

Forfeits Mar DII Championship

Written by Jackie Finlan
Tuesday, 19 April 2011 13:08

The Women's DII National Championship showcased some wonderful surprises that saw first-year and younger teams challenge and beat more established squads. But there were some less impressive surprises that marred the otherwise riveting competition. There were three forfeited games - two from defending champion Washington State that failed to make the trip to Florida due to last-minute monetary constraints and another from newcomer Santa Clara in a consolation match.

Despite the reasoning behind the forfeits, it's an embarrassment to the DII competition. And then what about the teams that prepared accordingly for the tournament and only had one game to show for their troubles? Mesa State found itself in the aforementioned situation. The Colorado team experienced a phenomenal first-ever season, emerging out of a tough three-way tie in ERRFU on points then taking the West championship with wins over former champ Wayne State and Texas. Mesa was knocked out in the Round of 16 after a physical 27-20 loss to Notre Dame, a team that went on to eliminate former DII champ Shippensburg 23-15 in the quarterfinals.

Mesa was poised to meet Santa Clara, which had lost to Shippensburg 38-17 in the Round of 16, in Sunday's consolation match. Given the Shippensburg and Notre Dame scores, it's safe to say that Mesa had a good shot at defeating Santa Clara, and vice versa. But Santa Clara forfeited on Sunday after one player was sent to the hospital and the squad whittled down to 14 with another two players questionable for play.

"I talked to Lindsay Tiernan with USA Rugby and she said that other than this year's rankings, the match would not negatively affect the team, i.e. disciplinary action or demotion," Santa Clara coach Neil Chatterji said. "We decided that it was not worth the risk and forfeited the match."

"We were very upset," Mesa coach Victor Bellavia said. "I think there needs to be some kind of penalty. We traveled over 800 miles for one game. It really makes the sport look amateur in the eyes of potential fans and new players. It's hard, too, because we really wanted to be able to come out of San Diego with a legitimate win. One thought is that their union should lose a playoff seed for next year as punishment."

But no one was more surprised to learn that Washington State wasn't participating in the tournament. According to WSU's Amber Sadoski: *The reason we did not travel to Florida is purely financial. The team was prepared to fund this trip as we have for the past two years, however the university made some surprise requirements attached to this loan that would threaten the team next year which we could not risk. It was an upsetting development that came at a horrible price to our club. We have repaid our prior loans in a timely fashion and are in good standing with the university and expected this year to follow the same plan we have before. Some people have suggested had we traveled to California we would have been able to compete, but this is false. The new loan stipulations would have been imposed regardless of our destination.*

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A truly unfortunate situation for WSU of course, but again, the team's absence meant another two teams unknowingly invested in a one-game weekend. UNC Charlotte, WSU's first round opponent, advanced to the quarterfinals against Radcliffe and held the Northeast powerhouse to a 10-0 halftime lead before losing 37-7. UNCC is only two years old and made quite an impressive debut, and it would have been wonderful to see the team on the field some more.

Winona State, same situation. The Midwest team lost to Stonehill 35-7 on Saturday, and instead of being able to redeem itself on Sunday, was served with a forfeit win against WSU, unable to end on a high note.

Both of the teams that forfeited are from the Pacific Coast union - one from Northern California, the other from Pacific Northwest. Some brand of punishment should be administered, maybe not to the teams, maybe to the unions, but it can't be swept under the rug in the same manner as the last-minute seeding debacle at the 2010 Girls U19 national championship was handled. It all comes down to lending legitimacy to the competition, and forfeits in any other national competition would be regarded with incredulity.