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Big 33 participant headlines Rock football recruiting class

By Terry Rodgers
Rocket Contributor

"Plan for the future" is a pearl of wisdom that's shared by a variety of different people in a variety of different situations.

And this is the time of year Slippery Rock football Coach George Mihalik and the Rock coaching staff takes that advice to heart.

Feb. 6 was national signing day in the world of college football, and the Rock got plenty of tools

to ensure the team is prepared for the future.

Six players signed their national letters of intent last Wednesday to continue their football careers at SRU, and the Rock added a seventh recruit the following day, which Mihalik was more than pleased about.

"It's a strong start...another two to three weeks and hopefully we add another six to seven (recruits)," Mihalik said.

National signing day is the first

day a college football recruit can sign a binding letter of intent to play with the program of his choice. This is the time when college teams are reloading with top high school talent.

The premise of it all is that the better talent a program can attract, the better the future looks for that team.

Judging by the 2008 Rock recruiting class, the future for the program looks bright.

Despite the strong early showing,

Mihalik said he still has a lot of work to do because the program graduated a considerably large class from last season.

"Recruiting is the lifeblood of any program," Mihalik said. "When you lose 17 seniors, that's a lot of bodies and a lot of talent. We have to replace those guys with a strong class."

Some of the needs the Rock will have to address are along the offensive line.

Three starters from last year's

squad have moved on, two of whom garnered national awards. Those two, Mike Butterworth and Bron Clouser, each received All-America honorable mention honors for their senior seasons.

Mihalik found a great way to replace at least one of those stars in Austin Fedell.

Fedell, a 6-foot-1, 270-pound offensive lineman from North Allegheny High School, has won a

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PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY NATE DAYMUT/THE ROCKET

Junior Jennifer Hansen goes up and over the bar during last Friday's SRU Open at Morrow Field House. Hansen broke the school pole vault record with a 15-foot, 6.75-inch jump, which bested the mark she set two weeks ago by one inch.

FEELING BLUE!

Indoor track continues record-setting season with 17 first-place finishes at SRU Open

By Andy Barlow
Rocket Contributor

The SRU indoor track and field team hardly needs a home field advantage.

But last Friday, they had one anyway.

SRU athletes won several events and set two school records at the SRU Open on Feb. 8. It was yet another solid effort by both the men's and women's teams.

The women's team, ranked 10th in the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association Division II national poll, won nine blue ribbons at the meet. Individual winners included junior Jennifer Hansen in the pole vault, sophomore Tina Beggs in the 200-meter dash, sophomore Jaime Wright in the mile run, freshman Whitney Hendershot in the high jump and freshman

Crystal Burnick in the 3,000-meter run.

Hansen's jump of 15 feet, 6.75 inches broke the previous SRU record by one inch, a mark she had already set on Feb. 2 at the Akron Open.

In other events, the combination of junior Lacey Cochran and freshmen Amanda Seigworth, Allison Smith and Tiffany Tedesco, took home the gold in the 4x400 relay. Cochran also won the 800-meter run, while Smith won the 55-meter hurdles and Tedesco came up victorious in the 55-meter dash.

For the SRU men, ranked 22nd in the USTFCCCA poll, the effort was highlighted by senior Brad Mueller.

Mueller set the school record in the 55-meter dash with a time of 6.36 seconds.

That time bested the record-breaking effort

by freshman Jeren Debardeleben at the Akron Open.

Also running to victory were junior Eric Novick in the 55-meter hurdles and senior Chris Geddis in the 800-meter run.

The 4x400 relay team of senior Nate Shadeck, junior Gabriel Fortunato, freshman Jason Jamieson and sophomore Phil Rector also finished first. In field events, senior Adam Jones won the 35-pound weight toss, senior Tim Tray won the pole vault and senior Steve Brenner ruled the high jump.

The next Rock indoor track and field competition will take place on Feb. 23 at Kent State University.

Until then, the team will continue to work toward improving in each event in time for the PSAC Championships on March 1 and 2 and the NCAA Division II Championships on March 14 and 15.

Loss at Edinboro puts Rock men on brink of elimination

By Phil Swartzlander
Rocket Assistant Sports Editor

The last few days for the SRU men's basketball team has been a roller coaster ride, and after Wednesday night's results, the team must feel like it's at the bottom of that first hill.

The Rock (5-17 overall, 3-5 PSAC) not only lost to Edinboro by an 80-62 margin, but also saw its playoff hopes grow dimmer as fourth-place Clarion upset Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Clarion, which is in fourth place, now holds a one-game lead over the fifth-place Rock in the PSAC West with four divisional games to play.

To have a chance at stealing the fourth-place spot away from Clarion in the season finale at Morrow Field House on March 1, the Rock will have to upset either division-leading California University of Pennsylvania (17-4, 7-0) or third-place Indiana

University of Pennsylvania (12-10, 4-3) and also beat Shippensburg University (6-17, 0-8). The Rock topped Shippensburg, 74-72, on Feb. 2 at Morrow Field House.

"We still feel we have it in our hands. We've got to beat them at home and do what we are supposed to do," junior Darnell Johnson said.

The Rock struggled all night on Wednesday against second-place Edinboro and was never really within striking distance.

"(Edinboro is) a very good team," Rock Head Coach Jamal Palmer said. "They have the best starting five in the league."

SRU shot a dismal 37 percent from the floor while the Fighting Scots weren't much better, hitting on just 47 percent of their field goal attempts.

Junior Jamar Scales led the Rock with 10 points while sophomore Rashiid Coleman and freshman Cory Somerville pulled down six rebounds each.

The Rock never led during the game and trailed by as many as 25 points in the second half.

"Things started going bad for us and then some players were trying to go more one-on-one than we would have liked," Palmer said.

Edinboro received a great effort by Ryan McLemore, who tallied a triple-double with 13 points, 11 rebounds and a PSAC-record 12 blocks.

"If he wasn't the No. 1 shot blocker in the country, he certainly is now," Palmer said.

On Saturday, the Rock was at the top of the hill of the proverbial roller coaster after soundly defeating Lock Haven University, 53-43.

The Rock used a solid team effort on both ends of the court, and especially in the second half, when they outscored the Bald Eagles 32-17.

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STEVE REED/THE ROCKET

Junior Joe Vines drives past a California University of Pennsylvania defender in a game earlier this season. Vines and his Rock teammates are looking for their first playoff berth since the 1999-2000 season.