

Running down a dream

JAMIE ARTHUR
Collegio Sports Reporter

Hanging above the bedroom closet in her Pittsburg home is a not so subtle reminder of why Venessa Lee runs nearly 40 miles every week.

Sometimes it's a reminder for her to do the crunches she forgot to do at practice and other times it reminds her why she shouldn't eat the junk food that she's craving. But, the red and yellow construction paper sign is always the first thing the two-time 800-meter indoor national champion sees when she wakes up and the last thing she sees when she goes to bed.

Written on the sign in bold black ink are just three numbers. No cheesy words of inspiration and certainly not another quote from a famous athlete about giving "110 percent." No, the numbers are not a percentage, they're a time - "2:05."

"That's been my goal for a long time," Lee said. "I've been stuck at 2:08 for over a year now and there's been times that maybe I could have run faster, but I wasn't able to...I think I can do it this year."

In 2006, at the NCAA Division II Indoor National Track and Field Championships, Lee shaved nearly 2.5 seconds off of her previous best time in the 800 meters to become the national champion. Just a sophomore at the time, Lee dominated the field winning in 2 minutes, 8.95 seconds.

Despite defending her title at this year's indoor championships, Lee wants more. The 800-meter outdoor title has been elusive in her first two years at Pittsburg State, but the 21-year-old is hoping to change that this season.

That's why she made the sign. It serves as a constant reminder that just being good isn't good enough.

After running her best outdoor time in the 800 meters at the Mt. SAC Relays in Walnut, Calif., on April 13, Lee knows that she can still do better. Her time of 2:09.53 might have been good enough to give her a school record and it might have been



Raymond Hillegas/Collegio

Venessa Lee, PSU junior, shows off her favorite motivational tool, a sign with her 800-meter time goal. Lee, the 2006 NCAA Division II 800-meter indoor champion, will try to capture the outdoor title this weekend at the MIAA Outdoor Championship in Hays.

good enough to finish sixth behind an athlete from Mexico, an unattached athlete and three Division-I runners, but she knows it's not good enough to win a national title.

Lee's goal is to run a 2:05, which would all but guarantee a national title and ensure automatic qualification to the USA Track and Field Championships in Indianapolis this summer. Her ultimate goal is to compete in the Olympic time trials next year in

Eugene, Ore.

Gorillas' head track and field coach Russ Jewett said Lee is different from any other athlete he's ever coached.

"I've never coached an athlete more focused on achieving," Jewett said. "That's really what makes her as good as she is...she is so driven, so focused."

But when Lee started running track in the seventh grade, she was anything but driven. After

competing in a few meets, Lee begged her parents to let her quit.

"I was so slow," Lee said. "I was embarrassed to run in front of people."

Her parents didn't let her quit and she spent the rest of the season training, but not competing.

Lee didn't compete again until her freshman year

see **RUNNING** page 9

Pitt baseball needs wins and more to reach playoffs

RYAN ATKINSON
Collegio Sports Editor

For what it's worth, the playoffs have started for the Pittsburg State baseball team.

If the Gorillas want to qualify for the MIAA Postseason Tournament and therefore give themselves a shot at the NCAA Division II National Tournament, there is no room for error.

Pitt State has five games left on its schedule and will need to win out, and get some outside help, to squeeze into the MIAA's four-team tournament.

Three teams - Missouri Western, Fort Hays State and Emporia State - have 19 wins.

The Gorillas sit at 14-16 with five more chances to add to their win total. If the Gorillas win all five and two of those teams lose their remaining games, there would be a tie for the final spot and a playoff game would be

needed to determine who makes it to the tournament.

Pittsburg State head coach Steve Bever, however, isn't really worried about all of the numbers and scenarios. He said he knows the only thing that really matters is what his team does on the field.

"I actually haven't sat down and looked at what all needs to happen for us to get in," Bever said. "All I know is that we need to win."

And so, Bever said, that is all the Gorillas will worry about when they take the field for tonight's crucial contest at Emporia State.

"We can't do anything about the games we're not playing in," Bever said. "You can only impact the games you're in and that's all we're going to think about."

The Gorillas have lost twice to Emporia State this season, dropping a 10-6 decision on April 18 and losing 4-3 on April 26.

Bever said a quick start, both on the mound and at the plate, will be crucial if the Gorillas want to avoid a third setback to the Hornets in their game tonight.

"It seems like the games that we do well in are the games where we come

out and pitch well and hit well early," he said. "When we come out and get a few hits early on and get some good pitching, we are able to get on top and stay there. Hopefully, we can come out strong early (tonight) and keep that momentum going."

If the Gorillas do knock off the Hornets, their focus will shift to Missouri Southern, which comes to Pittsburg for a four-game series over the weekend.

"The Southern series is always important and this will make it even more so," Bever said. "It doesn't matter if we're both in it or neither team is in it, Southern and Pitt is always a big series."

The series will also be the last games for Missouri Southern head coach Warren Turner, who is retiring at the end of the season. Turner, a 1965 Pittsburg State graduate and a former Gorilla baseball player, has been the head coach at Southern since 1977. He ranks eighth overall among active Division II baseball coaches in wins with a 849-711-3 record.

"I think that will make the weekend even a little more special, especially with Warren being a Pitt State graduate," Bever said. "With all the success he has had and all he's done for collegiate baseball, it should make it a real special weekend. I think we'll have a good crowd and, hopefully, good weather."

The Gorillas snapped a three-game losing streak by sweeping a doubleheader from Fort Hays on April 29 at Al Ortolani Field.

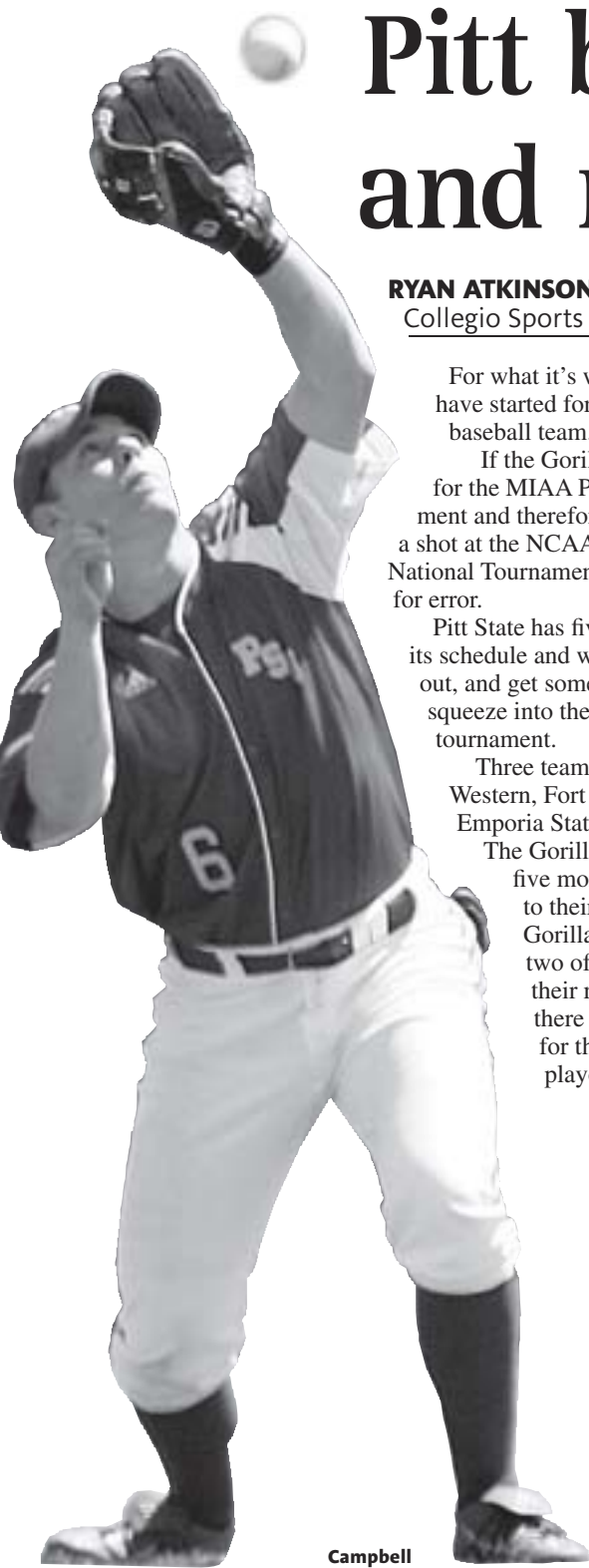
Before the sweep, Pitt State had dropped a single game at Emporia State and was swept by Fort Hays in a doubleheader on April 28.

The Gorillas split a doubleheader at Southwest Baptist on May 1, winning the opener 15-7 before dropping the nightcap 12-2.

MIAA baseball standings

	W	L
Central Missouri	26	5
Northwest Mo.	20	10
Mo. Western	19	11
Fort Hays State	19	12
Emporia State	19	12
Pittsburg State	14	16

The top four teams at the end of the regular season advance to the MIAA Postseason Tournament. PSU must win its remaining five games, while Missouri Western, Fort Hays State or Emporia State must lose out.



Campbell

Gorillas split up to find success

JAMIE ARTHUR
Collegio Sports Reporter

For the second straight week, the Pittsburg State track and field team divided up to compete in three different states.

Athletes competed at the MSSU Invitational in Joplin, Mo., the Drake Relays in Des Moines, Iowa, and the MIAA Heptathlon/Decathlon Championships in Emporia.

The Gorillas captured five event titles at the MSSU Invitational, including a tie for first in the women's high jump.

Freshman Emily Middleton and junior Kiley Lund took top honors in the high jump, clearing 5 feet, 5.75

inches.

The women also staked a 1-2 finish in the javelin throw with junior Audra Tope winning the event with a mark of 117 feet, 5 inches. Sophomore Ali Robertson was second with a throw of 108-04.

Junior Erica Ogle won the 1,500-meter run in 4 minutes, 49.38 seconds.

On the men's side, sophomore Jeremy Jackson won the 110-meter hurdles in 15.14 seconds. Jackson also finished second in the 100 meters in 11.16 seconds behind former Pittsburg State sprinter Robert Spies who was running unattached.

see **GORILLAS** page 9

Mule-kicked



Greg Grisolano/Collegio

Gorillahead rugby member Scott Blackledge is tackled by members of the University of Central Missouri rugby club during a match on Saturday, April 28, on the PSU rugby pitch. PSU won the contest 41-5.

Frustration marks end of softball season

RYAN ATKINSON
Collegio Sports Editor

Brad Horkey takes a deep breath when asked to sum up the recently completed Pittsburg State softball season. But it doesn't take long for the words to come rolling and he doesn't hold back.

"It was frustrating," he said. "Really, really frustrating."

Horkey's Gorillas ended the season at 17-29, not a surprising record for a team with just one senior and a generous helping of underclassmen. What frustrated Horkey was the way his team ended up with that final tally - knocking off some of the strongest teams in the region while being kicked around by the league's cellar-dwellers.

"The record isn't what is disappointing," Horkey said. "Twelve games below .500 is about where we expected to be with a young team like this. How we did it is what's horribly disappointing. To go out and beat some of the top teams and then get swept by the bottom end of the conference ... that's just frustrating."

The Gorillas started the season in Minnesota, at the St. Cloud State Husky Dome Classic. It was at the season-opening Husky Dome Classic that the Gorillas first showed their potential, hanging around with and beating some of the region's tougher teams. The Gorillas also routed Central Missouri on April 20, ending the Jennies' nine-game MIAA unbeaten streak.

But for every encouraging win, there were head-scratching losses to some of the MIAA's weakest teams.

"We knew this year was going to be rough," Horkey said. "We lost some heart-breaking games and picked up some quality wins. We were just too inconsistent. We would show up one day, but not the next. You're always going to have that with young players, but we have to fix that. We have to have players who will show up every game."

The Gorillas did have a tough time with injuries and illnesses. Tera Swartslander and Jill Havens missed a good chunk of games with injuries while Lori Lockhart sat out more than half of the year with mononucleosis.

"Not having Lori out there for that long just killed us," Horkey said. "Even when she was playing, she wasn't all there, we just didn't know what was wrong. Then she finds out it's mono and she can't play. With her and Jill and Tera missing time, it wasn't easy on us. We don't have enough depth for that."

Horkey is already on the recruiting trail, looking for the right players to add to the mix for next season. He said that he plans to attend two high school tournaments and two regional junior college tournaments in the next six days.

"We need to go out and get good, quality players," he said. "We really need to get some older players in the mix, some transfers from junior colleges. We need another pitcher and two or three more bats in the lineup if we really want to improve next year."

Horkey said he won't be on the lookout for talent alone. Attitude will play a big part in his search for future Gorillas.

"We have to get back to the attitude that my teams have had at other schools and that we had when I was here the first time," he said. "We need players to have the attitude that the Gorillas are not going to lose."