NECVA Conference Title in Sight in Manhattan

By M.J. Sharp
Sports Editor

“It’s always been in my sights … to be conference champs … since my senior year,” said Axford. “It’s real exciting.” Since the beginning of the season, the goal has been for the team to win the NECVA tournament and play in the Division III final four.

The men’s volleyball team will get their chance when they go to the North Eastern Collegiate Volleyball Association (NECVA) Division III conference tournament this weekend. They are ranked fourth out of 31 NECVA teams, 12 of which made it to the tournament.

In only their second year in the NECVA conference, the Royals aren’t known very well by other conference teams. “Nobody wants to play us,” said Sophomore Jeff McCutcheon. “Mac.” McCutcheon. “Nobody has played us much, so they don’t know how good we are.”

The team will leave Friday morning for New York. After a bye Friday night in the first round, the team will play first on Saturday at 3 p.m against the winner of fifth-seed Ramapo (11-1 in division) and twelfth-seed Mount Saint Vincent (8-4 in division). A win would put them in a third round game at 5 p.m., and the championship game will be Sunday afternoon at 1 p.m.

After making it to the semi-finals of the tournament last year and losing in five games, the hopes among players are very high. “We only got better [since last year], and every other team graduated people,” said McCutcheon.

“We’re going to win NECVA,” said first-year player Nate Artz. Fans are also optimistic about the tournament. “They rock! And they’re definitely going to the final four,” said Sophomore Kendra Martin.

If the Royals do come out on top in Manhattan, they will play in the Division III final four the following weekend, Apr. 10 and 12. The winners of the three Division III conference tournaments (NECVA, EIVA, & MIVA) meet along with host Juniata in Springfield, Mass.

The Royals ended their regular season 13-9 overall, 9-1 in their division, and 8-3 at home, with the only home losses coming to Division I team Saint Francis. Division II team Lees-McRae, and top-ranked Division III team Juniata.

Coach Jason Axford named fans as a significant factor in their impressive home record. “We’ve got great fans! [They] are our biggest advantage.”

The Royals have played two teams during the regular season this year that also made the tournament. D’Youville (8-2 in NECVA), who the Royals beat in straight sets four times in the last two years, is ranked seventh, but is on an eight-game winning streak. “It’s tough to beat a team three times in a season, anyway, even if they’re not on a winning streak,” said Axford.

Since the beginning of the season, the coach has been thinking about the tournament. “They went to the tournament just around the corner. The way the brackets are set up, the Royals could meet either one of the two teams in the final game.

Philadelphia Biblical College (7-3 in NECVA) will enter the tournament ranked 12th. The Royals beat PBC in five games at home in January and lost in Philadelphia a month later in four games.

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Royal Wrapup

Friday, Mar. 28
Softball vs. Peace College, W 7-5, L 4-15
Baseball vs. Mary Washington, L 3-10

Saturday, Mar. 29
Baseball vs. Roanoke, W 12-1, 10-4
(M) Volleyball vs. Villa Julie, 3-0
(W) Tennis vs. Greensboro, W 5-1
(M) Tennis vs. Greensboro, L 3-4

Tuesday, Apr. 1
Softball vs. Mary Baldwin, W 17-2, L 3-15

Wednesday, Apr. 2
Baseball vs. Bridgewater, L 4-6

Baseball Sweeps Roanoke

By David Rife
Contributing Writer

The Royals baseball team may be getting hot at the right time with the Old Dominion Athletic Conference (ODAC) tournament just around the corner.

Until this week, the team hasn’t seen a great deal of success, with a 1-6 record in ODAC, but they got the chance to improve their record by facing two struggling teams this week: Randolph-Macon and Roanoke College.

In the first game, the Royals beat Randolph-Macon 15-6. With the win, the Royals improved to 2-6 in the ODAC.

On Saturday, the Royals played host to Roanoke College in a double-header. Roanoke came in with a winless record in the ODAC conference, and the Royals looked to take full advantage of the struggling Maroons.

In the first game of the double-header, Roanoke College stuck with EMU until the third inning when the Royals offense exploded for five runs to take a 6-1 lead. The Royals offense was not done there; in the fourth inning they once again added five runs that were capped off by a two-run homerun by First-year first baseman Seth Berry. The Royals built up a commanding 11-1 lead and went on to add one more run on their way to a 12-1 win. Junior Kevin Forry got the win on the mound for the Royals while giving up only one run on seven hits.

In the second game, the Maroons showed signs that they didn’t plan on lying down. After four innings, Roanoke had a 3-2 advantage. The Royals battled back, and going into the bottom of the seventh inning, the game was tied 4-4. The offense then came alive again for the Royals as they pounded Roanoke for six runs over the next two innings. Roanoke was unable to mount any type of a comeback. The Royals won the game 10-4. Senior Ryan Martin picked up the win for the Royals while only allowing one run on four hits.

With a successful week the Royals improved to 8-17-1 overall and 4-6 in ODAC. They now have to keep the offense rolling and continue to get solid pitching down the stretch. The Royals have seven games remaining on the schedule before the ODAC conference tournament. Five out of the seven games are ODAC conference games, which include a double-header at home on Apr. 12 against second place Virginia Wesleyan.

EMU is currently ranked eighth out of the 10 teams, but they have a chance to move all the way into the third place position if they are able to win the rest of there ODAC games and get some help from the other teams.

Even if the Royals are unable to win the rest of their ODAC games, they still have a chance to finish above .500 and to gain a lot of momentum going into the conference tournament that will start on Apr. 25 in Winston-Salem, N.C.