

Four Bobcats Named All-Conference

Written by Whitney Noble
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Four members of the Lees-McRae College men's volleyball team have been named to the all-Conference Carolinas team, announced league officials Friday. Joshua Jones (Christmas, Fla.) and Efrain Negrón (Caguas, Puerto Rico) each earned second-team honors, as Jose Ribas (Guaynabo, Puerto Rico) and Randy Ramirez

(Guaynabo, Puerto Rico) were both named to the third team.

Regular season champion Mount Olive College led the way with six all-conference selections, as the Bobcats and Pfeiffer University each had four honorees. Erskine College and Limestone College both placed three student-athletes on the all-conference teams.

Lees-McRae has put together a 17-11 overall record this season, including a 10-6 mark in league play to earn the third seed in this weekend's Conference Carolinas Tournament. The Bobcats have played one of the toughest schedules in the nation this season, taking on a trio of ranked teams while entering the league tournament as the only conference school to win a set against a squad in the national top 15.

Jones has shined for the Green and Gold during his sophomore campaign, entering the week ranked 19th in the nation in blocks per set (1.12) while attacking at a .350 clip this season. The reigning Conference Carolinas Freshman of the Year has posted at least 10 kills in seven matches, including a season-high 15 smashes in a thrilling five-set victory over Limestone to open the campaign.

Negrón put together a strong regular season for the Bobcats, averaging 2.37 digs per set to rank fourth in the conference. A native of Caguas, Puerto Rico, Negrón posted at least nine digs in 14 matches this season, including a campaign-best 17 at Barton on January 25. The junior libero has enjoyed one of the best careers in program history to date, entering the weekend with 518 digs as a Bobcat.

Ribas has been a consistent force at the net for Lees-McRae this season, leading the team in kills (260) and kills per set (3.10) while posting 101 digs and 55 blocks. The Guaynabo, Puerto Rico native has recorded at least 10 smashes in 11 matches this season, including back-to-back 20-kill performances against Pfeiffer (Mar. 19) and NJIT (Mar. 21) to lead the Bobcats to a pair of pivotal victories.

Ramirez has enjoyed a stellar junior season for the Bobcats, averaging just under 10 assist per set while leading the team with 27 service aces. The Guaynabo, Puerto Rico native has put together one of the best careers in program history, recording 2,312 assists to date while ranking among the school's all-time leaders with 56 aces.

No.12 Penn State Sweeps LMC

Jose Ribas (Guaynabo, Puerto Rico) posted a squad-best nine kills to pace the Lees-McRae College men's volleyball team on Friday evening, as No. 12 Penn State University swept the

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Bobcats in non-conference play.

Penn State (18-6) won the match by scores of 25-15, 25-16, and 25-20, recording a hitting percentage of .388 in the contest while holding Lees-McRae (17-12) to a .111 clip on the attack. The Nittany Lions tallied 37 kills, 10 blocks, and five aces on the night, as Lees-McRae posted 26 smashes and 12 digs.

Ribas led the way for Lees-McRae with nine kills, as John Lucas (Cincinnati, Ohio) added seven smashes. Randy Ramirez (Guaynabo, Puerto Rico) posted 20 assists and three digs, while Efrain Negrón (Caguas, Puerto Rico) dug out four Penn State attacks.

Aaron Russell and Nick Goodell paced the Nittany Lions with 10 kills each, posting hitting percentages of .750 and .444, respectively. Scott Kegerreis and Kyle Mars both added seven smashes, as Taylor Hammond recorded a match-high 30 assists. Connor Curry and Ian Hendries tallied contest-bests of seven digs and four blocks, respectively.

Penn State jumped out to an early 12-6 lead in the first set before stretching the margin to 16-8 with a 4-2 spurt, which was capped by a solo block by Matt Seifert. The Nittany Lions would close out the set with a 7-3 run, claiming a 1-0 advantage in the match on a Russell kill.

The Bobcats battled back in the second, evening the tally at 11-11 following a Ribas smash before Penn State responded with a 13-3 surge, pushing Lees-McRae to set point on a kill from Goodell. Lees-McRae would fight off a pair of set points before Kegerreis closed out the frame for the Nittany Lions with a kill, giving Penn State a 2-0 lead in the contest.

Penn State carried the momentum into the third, claiming an early 13-7 advantage following a Bobcat miscue. Lees-McRae countered with a 6-4 spurt, trimming the margin to 17-13 on a smash by Lucas. The Bobcats continued to fight back over the next several minutes, cutting the lead to 21-18 following an ace from Ramirez before Penn State answered with four of the next six points to cap the set and the match.

Lees-McRae returns to the court on Saturday when the third-seeded Bobcats host sixth-seeded Belmont Abbey College in the quarterfinal round of the Conference Carolinas Tournament at 7 p.m. in Williams Gymnasium.