
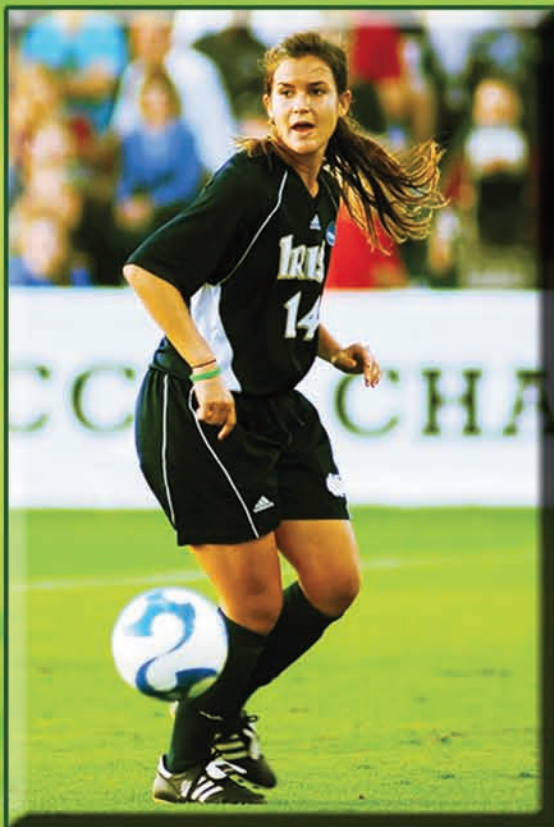
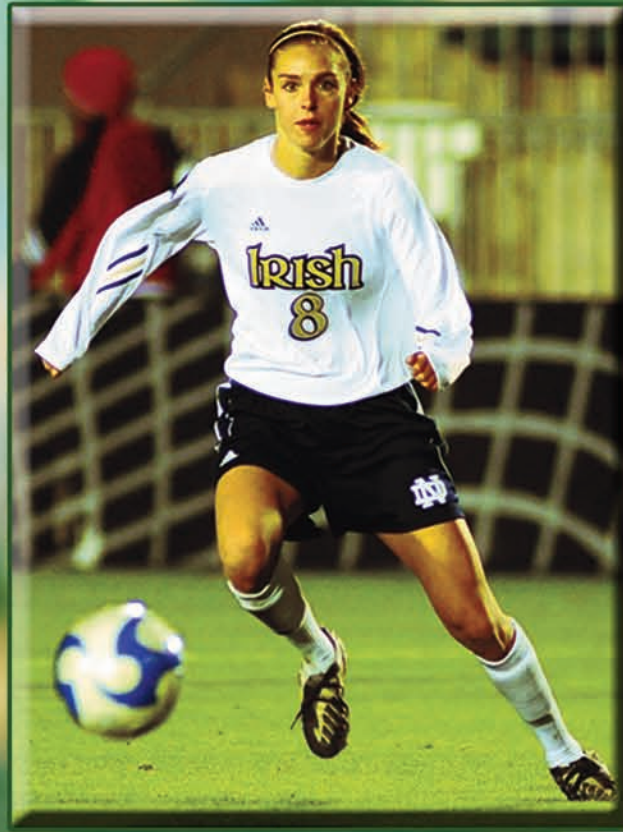
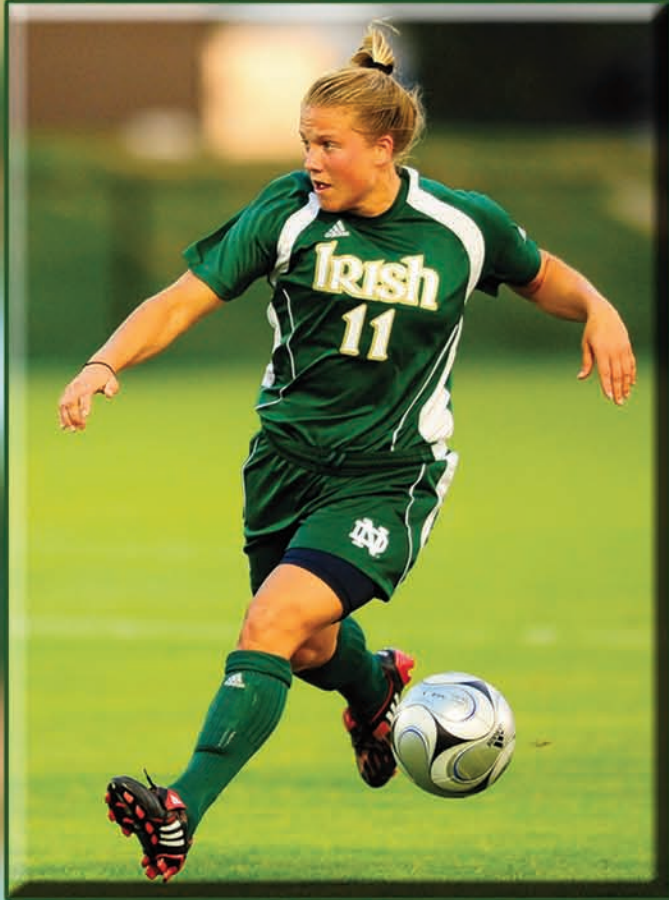


IRISH INSIDER

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THE
OBSERVER



**FOUR
FOR
FOUR**

**THE IRISH SENIORS HEAD
TO THEIR FOURTH COLLEGE
CUP IN FOUR YEARS**



ILLUSTRATION: ANDREA ARCHER

Underclassmen carry Irish through rough start

Henderson, Fowlkes and Augustin fill in for injured seniors with goals, assists and leadership

By ALEX BARKER
Sports Writer

Entering the season, all signs pointed towards another Notre Dame run at an NCAA Championship.

Sure it didn't help to lose one of most talented senior classes in program history, but as is true of all great programs, there would be no rebuilding, just reloading. The third-ranked Irish not only boasted a strong senior class, who could not have come closer to a title in its previous tries only to be denied in three College Cup appearances, but also a collection of talented underclassmen ready to step into starring roles, whatever they may be.

"At the beginning of the season, you are still trying people at different positions using different rotations," junior forward Rose Augustin said.

While still trying to find the right lineup as injuries depleted the team, top-ranked North Carolina came to town.

The Irish had high expectations heading into the rematch of last season's College Cup final, a 2-1 Tar Heel victory, hoping to christen the brand new Alumni Stadium with an opening night victory.

However, an energetic crowd of 3,000-plus fans weren't enough to will the Irish to a win as the Tar Heels dominated early and often on their way to a 6-0 shutout.

Things continued to worsen for the Irish.

Just a week later, Notre Dame traveled out west for a pair of showdowns with highly ranked opponents Stanford and Santa Clara. The offensive woes continued as the Irish failed to score in

either match, falling 2-0 in both contests.

"When we were struggling to find the right lineup early in the season, injuries really compounded our problems," Irish coach Randy Waldrum said. "Early on we just didn't have a solid back line and it took us a while to establish that."

For some teams, these losses might have just been a case of running into a better opponent. But this Notre Dame team wasn't accustomed to losing. Prior to the North Carolina loss, the Irish had been riding a 30-game regular-season winning streak following last season's undefeated regular season. This season, they already had three defeats.

"You are trying to find your way as the season goes on and that's why you play those hard games early on in the season," junior forward Lauren Fowlkes said. "It exposes what you need to work on the rest of the season."

While Notre Dame was able to find its rhythm in time to turn its season around, and thus reach its fourth consecutive College Cup, things might not have panned out so nicely had Waldrum not made a number of crucial personnel changes.

During the blowout loss to North Carolina earlier in the season, Waldrum made the decision to move Fowlkes from the midfield into the central forward position.

"When we made that move, there's no question that's when things started to really click," Waldrum said. "We made a few moves and that was probably one of the biggest."

No stranger to the position having played it in high school, Fowlkes has shined scoring 10

"Early on we just didn't have a solid back line and it took us awhile to establish that."

Randy Waldrum
Irish coach



IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

Sophomore Melissa Henderson has emerged as an offensive stalwart for Notre Dame this season, leading the Irish with 18 goals and 41 points. She also has five assists on the season.

goals and adding four assists this season on her way to collecting Big East co-Offensive Player of the Year honors.

"[I'm willing to do] whatever is needed for the team and coach thought that it was a good fit. I was excited about it and it just kind of worked out," Fowlkes said.

Possibly the biggest beneficiary of Fowlkes' transition has been sophomore forward Melissa Henderson. Henderson has really come on in the NCAA tournament, scoring seven goals in four contests, bringing her season total to 18 tallies and five assists.

"It's awesome having [Fowlkes] up there," Henderson said. "All of our forwards are tremendous. But she has been doing really well, to come in there and score the goals that she has and setting up the plays that she has."

Toward the end of last season, Henderson was slowed by a lin-

gering knee injury that took its toll down the stretch as the Irish got deeper into the tournament. Henderson admitted to feeling much better and it having a positive impact on her performance.

"I'm definitely excited [to be healthier] this year," she said. "Last season I never really knew how much I could give on the field. Now I know I can give 100 percent and still have energy to go into overtime and actually be able to help my team."

While Fowlkes and Henderson have had outstanding seasons in their own right, they have junior midfielder Rose Augustin to thank for many of their offensive opportunities. Augustin, in her second season as a regular starter, leads the team with 10 assists and has seven goals of her own.

"[Augustin] has been one of our most consistent players all year," Waldrum said. "I think she's having an All-American

type year. I think she's made great improvements in her defending and she's really become a leader for us on the field."

Augustin's emergence became possible when last year's talented class graduated, creating an opening that Augustin has filled ably.

"Rose has definitely come into her own this season," senior defender Rachel VanderGenugten said. "Last year she had a lot of other people ahead of her in that position."

VanderGenugten said necessity spurred the younger players into bigger roles. After Notre Dame's leading scorer last year, Kerri Hanks, graduated, someone had to pick up the offensive slack. Fowlkes and Henderson have certainly done such. Similarly, Augustin's leadership was needed in the front line.

"This year it had to be [Rose]," VanderGenugten said. "If Rose didn't step up, I'm not sure if we would have had an upperclassman [leading] up there at all."

Another change came in the Irish net. Senior Kelsey Lysander, who started every game last year compiling a 26-1-0 record, began the season splitting time with junior Nikki Weiss before Weiss eventually took over for good.

With all the changes this Irish team has undergone, they find themselves in a familiar position, even familiar to the younger players on the team.

"It's good to have [those previous tournaments] under your belt and to experience something like that," Henderson said. "Coming into next year, you are used to it and more prepared."

The Irish have indeed become used to the NCAA Tournament, as the bar has been set at a high level.

"There is just an expectation to be there [at the NCAA Tournament] every year," Fowlkes said. "Just having those goals really helps you focus throughout the season."

After changes throughout the lineup, Fowlkes, Henderson and Augustin have found themselves in positions where their focus could lead the Irish beyond expectations, to a College Cup title.



Juniors Lauren Fowlkes, left, and Rose Augustin, right, have adapted to expanded roles this season. Fowlkes began the season as a midfielder, but after Notre Dame struggled in the beginning of the season, moved to forward and led the team with 76 shots.



IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

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Seven seniors seek one title

Headed to their fourth College Cup, Irish seniors are seeking an elusive Championship



IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

Senior forward Michele Weissenhofer leads the Irish into their fourth College Cup in four years. Weissenhofer is a member of one of the most successful senior classes in program, and NCAA, history, but the seven seniors at Notre Dame still lack a National Championship.

By DOUGLAS FARMER
Sports Writer

Four College Cups. Two national runner-up finishes. Four Big East divisional titles. Three Big East Tournament titles. Ninety-one wins against only 10 losses.

It is safe to say that Micaela Alvarez, Amanda Clark, Haley Ford, Kelsey Lysander, Courtney Rosen, Rachel VanderGenugten and Michele Weissenhofer, the seven seniors in this year's senior class, have accomplished a lot in the past four years. They would say they have not accomplished enough.

"I came in wanting to win a National Championship and play competitively for a successful team," forward and captain Weissenhofer said. "We have definitely surpassed my expectations for a successful team, and we may have many accomplishments including four Final Fours, but I still haven't received a national championship yet."

The Irish have indeed gone oh-for-three in the College Cup, and each loss in the final weekend of the season stung more than the previous one.

In their freshman year, 2006, Notre Dame lost to, of all teams, North Carolina 2-1. Two years later the same thing happened, a 2-1 loss to the Tar Heels after North Carolina scored a goal with only two minutes left in the game.

"I would say our approach against North Carolina freshman year was that we had them on this pedestal that they were this unbelievable opponent and rival that we couldn't beat," defender VanderGenugten said of their first experience in the finals.

In between the two losses to the Tar Heels, Florida State beat the Irish in the College Cup semifinals in 2007.

"That year we wanted to win so badly after losing to North Carolina the year before," forward and captain Rosen said. "We just felt we had worked so hard the whole season to get there, and then to have it pulled short in the semis was

even harder than losing in the championship."

Even if all three previous Cup appearances ended in losses, the pure feat of reaching four Cups consecutively surpasses any expectations anyone had for the team's seven seniors Irish coach Randy Waldrum said.

"It is such a difficult thing to get to a College Cup, yet alone four of them," he said. "I don't think I could honestly sit here and tell you that I would have expected this group to get to four. You hope that you have a group that could win a national championship along the way, but I think they have certainly exceeded any expectations that you realistically had when you started out."

In getting to the four Cups, and falling short in the first three, the seven seniors went through experiences that few others can fathom.

"Especially after last year's loss, we can think of so many times we just sat on our futons back in the dorm and cried because we lost," VanderGenugten said. "It was such a bonding experience to go through something like that."

The three dramatic losses have not been the only thing to bring the seven closer.

"We have relationships that I can't even describe, to be able to play on the field as a competitor, be a teammate, and also be a roommate. There are so many facets of our relationship that I believe we have developed through soccer that go into various areas of our lives," defender Clark said. "We have learned so much through both the successes and even more through the defeats. You learn more after you lose and have a chance to look back at it."

Learning more through a loss does not mean these Irish are willing to suffer another defeat, not at all. If nothing else, the seven hope their previous heartbreaks will contribute to a triumph this weekend.

"This year we are going in knowing we have beaten [North Carolina] in the past

and are fully capable of beating them again," VanderGenugten said. "I think we are stronger than we were last season."

Last season's end is a common motivational theme, as well as lesson, among this group. The team rolled through the regular season last year, reaching the NCAA Championship final undefeated and untied before North Carolina dashed perfection.

"Last year I'd say it came pretty easy," forward Ford said. "Most of the season, from the very first game to the final, we clicked pretty easily. This year we have had to work a lot harder. We had three losses in our first few games."

Tears are no longer shed over those three losses, including defeats to the Tar Heels as

well as to Stanford, both of which are in the College Cup this weekend.

"It's kind of an advantage. Last year we never tailed, so we never had to fight back and come from behind," VanderGenugten said. "This year we've done that all season. ... We've been down late in the half, and we come back and get the win. That's a huge difference."

The past four years haven't only been about fighting back from deficits or defeats though. As made evident by their bounty of wins and trophies, these seniors have had more good times than most college athletes come to know. One of the highlights of their four years was Senior Day on Oct. 25. The highlight of the day came when Waldrum subbed

"We want to end [our four years] with winning the final big kahuna."

Courtney Rosen
Senior forward



IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

Senior defender Haley Ford has gotten used to playing North Carolina in the College Cup. Friday's match-up will be the third between the two teams in the College Cup in the past four years.

Alvarez onto the field. Alvarez had torn her ACL that week in practice, and doctors had ruled her out of any competition for the rest of the season, so Waldrum's move was quite surprising.

"[Waldrum] sprung it on me on the sideline as we were sitting there," she said. "Just to put on the jersey one more time and to be able to step out there was really an unbelievable experience. It was emotional, but it was something I'm always going to cherish having that memory."

The kind gesture did not only reward Alvarez, but her teammates, friends rather, got some great blackmail out of the moment.

"Some quality dance moves were caught on tape," said Rosen, unable to control her laughter.

In the long run, the seven seniors will remember moments like Alvarez's moment, or VanderGenugten's first two career goals in the first two rounds of these playoffs, more vividly than any College Cup heartbreaks, but in the short term, they all have one common thought.

"Haley said the other day and it sums it up pretty well. We are tired of someone else ending our season, and are tired of ending the season crying," Alvarez said. "Let's celebrate for once."

Goaltender Lysander, who has stepped strongly into a leadership role this season as junior Nikki Weiss has shined in the goal, summed up the senior class' thoughts concisely.

"We have a job to do," she said. "Let's get it done."

In the end though, the seniors' long list of accomplishments to date cannot be overlooked, no matter how badly they want to add two wins to the list this weekend.

"We have a lot to celebrate and we have had a great four-year run," Rosen said. "But we want to end it with winning the final big kahuna."

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Familiar foe awaits Irish in College Cup Semis

By MIKE GOTIMER
Sports Writer

For the second straight year, and the third time in four years, Notre Dame and North Carolina will meet again in the College Cup.

In women's college soccer, No. 5 Notre Dame (21-3-1) and No. 4 North Carolina (21-3-1) have formed the premier rivalry for more than a decade.

"The last 15 years, I think when you think of women's college soccer, I think Notre Dame [and North Carolina] would probably have to come to mind as that biggest and most storied rivalry," Irish coach Randy Waldrum said. "Over time that Notre Dame-Carolina rivalry has been one of the best in the country, and I know that when we go there to play, it's always a packed house and obviously when they come to us it's a packed house because that's the game that everybody wants to see, and I think everybody around the country is always waiting to see what the score is the next morning when the game's over."

Coming into this season, Notre Dame faced questions early about their ability to replace key seniors after their run to an undefeated national championship ended in the College Cup final with a 2-1 loss to the Tar Heels, the same score that North Carolina defeated the Irish by in 2006

when Notre Dame's current seniors made their first run at a national title as freshmen.

The Irish had a chance to put concerns surrounding this year's team to rest when the Tar Heels traveled to Notre Dame for the first time in a decade to open newly-constructed Alumni Stadium on Sept. 4 in a matchup of the top two teams in the country. Unfortunately for the Irish, they were the ones whose heels looked like they were stuck in tar after North Carolina dismantled Notre Dame in a 6-0 blowout. Doubts continued to rise after the Irish lost to Stanford, who enters the College Cup with an undefeated record, and Santa Clara on an early West Coast road trip.

Since their early season struggles, however, the Irish have been one of the hottest teams in the nation, rattling off a 19-game unbeaten streak in which they have trailed for just 16:38.

"They beat us in the beginning of the season when we were a different team. We have changed and developed this season," senior defender Amanda Clark said. "We are a different team; they don't know what's coming to them."

The streak has given not only Clark, but the whole Irish team confidence, and not only do they expect a better result than their blowout loss in September, but a win against their rivals.



IAN GAVLICK/The Observer

Notre Dame defenders, including Rose Augustin (15), Mellisa Henderson (6) and Courtney Rosen (14) line up to block North Carolina forward Casey Nogueira's free kick in last year's final.

"It's our time to beat them when it counts," Clark said. "They won in the beginning here, but we are ready to take that national championship."

Of the four teams still chasing that national championship, the Irish are the only remaining two-seed. North Carolina, UCLA and Stanford are one-seeds.

"I think, in fact, that [the team is] probably feeling that most people think that we're the underdogs going into the game," Waldrum said. "I think we're the only ones that really feel like we can go there and win and are expecting to do that on Friday."

After their three disappoint-

ing early season losses, the Irish made a few key lineup changes that propelled them to their current unbeaten streak. For starters, junior goalie Nikki Weiss took over the goalkeeper duties from senior Kelsey Lysander and posted a 14-1-1 record in net with an astounding 0.47 goals against average and 7 shutouts, with a 13-0-1 record during the winning streak.

Furthermore, Fowlkes moved from midfield to forward and gave the Irish much needed firepower on offense through her own goal scoring. Fowlkes's move also freed up sophomore forward Melissa Henderson for more chances in the opponent's half of the field. Henderson has scored 10 goals and notched three assists in seven playoff games.

"We made a few moves, and [moving Fowlkes] was probably one of the big moves that we made," Waldrum said. "I think moving [Fowlkes] up front gave us two things. It gave us a player who could hold the ball for us, a bigger stronger kind of target for us to play into that could hold the ball, and I think certainly because she's a great player in her own right, it now gave the opposition another good player up front to have to deal with, and that's certainly taken some of the pressure off Henderson."

For her part, Henderson has teamed with junior midfielder Rose Augustin to provide a spark for the Irish offense during their postseason run.

"I think both of them really turned it on," Waldrum said.

"Rose was pretty good for us scoring some goals early, and then she went through a spell where she was still playing very well but wasn't scoring as many goals, and then it just seems like come playoff time she got hot again, and I think her and [Henderson] have a great connection with each other."

The Irish hope that the changes they've made will lead to a different outcome against the Tar Heels when they face off on Friday at 8 p.m. in College Station, Tex. Although Waldrum is unsure about how North Carolina might plan for Notre Dame's changes, he thinks that his team has an opportunity to catch the Tar Heels sleeping.

"Well I really don't think they will change," he said. "They've got such a history in their own program, I think they'll continue to play the way they've played all year, and I don't think just because we've changed some personnel around it will cause them to make any adjustments or changes."

"What will be different is I think they're going to have to respect the fact that we are a different team than what they saw when they came to our place in September," he continued. "What you hope for is that they don't respect it enough and they don't take it seriously enough, and they remember the 6-0 win and you can catch them a little bit off guard if that's the case."

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6 GAMES IN 4 YEARS = RIVALRY

| Date | Score | Location |
|---------------|-------------|--------------------------------|
| Dec. 4, 2009 | TBD | College Cup Semifinal |
| Sept. 4, 2009 | UNC 6, ND 0 | Notre Dame, Ind. |
| Dec. 7, 2008 | UNC 2, ND 1 | College Cup Final |
| Sept. 5, 2008 | ND 1, UNC 0 | Chapel Hill, N.C. |
| Aug. 19, 2007 | ND 2, UNC 2 | Exhibition at Notre Dame, Ind. |
| Dec. 3, 2006 | UNC 2, ND 1 | College Cup Final |

ANDREA ARCHER | The Observer

Irish recover from three losses with 19-game unbeaten streak

By DOUGLAS FARMER
Sports Writer

After beginning the season 3-3, No. 5 Notre Dame has gone unbeaten in 19 consecutive matches. The streak started with a 4-0 victory over DePaul on Sept. 18, and included two golden goal victories as well as a tie.

The Irish topped West Virginia in overtime with a golden goal from junior forward Taylor Knaack. The conference victory broke the Division I record for consecutive unbeaten games in conference play, previously held by North Carolina at 55 games. The Irish record has now been extended to 66 games.

Notre Dame used another golden goal, provided by sophomore defender Jessica Schuveiller, to beat St. John's 2-1 in the semifinals of the Big East Tournament on Nov. 6.

On Oct. 4 Notre Dame did not manage a golden goal as it fought Pittsburgh to a 0-0 tie in double overtime.

Weiss wins

Junior netminder Nikki Weiss stepped in at goal when senior Kelsey Lysander was battling some nagging injuries.

Once in goal, Weiss did not come out, going 13-0-1 during the unbeaten streak, including seven solo shutouts.

Weiss earned Big East recognition when she led the conference statistically in goals-against-average (GAA) by only

allowing one goal in 597:00 minutes of Big East action for a 0.15 GAA. This broke the conference record, previously held by former Irish goalkeeper LaKeysia Beene. Beene's mark was 0.18 GAA in 1997.

Weiss also led the conference with a 0.955 save percentage and 0.71 shutouts per game.

Senior class sets marks

The Irish senior class has a .886 winning percentage to date and a 91-10-4 record. Both marks are second in the nation, behind only North Carolina's senior class, at 92-9-4 (.895).

UCLA's senior class is third in both categories, at 84-9-5 (.883).

This is the fourth senior

class in Notre Dame history to reach 90 victories. No class has reached 93, which this class still has a chance of doing.

Only one other Irish senior class has gone to four consecutive College Cups, the class of 1997.

Déjà vu

This year's College Cup field is made up of the same four teams as last year's was. Last year, Notre Dame beat Stanford 1-0 in one semifinal, and North Carolina topped UCLA 1-0 in the other before beating Notre Dame 2-1 in the final.

The way the bracket was set up this year, the pairings switched, and Stanford faces UCLA at 5:30 p.m. Friday.

Hot Henderson

In seven postseason games, with up to two more games remaining, sophomore forward Melissa Henderson has already more than doubled her regular season goal output of eight goals.

She netted a hat trick in the Big East Quarterfinals against South Florida, scored two more goals in the opening round of the NCAA Tournament against IUPIUI before erupting for four goals against Central Michigan in the second round of the NAAs. She raised her postseason total to 10 goals with a goal against Florida State in the NCAA Quarterfinals.

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