

Men claim victory, women fall to SIUE

BY JOE BELL
Staff Reporter

It has been nearly a month since their last meet, but the men's and women's tennis teams hit the courts swinging.

The men and women played their latest indoor dual meet Saturday at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. The women won their meet 5-4, and the men lost 4-5.

The women began with a strong showing in the doubles matches. The No. 1 team of juniors Lindsay Blair and Courtney Walther won its match, 8-6 and the No. 2 combo of senior Jennifer Salmon and freshman Amy Ochs won its match 8-5.

The women carried their success into their singles matches. No. 2 Blair won her match 6-3, 6-4, and No. 4 freshman Kelsey Kuykendall won 6-4, 6-0 in straight sets. No. 5 Ochs won her match in a tie-breaker 6-4, 0-6, 10-5.

"The team did great overall," Salmon said. "It was a really good win for us. [SIUE] is a really good team. We thought we would match up pretty well, so we're definitely happy with [our win]."

In sophomore Peter Bracha's return after a wrist injury, he and senior partner Cody Pusateri were the only pair to claim a doubles victory 9-7 against SIUE.

"[Bracha] played really well," Pusateri said. "It really is a joy to get to play with him because he can do everything really

well. It's not like he's really got a weak part of his game. So even though he lost singles, he's got such a good head on his shoulders that he didn't let it affect [his play]. He knew we still had a chance to pull out that match."

In singles, the men claimed three victories. No. 3 Pusateri (6-1, 7-5) and No. 5 sophomore John Rothfusz (7-5, 6-2) won in straight sets, and No. 4 sophomore Kyle Schlotz won in a tie-breaker (6-4, 4-6, 10-5).

The Bulldogs played against many opponents they had faced in their last match at Principia on Feb. 15-16.

"We knew going in that both matches were going to be close," head coach Pete Kendall said. "The results proved that. We had played those players on both teams a couple weeks ago as well as in the fall at tournaments. They knew us, and we knew them."

Pusateri recovered from a recent illness to win his singles match (6-1, 7-5).

"It was the same guy I played two weeks ago," Pusateri said. "Going into a match, knowing how that's going to go, is a real big confidence booster. That's how it's always been for me. If I know I can beat a guy once, even if it's close or even if I know I didn't play well, it kind of gives me a mental edge over him."

The team has practiced less during the past few weeks in an effort to save itself for

the rapid succession of upcoming meets. The team has been practicing a maximum of three days in Pershing, whose courts play trickier than the floor at Edwardsville.

"[The surface in Pershing] is a rubber floor," Salmon said. "... It just completely changes the bounce of the ball. It makes [the ball] quite a bit quicker, which in some regards I guess it's better to go from that to slower [courts] as opposed to going from slower to faster. So optimistically, I guess it's better than the opposite, but it would still be nice to have an indoor court."

Normally by this time of year, the team practices outdoors every day of the week.

"This is the first time I can remember in years when we haven't been outside already," Kendall said. "Usually by the end of February we can get outside."

The next few weeks could prove to be tough for both teams. The men's team will play three duals this coming weekend, and the women will play two. The home openers for both teams follow soon thereafter.

Next up for the men's tennis team is a dual match against Winona State University (Minn.) on March 6 and dual meets against both Mesa State College (Col.) and Metropolitan State College of Denver on March 7.

The women take on Winona State on March 6 and Mesa State on March 7. All of these meets will be played in Topeka, Kan.



Brian O'Shaughnessy/Index
Sophomore Peter Bracha sets up for a backhand in an indoor practice in Pershing Arena. Bracha won his doubles match Saturday against SIUE.

Bulls shut out Tulsa in spring season opener

BY COREY JAROS
Staff Reporter

The Bulls rugby team set the tone for the spring campaign with a 53-0 shutout victory at home against the University of Tulsa's club.

"The most exciting thing about Sunday was to see how well everyone responded coming out of last fall and a solid off-season of practice," head coach Bill Sexton said.

Junior captain Justin Lacy initiated the scoring barrage with a pick-and-drive move to give the Bulls the lead two minutes into the match. Lacy also barged past the goal line to score another five-point try later in the game. He played a large role in coordinating the efforts of the 15 men on the field, and the constant 30 mph gusts of wind made his presence all the more essential.

"As captain, Justin was just constantly all over the field, and he leads by example which is very helpful out there," Sexton said.

Junior Dustin Ralph took a pass and exploded around the corner late in the game, then cut back toward mid-field and headed for the goal line for another Bulls try.

"To see him running aggressively like that was really exciting," Sexton said. "I think the crowd really liked it when he cut back against the grain on a couple players and left them grasping at air."

Senior Tim Hage played a fundamentally sound game, matching Lacy's production with two tries of his own.

"The tries that he got were because he was doing the right things," Sexton said. "Several times in the game he would be coming on and supporting a player on a breakaway, and he kept the ball alive and

took it forward, which led to two nice tries."

Sexton said one of the main reasons the Bulls 2-9 fall season was a lack of a supporting cast for their core of experienced lettermen. He said the problem was not that the team lacked talent but that it lost a lot of players to graduation and turnover last year.

After an offseason recruitment effort, the team benefited from contributions by several young players Sunday.

"We had a real mix of youth on the field," Sexton said. "There are several guys that joined the team last fall and are getting to play on the A team because of their solid work ethics. We are getting an immediate impact from a lot of young players, which is really exciting."

One player Sexton said he was particularly impressed with was sophomore Lee Jones, who is playing his second

semester of rugby for the Bulls. Jones said his main goal on the field is to provide support for his teammates, enabling them to do their best.

"He moved the ball up well, he went into rucks, he protected the ball carrier at the tackle, he did lots of all-around good things that you look for in a player," Sexton said. "And he just reacts to the situation in front of him really well."

Jones scored a try when he was the fourth Bull to touch the ball coming out of a scrum on Tulsa's side of the field. He powered through the last defender's tackle and touched the ball over the goal line with an outstretched arm.

"The ball came out of the scrum and went to Will [Holleman], then to Josh [Harris], and the defenders sank into him, but he got rid of it first," Jones said. "I got the next pass and got tackled about two meters from the line, and I just

reached out with the ball and touched it in the end zone."

The infusion of new players into the Bulls' rugby club has rejuvenated the team's hopes to once again earn the opportunity to play in the Western Collegiate Championships. Being able to field almost two full squads not only increases the depth of the team for game substitutions, but also allows for more beneficial practice sessions.

"Last semester we would only have like three or four reserves for a game, and that really took a toll on a lot of us mentally," junior Will Holleman said. "Now we have enough for almost two full squads, and that's also priceless as far as practicing goes."

The Bulls will travel to Manhattan, Kan., this weekend to take on two perennial conference powerhouses, the University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma

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