Written by Jackie Finlan
Wednesday, 20 April 2011 13:20

The first two rounds of the Women's DII College National Championship have concluded, and a number of unexpected but thrilling games have shifted the rankings accordingly. Teams making the biggest jumps include the Northeast's Radcliffe and Stonehill, who have advanced to the Final Four, and will join Western Washington and Notre Dame in Pittsburgh at the end of the month.

Overall, the Northeast had the most successful weekend, with all three teams (including Norwich) advancing to the quarterfinals. But one of the most notable upsets of the weekend occured between two NRU squads, when Radcliffe eliminated Norwich, which had held the #1 ranking for the majority of the season, 22-7 after trailing at the half.

"We went into this game *knowing* we could win and just had to carry out the game plan," Radcliffe forwards captain Janelle Lambert said. "We knew this game was all about defense, particularly near the breakdown, so we put a lot of effort into that and it paid off."

Notre Dame attacked the weekend with the same gusto, and emerged out of the Round of 16 with a tough 27-20 victory over Mesa State, then came back the next day to knock off Shippensburg 23-15 in the quarters. No one knew what to expect from the first-year team, but the Fighting Irish were the bright spot of the Midwest, whose two other teams (Winona and UW La Crosse) bowed out in the first round. Notre Dame had a more difficult path to the final four than did Stonehill, which beat Winona and UNC Charlotte, and therefore got the nod as the #3 team.

We're also giving a slight edge to George Washington over Shippensburg, even though the latter beat GW in the MARFU final. Nationals is a different ball game, with different brands of pressure, and GW answered the call by pushing top seed Western Washington into overtime before losing 20-12 in the quarterfinals.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, Washington State dropped nine spots to #12 due to the defending national champion's two forfeits at nationals. Realistically, WSU is probably capable of playing at a higher level than several of the teams ranked above it, but the simple fact is that we'll never know. Through the sea of upsets and underperformances at nationals, we don't know where WSU would have fit in, but we're not going to rank the former champion above most teams that did play their two games last weekend.

Claremont is the only team that dropped out of the top 16, a move that occured after the team allowed 105 points against and scored only one try.

Around the rest of the country, friendlies and tournaments abound. The most notable event last weekend was the Beast of the East, which Vassar won against UConn 12-0 in Portsmouth, R.I.

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Women DII College Top 25 - April 20, 2011

1 (1) Western Washington (10-0). Advanced to DII semis defeating Claremont 67-5 then George Washington 20-12 in overtime

2 (12) Radcliffe (8-4) (12-4). Advanced to DII semis defeating UW La Crosse 22-0 and Norwich 22-7

3 (6) Notre Dame (5-1) (6-2). Advanced to DII semis defeating Mesa State 27-20 and Shippensburg 23-15

4 (8) Stonehill (11-2). Advanced to DII semis defeating Winona 35-7 and UNC Charlotte 37-7

5 (2) Norwich (12-1) (17-6). Defeated Mary Washington 55-5 and lost to Radcliffe 22-7 in DII quarters

6 (9) George Washington (8-2) (13-3). Defeated Lee University 20-5 then lost to Western Washington 20-12 in DII quarters

7 (5) Shippensburg (10-1) (11-2). Defeated Santa Clara 38-17, lost to Notre Dame 23-15 in DII quarters

8 (13) Mesa State (7-2). Lost to Notre Dame 27-20 then forfeit win vs Santa Clara

9 (10) Lee (7-1). Lost to George Washington 20-5 then defeated Claremont 38-0 in DII consolation

10 (15) Mary Washington (8-3) (8-5). Lost to Norwich 55-5 and then defeated UW La Crosse 17-10 in DII consolation

11 (7) Winona State (9-2) (21-3). Lost to Stonehill 35-7 and forfeit win over Washington State at DII nationals

12 (3) Washington State (8-4). Forfeited two games at DII nationals

13 (4) UW LaCrosse (9-2). Lost to Radcliffe 22-0 and Mary Washington 17-10 in DII consolation

14 (25) UNC Charlotte (5-2). Forfeit win against Washington State then 37-7 loss to Stonehill in DII quarters

15 (19) Santa Clara (4-3). Lost to Shippensburg 38-17 then forfeited DII consolation to Mesa State

16 (11) Slippery Rock (6-1-1). Idle

17 (18) Vassar (5-2-1) (13-4-1). Won Beast of the East

18 (24) Wayne State (8-0). Idle.

19 (16) Temple (6-3) (7-5). Defeated Bloomsburg and lost to La Salle in friendlies

20 (17) Boston University (8-3). Defeated Portland U19s 60-10

21 (21) La Salle (5-2) (7-3). Defeated Temple in a friendly

22 (20) William & Mary (8-3). Lost to Shippensburg 29-17 on April 9

23 (14) Claremont (6-3). Lost to Western Washington 67-5 then Lee University 38-0 at DII nationals

24 (22) CSU Fullerton (5-0-1). Idle

25 (unr) Colorado College (4-1). Idle