

Collegian Sports

The year that was and will be



By REILLY MOORE
Sports Editor

The school year is quickly coming to an end, but there is just enough time left to look back on the year that was and what it could mean for the year that will be.

First, let's look back at the year for University of Richmond athletics.

Upon returning to school in August, the first two big sports stories of the year were hardly encouraging. First, there was news of recruiting violations by both of Richmond's basketball teams for illegally text-messaging recruits. Then, there was word of a former tennis coach being indicted on child pornography charges. Both of these stories broke less than a month into first semester. Welcome to Richmond, class of 2012!

At that point, as the assistant sports editor for The Collegian, I was embarrassed. These two stories may not have been a big deal to many students on campus, but both stories made national news. Richmond made a name for itself for all the wrong reasons.

As the fall season wore on, the men's soccer team struggled and the women's team, which had been off to its best start in school history, failed to qualify for the postseason. Field hockey reached the Atlantic 10 championship, but lost during the title game.

Then there was the football team. After starting the season with a win over Elon, the team missed some good opportunities and lost at the University of Virginia. Then, after

wins against Towson and Maine, the Spiders went into Villanova as the No. 1 ranked team in the Football Championship Subdivision, and lost. Two weeks later, a last-second punt return by James Madison sank the Spiders again and the 2007 Colonial Athletic Association champs were in danger of missing the postseason.

Ahead 20-0 at halftime of the must-win season finale at William & Mary, the Spiders appeared to be postseason bound. Then, as I watched helplessly from the press box, William & Mary scored 20 unanswered points to tie the game, send it to overtime and put the Spiders' hopes on hold.

Remarkably, the team withstood the Tribe's second-half charge, settled down and won the game in overtime to secure a berth in the FCS playoffs. The rest of the story can be told by the enormous rings now engulfing some of the largest fingers on campus.

The national title put Richmond on the big stage for the right reason. Before it had to enter the real world, or at least leave the bubble, Richmond's class of 2009 witnessed the school's first national championship in any sport. It won't show up on résumés or transcripts, but the football team's triumph provided the entire university with a season it would not soon forget.

Then came basketball season. During the first half of its first big-time game, the men's team led Syracuse by seven on the road, during a game that was shown on national television. Then, as was all too often the story this season, the Spiders couldn't hold on to the lead.

After a home loss to Saint Joseph's in late January, the St. Joe's coach called out Richmond's students for failing to come out

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TWO-MINUTE DRILL

By Reilly Moore

- ◆ The NFL Draft will be held this weekend in New York City. Lawrence Sidbury Jr., a defensive end for Richmond last season, has been projected to be drafted as early as the second round, which could make him the first Football Championship Subdivision player taken. ... Sidbury is probably just hoping he doesn't end up with the Lions, the NFL's version of the FCS.
- ◆ The Kansas City Royals hit into six double plays during Tuesday night's loss against the Cleveland Indians, tying a record in the American League. ... Even with a loss, the Royals were happy that they finally set a record for something.
- ◆ Montreal Canadiens fans booed during The Star-Spangled Banner before game three of the team's first-round playoff series against the Boston Bruins. ... I guess the fans figure if the 24 American teams in the NHL were gone, they wouldn't have been swept in the first round.
- ◆ Houston Rockets center Dikembe Mutombo said his 18-year career was finished after injuring his knee during a playoff game against the Portland Trail Blazers on Tuesday night. ... Mutombo, who was known for wagging his finger after blocking a shot, could use his fame to pursue a career making anti-drug commercials.



LEIGH DONAHUE/THE COLLEGIAN

RUNNING WILD

Senior Alli Furstenberg evades Saint Joseph's University defender Meghan Cullinan during the women's lacrosse team's 12-5 win on Sunday afternoon at First Market Stadium. During Richmond's Senior Day, Furstenberg scored four times to lead the team. Senior Mandy Friend, a three-time All-American, scored one goal and had one assist during her final game at First Market Stadium. Freshman Caitlin Fifield added three goals, while sophomore Jules Nicola and freshman Sam Tajirian each scored twice. With the win, the Spiders improved their conference record to 5-2 and clinched the No. 2 seed for the Atlantic 10 conference tournament, which will begin on Friday. Less than a week after their first meeting of the season, Richmond will face Saint Joseph's again during the first round. To read more about the women's lacrosse team, see page 23.

Economy deters MLB fans



By JESSIE MURRAY
Assistant Sports Editor

Major League Baseball's 2009 season has officially begun, and for fans across the country that usually means it is time to grab some hot dogs, a cold beer and head out to the ballpark. This year, there will still be hot dogs and beer, but will the same number of fans be expending the extra cash to go watch their favorite team during the summer heat or will they resort to enjoying their comfort food lounging on a recliner in their living room?

Looking at the average number of ticket sales the MLB sold during spring training could be one indicator of how the economic recession will hit the league this season. Fan attendance was down, on average, 7.7 percent per game.

During the first two weeks of the regular season, average attendance at many ballparks across the nation was down 7 percent from last year. Before the season's official start, the MLB expected an approximate 7 percent dip in overall ticket sales for the season.

Ticket sales are just one area in which the MLB will take a hit this season. Cor-

porate sponsorship, payroll and other areas will also be indicators of how resilient, or not, baseball will be to the global recession.

The fear of discretionary spending that has already hit consumers hard this year will undoubtedly have some effect on the monetary success of the MLB this season. But the real unanswered question is, to what extent?

If you're sitting in some of these club houses' big offices, it may be too early during the season to panic about the decrease in game attendance, but I am sure some general managers are nervous about whether things are going to be worse than expected.

Two-thirds of the 30 major league teams decided to lower the average cost of some seat levels, according to the MLB. Other teams will provide deals on same-day ticket purchases, and other promotions, so fans can save a buck. The San Francisco Giants decided to be trailblazers this season by being the first to implement a "dynamic pricing" model. With this new ticket-pricing model, the Giants' ticket prices will be adjusted up until game day based on market demand.

"Given the economic challenges faced by everyone, we have taken a number of steps to respond to the needs of our fans, particularly our season ticketholders," said Larry Baer, Giants president and chief operating officer. "We want to ensure that baseball remains accessible to everyone even

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