggering point tallies, including 102 points in



Noah Aberegg/Collégian

Forward Reese Laubach watches the play at the Penn State men's hockey game against Michigan at Pegula Ice Arena on Nov. 23, 2024.

just 57 games during the 2021-22 season.

The next logical step for Laubach was heading to juniors, but before his next move to Youngstown, Ohio, his hometown team came calling.

Every athlete dreams of hearing their name on TV during draft day — no less in front of the logo of their childhood team — and on July 8, 2022, that dream became a reality for Laubach.

The forward said he knew there was a chance he'd be drafted, but he wasn't expecting anything.

"I kind of tuned out, to be honest, when it started getting later on in the draft ... and my mom ran in the room and tapped me (and said) 'Hey, turn the TV on,'" Laubach said. "Little did I know it was the Sharks, so within a couple of minutes they were calling me, and I mean, that's a five-minute increment that I'll never forget."

After watching his NHL dreams become a reality, Laubach headed off to the USHL, where he spent the next season splitting time between the Youngstown Phantoms and the Omaha Lancers.

Laubach only spent 19 games with the Phantoms before he was traded to Omaha, tallying 20 points across the remaining 33 games for the Lancers.

"I think that year specifically was the hardest of my hockey

career. Juniors was tough for me," Laubach said. "It really opened your eyes to see the difference when you get to junior hockey ... I really feel like I developed a lot as a person and as a hockey player."

Finally, it was time to head off to the NCAA, but it wasn't always Hockey Valley on Laubach's radar.

At the young age of 16, while playing in prep school in Minnesota, the Sharks prospect had originally committed to play at Minnesota State. After head coach Mike Hastings left the Mavericks in 2023, Laubach reopened his commitment.

Penn State coach Guy Gadowsky didn't waste much time in reaching out to the newly available prospect. The Nittany Lions were coming off a historic trip to the Frozen Four that put much of the hockey world on watch.

"Within a couple days (of de-committing), Coach Gadowsky called, and this was right after they had gone to the regional ... So I had heard a lot about Penn State," Laubach said. "I had heard how great of a school it is, how fun it is, how great the culture is here, so as soon as he was talking to me, I was pretty interested."

Within a few days of the initial phone call, Laubach and his

family were on a plane to Happy Valley.

"We were only here for 24 hours, but we got the locker room tour, met all the coaches, and I kind of fell in love with it," Laubach said. "Before I even left the state again, I committed here."

Laubach's cross-country hockey career had finally led him to Pegula Ice Arena, and it didn't take long for his arrival to start making waves.

During his first season in Hockey Valley, Laubach was placed on a line with fellow freshmen Aiden Fink and Matt DiMarsico, and the trio took the Big Ten by storm.

Dubbed the "Kid Line", the three freshmen combined for 82 points in 2023-24 and became the driving force behind the Nittany Lions' offensive production.

"As three of the youngest guys on the team, I think at first, no one really expected anything," Laubach said. "You go into it with the mindset of, 'Well, I guess let's just go have fun and see where this goes,' and we kind of just took off."

After already solidifying his spot as a top-line player, Laubach headed into his sophomore season with some goals in mind.

"I was focusing on being really good on both sides of the ice," Laubach said. "It was being real-

ly good defensively and breaking the puck out to those guys ... and then when we're in the offensive zone, (playing) more productive, getting to the net front."

Saying the forward's improvement has been noticeable would be an understatement. Laubach's 29 points through 30 games have already surpassed his 22-point freshman campaign, with the Big Ten Tournament up next and an NCAA Tournament bid looming.

Laubach's teammates have also taken notice of his solid 100-foot play this season.

"He's a workhorse ... He can produce ... He's a very gritty player," senior captain Simon Mack said. "He has that defensive side to his game as well that makes him so effective."

Laubach's breakout sophomore campaign has been noticed by those around the conference as well, as the forward has collected two Big Ten Third Stars of the Week awards this year.

The first came after a four-point weekend where he scored the game-winning goal in overtime in the Nittany Lions' victory over Ohio State, and the second came after a four-point weekend in which he tallied the game-winning goal in both contests against Wisconsin.

As noticeable as Laubach's play is on the ice, his character off the ice is greater — a sentiment no one was quicker to comment on than the guy at the helm. Gadowsky has never shied away from giving praise to the forward, calling him "truly one of the highest quality human beings that you will meet."

"He's unique because he's soft-spoken, just a wonderful quality person ... until he gets on the ice, then he's a silent killer," Gadowsky said. "If you're going to go in a corner with a couple monsters, he's the guy you want right away. He's just that type of guy."

As the blue and white gears up for one last push heading into the conference tournament, don't be surprised to hear about a California kid 3,000 miles from home leading the pack.

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'I love the story of Simon Mack'

The story of the 11th captain in Penn State's history — Simon Mack

By Chase Fisher
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Athletes and coaches often stress that hard work beats talent.

For Penn State defenseman Simon Mack, that tutelage began at a young age. He's embodied the value of working hard behind the scenes and reaping the benefits — a mindset that was instilled in him from none other than his father, who's played the most influential role in his development.

It all started with early-morning power skating as a kid.

"That's how I built my foundation with what I consider to be the strength in my game — my skating," Mack said. "There's been so many people and coaches that have helped me along the way, but my dad has been the most instrumental in my development."

During his four-year tenure as a Nittany Lion, Mack has been exposed to multiple leadership groups beyond his father. Throughout his career, Paul DeNaples and Christian Berger played major roles in shaping him into the player and leader he is today.

DeNaples served as Penn State's captain from 2021-2023, forming a close relationship and serving as a mentor to Mack in his freshman and sophomore seasons.

"(DeNaples and I) sat beside each other in the locker room, and he was obviously a captain for a couple years," Mack said. "Paul's been unbelievable to myself and my family over my time



Megan Miller/Collégian

Defender Simon Mack skates out for starting lineups during the Penn State men's hockey game against Notre Dame on Feb. 14, 2025.

here, somebody that I can call whenever, and he's always been there for me. Any advice I have in regards to leadership, my game or just to chat, he's been a super great mentor."

Mack spent his first two seasons in State College playing a limited role, seeing minimal ice time in big situations and no action on the power play.

Since then, the senior has been the blue and white's most recent success story, earning the sport's most prestigious honor by donning the "C" as Penn State's captain and leading all Big Ten defensemen in assists this season.

Many players face a sense of

uncertainty when transitioning to a new level, such as the jump from juniors to college hockey, and that ascent can often cause a shift in confidence. For Mack, however, his confidence has grown steadily since his freshman season, aiming to improve that aspect of his game.

"Just confidence in my game," Mack said. "It's been something I've been trying to work on along with my offensive game over my time here. I think, as you get older and play more games, you develop that confidence. That's where you start to see a little bit of success and just continue to help the team in that way."

As his confidence started to grow, so did his production. Mack boasts career highs in assists, points, net rating, power-play assists, shots and blocks, along with manning the first power-play unit and playing the entire 2024-25 season on the top defensive pairing.

Mack's improvement in his offensive game has made him a go-to guy for Penn State in overtime, often starting the extra period on the ice and scoring two game-winning goals.

Additionally, the Brockville, Ontario, native's growth resulted in him leading the team in ice time, logging over 22 minutes in 29 of 34 games this season.

Coach Guy Gadowsky — who

recruited Mack in 2017 — couldn't be happier for the senior's success. He said all of Mack's breakthroughs were earned through his hard work and dedication to improve his craft.

"He didn't demand any of it. He wasn't promised any of it," Gadowsky said. "He wanted an opportunity to come in and work, and that's exactly what he did, and now he's getting the opportunity. He's taken advantage of it, and I love the story of Simon Mack."

Mack's personality traits set him apart from your average captain. His work ethic is unmatched, but he doesn't scream or yell; he leads by example. The team witnessed the dedication Mack has put in over the past several years, and they voted him as the 11th captain in Penn State history.

Mack's been a tremendous leader for the blue and white, helping orchestrate a historic second-half comeback as the catalyst of "sticking with what was working well for the team," according to teammate Tyler Paquette.

"He was obviously selected as a captain by his peers for a reason, and that reason is he's an example guy," Gadowsky said. "He's never one to yell and scream. (Mack) seldom speaks, but when he does, (the team) listens. He's earned everything, and I think that really is something that the

team respects."

Mack's roommate, Dylan Lugris, also noted that the defenseman is highly respected by his teammates for the work he does behind the scenes, which sets a great example for the program's younger players.

"The guys really take what he says to heart," Lugris said. "He's obviously done all the hard work, all the extra reps, and now he's captain. It's great because a lot of guys look up to him, and he leads by example, both on and off the ice."

Mack's commitment and determination have not only shaped him into a successful athlete but also a top student in the classroom.

The 23-year-old not only has a passion for hockey, but is challenging himself with learning the ins and outs of medicine. When he's not on the ice and working on his game, Mack has tackled pre-med classes, receiving the nickname "Doc" from his teammates and coaches.

"I got the nickname (Doc) my first year," Mack said. "One of the other guys gave it to me because I was a pre-med major, but obviously, I still want to play hockey moving forward. If, at some point, I want to fall back on the path of medicine, that's something I'm also interested in. I just enjoy taking (pre-med) classes and challenging myself with that."

On Saturday, March 1, 2025, "Doc" stepped into Pegula Ice Arena for the last home game in his lustrous collegiate hockey career. His name was announced to loud cheers during player introductions, as he skated toward the Roar Zone one last time.

Hours later, as the final buzzer sounded, Mack went through the handshake line, sang the alma mater and said one final goodbye to the fans who had supported him the past four years.

It might've been the last NCAA game he played in Pegula, but his sights are set for the Big Ten Tournament, where Penn State faces off against Michigan as Mack seeks one last playoff run.

"It's exciting times for Penn State hockey," Mack said.

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Chris Eutsler/Collégian

Defender Simon Mack skates with the puck during the Penn State Men's hockey game in Pegula Arena on Sunday, Nov. 5, 2023.

‘She has a wicked shot’

Penn State women’s hockey forward Grace Outwater impresses in freshman season

By Andrew Deal
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Entering the 2024-25 season, coach Jeff Kampersal had some high hopes for the future of the program because of the incoming freshman class.

The player who stood out in that class was forward Grace Outwater, who has made the most of her opportunities for the Nittany Lions in her first season.

Outwater’s decision to join Penn State included a lot of trust in the coaching staff, as she would make her way from Ontario, Canada.

“Having the trust already with the coach and knowing the facilities and everything without even having to go see them, and how extraordinary they are... it was an easy choice for me to come to Penn State,” Outwater said.

Outwater made her decision, and Hockey Valley became her new home after spending time with the Ottawa Lady Senators, where she put up a staggering



Forward Grace Outwater drives toward the net with the puck against Lindenwood at Pegula Ice Arena on Nov. 16, 2024.

50 goals in only 38 games in the 2023-24 season.

Kampersal knew what he was getting with the sharpshooting forward.

“She has a wicked shot. She scored 50 goals last year in a

really good league,” Kampersal said.

Outwater’s success in the blue and white was not immediate while she made the transition to the collegiate game. However, as she continued to adjust, the scoring came along with it.

“It came with confidence,” Outwater said. “Obviously, at the start of the season, it’s hard as a freshman to have confidence as soon as you get going, but learning to have a shooter’s mentality, as well, has really helped.”

Part of the transition process over the summer and into the beginning of the season was sped up by training with captain Tessa Janecke. Janecke has cemented herself as the top scorer in Penn State women’s hockey history and has focused on helping the future of the program.

“It was great to have (Janecke) here over the summer just to help us gain confidence and learn all those skills that she taught us throughout the summer,” Outwater said.

As Janecke nears the end of

her junior year, Outwater has put herself in a position to succeed Janecke as Penn State’s next reliable scorer.

With her success growing and expectations rising, Outwater has even received some comparisons to the current Penn State captain.

“Grace is similar to Tessa in the fact that she’s just a very strong, tough, gritty kid,” Kampersal said.

The Picton, Ontario, native has found her confidence and shot just at the right time, which has allowed her to earn some premium awards throughout the season.

Throughout her freshman campaign, she’s been named AHA Rookie of the Week four times while also earning the AHA Rookie of the Month award for September/October.

“It’s super cool to get the award, and it’s awesome seeing it on Mondays,” Outwater said. “It really makes me know that the work I’ve been putting into hockey has been going pretty well.”

The freshman forward is up to 16 goals and 25 points as she continues to adapt to the college game. Despite Outwater’s numbers not being at, or near, the caliber of Janecke, her game meets the eye test.

“Her shot is elite,” Kampersal said. “I’m not receiving it, but it must be deceptive for the goalies because she shoots straight on, and she’s beating goalies a lot straight on.”

Kampersal broke it down even more with how technical she’s already gotten within her shot.

“Her stick angle, she’s changing the relationship (of the stick) a little bit,” Kampersal said. “She hasn’t had a lot of goals where she dekes the goalie, they’re just straight-on shots.”

In addition to the recognition she’s received from Kampersal and the conference, she’s also earned the attention of her teammates through her strong play.

“She’s been super impactful,” freshman forward Abby Stonehouse said. “She’s scoring, helping the team out a lot, and I think the team is really grateful for her.”

It’s not just her “elite” shot that has Kampersal impressed. Outwater’s earned her spot on both special teams units, playing an important defensive role on the penalty kill.

“She’s stepped up over the course of the season as a counted-on penalty killer, so she’s doing more than putting the puck in the net,” Kampersal said.

Outwater’s first season is nearing an end, and as the postseason schedule ramps up, she’s firing on all cylinders, providing the Nittany Lions with a real scoring threat anytime she steps on the ice.

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Championship bound



Penn State hockey players fight to locate the puck during the Penn State women’s hockey game against Mercyhurst at Pegula Ice Arena on Feb. 8, 2025

By Baxter Gimer
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

As the final horn sounded in Pegula Ice Arena on Saturday evening, Penn State secured its ticket to the AHA Championship for a final brawl against Mercyhurst.

The Nittany Lions swept RIT to earn their third straight appearance in the AHA final, with puck drop set for 2 p.m. Saturday in State College.

“We know each time we play Mercyhurst, it’s an absolute grind,” coach Jeff Kampersal said. “They’re really well coached, they defend hard, angle hard, have skill up front and try to catch you in transition.”

Mercyhurst and Syracuse faced off in a best-of-three thriller to determine the representative

for the other side of the bracket. The 1-1 series needed a win-or-go-home Sunday showdown.

The game was tied 2-2 entering the final period, and both sides needed a hero.

Around the eight-minute mark of the third period, Lakers forward Julia Schalin barreled through the right face-off circle and fired a wrist shot on net, prompting a juicy rebound from goalie Allie Kelley that trickled out of reach for Syracuse’s nearby defenders.

Schalin quickly collected her own scraps on the backhand of her blade and flicked it over the sprawling netminder and into the back of the net to give Mercyhurst the 3-2 lead and the eventual game-winner.

After a few more minutes of anxious defense, the Lakers closed out the victory and sealed their spot in the final.

Schalin scored three goals on Penn State during four regular season games.

The blue and white enters the matchup a nearly perfect 19-1 in the AHA. Mercyhurst was the only team to take down the Nittany Lions during conference play.

Mercyhurst served Penn State its only conference loss of the regular season on Feb. 8, outscoring the blue and white, 3-2, in Pegula Ice Arena. Vanessa Upson, the Lakers’ team captain and leader in points, scored the game-winning goal.

“That loss, in particular, I think was beneficial because we were able to reset the team,” Kampersal said. “We got a little bit loose in the [defensive] zone, a little bit loose in terms of taking away time and space.”

The Nittany Lions have the upper hand this season, winning three out of the four matchups.

However, all games but one have been determined by one goal.

The Lakers’ penalty killers held Penn State’s power play scoreless in eight attempts the entire 2024-25 season. Mercyhurst tallied two goals on 11 power-play chances against the blue and white.

“We tend to hold onto the puck a little bit, take one extra stick-handle, and then the spacing or the lanes close up,” Kampersal said. “We’re focusing on moving the puck and having a bit more urgency.”

Out of the six teams in the AHA, the Nittany Lions rank fourth on the power play with a 17.7% average. RIT, the league leader, smokes that average with a 27.6% scoring rate. The Lakers are third with 19.1%, a slight edge over the blue and white.

Penn State forward Maddie Christian’s breakout year showed no sympathy for Mercyhurst. The 20-goal scorer tallied four goals in four games against coach Michael Sisti’s squad.

Tessa Janecke, Penn State’s goals and points leader, also reigned terror on the Lakers, scoring four goals and tallying four assists across their four matchups.

Janecke and the Nittany Lions take the stage on Saturday to fight for an AHA title. The winner automatically qualifies for the NCAA National Collegiate Women’s Ice Hockey Championship.

The date is set, and a guaranteed ticket to the tournament is on the line, along with the glory of capturing the conference title.

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Penn State hockey players shake hands with Mercyhurst players following their game at Pegula Ice Arena.

It’s time

Women’s hockey prepares for Mercyhurst

By Andrew Deal
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Following two wins against RIT, No. 8 Penn State is set for a championship game against Mercyhurst. It’ll be the fifth time the Nittany Lions take on the Lakers this season, with the blue and white leading the season series 3-1.

Mercyhurst’s victory over Penn State was the Nittany Lions’ lone loss in AHA play this season, as it went 19-1 in conference play.

“It’s never ideal to lose, but that loss in particular, I think it was beneficial because we were able to reset the team and they had good habits, but we weren’t playing with championship habits,” coach Jeff Kampersal said.

The Nittany Lions are coming off a series sweep of RIT in which they remained in firm control, outsourcing the Tigers 7-2.

The blue and white focused on limiting power-play opportunities against one of the top power-play units in the country. That game plan will remain the same against Mercyhurst.

“We’ll continue to work the next few days on it and see what happens,” Kampersal said. “We’ll be focusing on all kinds of situations... Maybe we get a 5-on-3, those kind of things like what we want to do in closing minutes of periods ... We’re going through all that and all those decisions now.”

As they work on those situations, it’ll be with the hope that the Nittany Lions get power-play opportunities, something that was limited throughout the regular season.

“We didn’t have a ton of chances at Mercyhurst, either,” Kampersal said. “But for a period of time, we were passing the puck around and being really passive and not urgent on the power play.”

The film from the last series against Mercyhurst will be a point of emphasis throughout the week, as Penn State defeated the Lakers in overtime before falling in Game 2.

“We want to be more urgent, move the puck quicker,” Kampersal said. “We showed them — there was a clip from the Dallas Stars last night where all five guys touched the puck... So we’re just focusing on moving the puck and have a little bit more urgency.”

The teams are quite familiar, but one thing that could change is the number of fans in attendance. With Spring Break beginning Saturday, there’s a mixed reaction to how many fans are going to show up.

“Students (are) going away for Spring Break, but hopefully people stick around and can get at least to 2,000 people. That would be awesome for our players,” Kampersal said.

The 2,000-fan mark would set an attendance record at Pegula Ice Arena for a Penn State women’s hockey game and would certainly provide a beneficial home-ice advantage.

“I feel like our players definitely deserve that support,” Kampersal said. “They put on a good show, and hopefully, it would be nice to see a crowded house in Pegula.”

Despite the blue and white holding a distinct advantage in every aspect of the game, the numbers and rosters don’t depict the heart and chip that the Lakers tend to play with against the Nittany Lions.

“What makes them particularly dangerous is that they’re in our state, and they feel like Penn State gets everything, (and) they get nothing. So, they get like a little chip on their shoulder and play hard that way,” Kampersal said.

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Defender Karley Garcia skates toward her teammates after a goal during Penn State’s game against Mercyhurst.