

# Nittany Lions awed by winning play

by Mike Jensen  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

MIAMI - As the chapters pile up, this Kevin Thompson saga keeps getting more interesting. In the last year, the quarterback has been booed by the student section of his own school at a basketball game and castigated loudly around the state. He's also had his head coach defend him at every turn.

ing up the situation neatly, after the Nittany Lions had fallen behind, 23-20, in the fourth period.

Thompson didn't even know he would be in the game at the end until just before the pivotal series began, when both head coach Joe Paterno and offensive coordinator Fran Ganter told him he was in.

He hadn't had a big game. He would end up throwing for more



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MIAMI QUARTERBACK KENNY KELLY IS TACKLED LEADING TO A FUMBLE IN THE SECOND QUARTER AGAINST PENN STATE SATURDAY. PENN STATE WON 27-23.

Fields wasn't the first option. Penn State split end Eddie Drummond, who had caught a 51-yard pass from Thompson the week before to set up the game-winning field goal against Pittsburgh, got the first look on the other side. But Thompson didn't see much there. Thompson also had options in the middle of the field that could get him short yardage.

"Chafie made a great release and got downfield," Thompson said. "So I decided to give him the ball so he could go out there and run underneath and catch it. He made a great play."

That was all the big talk anyone heard from Thompson.

"I feel good about myself, too," he said when pressed. "But I'm not a player who's going to go out and congratulate myself on things."

His teammates handled that. "Kevin Thompson should get some credit after taking all the heat after what happened last year," said linebacker Brandon Short, Thompson's fellow co-captain. "He's a hell of a of

quarterback, and I'm glad he's playing for Penn State. It's time for people to get off his back."

Asked what that one play says about Thompson, Fields shot back, "It doesn't say anything! I've been confident in Kevin's arm all along. I expect him to make plays like that."

Paterno, of course, had originally recruited Thompson to be Dan Kendra's backup before Kendra backed away from his oral commitment and went to Florida State, where he now is the starting fullback.

"Kevin Thompson got a bad rap from some people up our way," Paterno said. "I feel great for the kid."

But Thompson wasn't talking of vindication. Someone asked if there was some of that feeling after he had gotten booed at a Penn State-Indiana basketball game last winter.

"Nope. Nope," Thompson said politely before turning his back to the questioner.

# Hollywood could have written a better script for Tim Couch

by Michael Weinreb  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

NASHVILLE, Tenn. - This was the pass he'd been waiting to throw, the \$48 million special, languishing and sloping and dripping over the outstretched arms of a defensive back and into the hands of his receiver.

This was the pass he'd honed over hours, over months, over years, lofting touch throws into a garbage can on his front lawn and hurling bombs that rattled the goal posts of his high-school field in Hyden, Ky.

In the beginning, there was Tim Couch to Kevin Johnson. Thirty-nine yards of spiraling beauty.

It was the first transcendent moment in the revised history of the Cleveland Browns, this touchdown, the only one in Sunday's 26-9 loss to Tennessee at Adelphi Coliseum, the only moment to cling to so far in an otherwise bland season.

And yet it already has the feel of a burgeoning legend. Because what happened before the pass, in the midst of Couch's first-ever start as a professional football player, is as breathtaking as the throw itself.

That was when the kid leaned into the huddle. And he said something

that rookies aren't supposed to say, something that even Babe Ruth had trouble getting away with.

He lifted his chin. He locked his eyes on his linemen.

He said, "If you give me time, this is a touchdown."

He called his shot.

And he delivered.

He is 22, all mussed blond hair and rosy cheeks. He was named the starting quarterback on Wednesday. It was the first controversy in Browns history. Was Couch ready? Could he handle this? What happened to playing the veterans? What happened to Ty Detmer? Here is your answer: Thirty-nine yards. Couch to Johnson.

If you give me time...

"Now," said Lomas Brown, the veteran offensive tackle, "it's like, he's our man."

There's the matter of the other 59 minutes, 50 seconds.

There are his rather nondescript statistics: 12-for-24, 134 yards. There are the seven sacks, and the throws that were intended for the neighboring Cumberland River. There is the fumble on his final play of the game.

There are the first two drives.

One started at his own 6.

The other started at his own 3.

There is the safety on that second drive, when Couch was swarmed in the end zone and folded like an aluminum chair.

"There were some mistakes made," Couch admitted.

But here is the disclaimer again: He is a rookie. He was making his first start, in a league in which even the greatest quarterbacks have needed time to adjust. Sometimes even years.

If you give me time...

So, you cling to that grain of hope in an otherwise barren seabed. And you continue to anticipate the pearl.

"He's a better quarterback going back to Cleveland than he was when he came to Nashville," said Browns team president Carmen Policy.

There also is the matter of the spike.

Urrgh. The spike. Before Couch does that again, someone might want to offer him a scholarship to the Deion Sanders school of end-zone celebrations.

"Ugly," Brown said.

This one was formulated that morning, by Couch and Johnson. Two rookies, two road roommates, scheming like children. Throw me a touchdown pass, Johnson told Couch, and I'll give you back the ball.

So Couch did. And Johnson did. And Couch took the ball and spiked it, emphatically, the ball careening into the stands - and the Titans' egos careening right along with it.

It might cost Couch a bruise or two down the road. A sharp hit after the whistle. A forearm to the chin. Take that, rookie. Spike this, golden boy.

The thing is, he doesn't care. He spent half of this day picking grass from his face mask, his jersey untucked, his body jarred by the Titans' behemoth of a defensive end, Jevon Kearse. Yet, every time, he got back up, and he tucked in his jersey, and he walked back to the huddle.

As he did as a high-school prodigy. As he did as the messiah of Kentucky football.

"Once we got started," he said, "it was just football again."

If you give me time...

What? How far can this go, if you give him time?

To answer that would be desperately premature. But with one dreamy pass, with one touchdown, with one sprint downfield, with one spike, Tim Couch restored hope to an otherwise hopeless season.

And, in the beginning, hope is enough.

# Trinidad rallies to win majority decision

by Carlos Arias  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

LAS VEGAS - Oscar De La Hoya had Felix Trinidad bloodied, outclassed and beaten after eight rounds, so he listened to his corner and stayed away from the dangerous Puerto Rican.

De La Hoya's corner told him there was no need to engage in a toe-to-toe slugfest after he clearly had outboxed Trinidad and built a huge lead on points.

De La Hoya has ignored his corner in the past, but in the weeks leading up to a bout billed as "The Fight of the Millennium" by promoter Bob Arum, De La Hoya said he had learned his lesson. He wouldn't ignore his corner again.

Plus, the judges were sure to side with De La Hoya. He's the Golden Boy. Las Vegas is his back yard.

It turned out to be a major miscalculation.

Trinidad knew the fight was close and rallied in the final four rounds to pull out a majority decision Saturday night in front of a capacity crowd of 12,000 at the Mandalay Bay Events Center.

Trinidad (36-0, 31 knockouts), the IBF welterweight champion since 1993, added De La Hoya's WBC 147-pound title. De La Hoya fell to 31-1 with 25 KOs.

"I knew it was close, so I put the pressure on in the later rounds," said Trinidad, who won the final four rounds on one judge's card and three of the last four rounds on the two other judges' cards.

Jerry Roth of Las Vegas scored it 115-113 for Trinidad, Bob Logist of Belgium had it 115-114 for Trinidad, and Glen Hamada of Tacoma, Wash., had it a 114-114 draw.

De La Hoya had a significant statistical advantage according to CompuBox numbers. He landed 263 of 648 punches (41 percent), while Trinidad landed 166 of 462 (36 percent). De La Hoya landed 101 more jabs than Trinidad and connected at a higher percentage. Trinidad had a slight edge in power punches, landing 124 of 318 to De La Hoya's 120 of 277.

One judge gave Trinidad the second round even though he landed only five punches.

"I don't know what the hell people are looking at anymore when scoring these fights," said Arum, De La Hoya's promoter.

"Honestly, in my heart, I thought I won the fight," De La Hoya said. "I really believe I was giving him a boxing lesson, but apparently it wasn't appreciated by people (the judges). I really believe I was in control of the fight."

It took 30 minutes after the final undercard bout before the main

event started. There were national anthems for Puerto Rico, Mexico and the United States, and then came the ring entrances. There was another delay because Trinidad's cornermen forgot his mouthpiece.

When the fight finally started at 9 p.m., De La Hoya made true on his promise to use lateral movement, combinations and a strong left jab instead of slugging it out as he has done in recent fights. Trinidad seemed baffled by De La Hoya and failed to cut off the ring as De La Hoya sprinted to an early lead.

De La Hoya was very economical with his punches, but the punches he landed had an impact. A double left jab at the end of the second round bloodied Trinidad's nose, staining his white trunks. Trinidad's left eye was swollen from a right at the end of the fifth.

"I was making him miss and making him pay," De La Hoya said. "I'm hurt. Emotionally, I'm hurt."

Neither fighter was knocked down or in serious jeopardy. The fight had few exchanges or dramatic moments.

The seventh round ended with Trinidad nailing De La Hoya with a left at the bell. De La Hoya had to be pulled back to his corner by his trainer, Robert Alcazar.

Trinidad started to rally in the ninth. He seemed to be willing to eat jabs in order to land hard rights. He continued to chase De La Hoya, who got hit only when he stopped moving.

The most exciting exchange came at the end of the 10th as the fighters went toe-to-toe for the final 10 seconds. Trinidad got the better of the exchange.

De La Hoya used a strange tactic in the final two rounds. Whenever Trinidad landed a right hand, De La Hoya rolled with the punch in an exaggerated motion that made the punch look more damaging than it was.

"I knew Oscar is a great fighter," Trinidad said. "I had the will to win. I told everybody I'd win."

Trinidad said he is willing to give De La Hoya a rematch. De La Hoya earned \$15 million, and Trinidad made \$10 million. Trinidad's promoter, Don King, said he has no problem with a rematch as long as Trinidad gets the lion's share of the cut next time.

"Just change the names where Bob Arum was and put my name in," King said.

King also promotes WBA welterweight champion James Page, so a fight between Trinidad and Page could be made to unify the welterweight titles if a rematch isn't made.

"People will demand (a rematch)," De La Hoya said. "I guess next time I'll brawl him."

# Fans flock to see homeruns, not the game

by Steve Kelley  
Knight-Ridder Newspapers

CHICAGO - Wrigley Field was sold out. There was an expectant buzz in the stands before the game, like the buzz before a championship fight.

This night had a playoff feel to it, cold and windy. But this was just a late September game between two teams that were a combined 38 games under .500.

They didn't come for the baseball game. They came for dingers.

It wasn't the Cubs against the Cardinals. It was Sammy Sosa against Mark McGwire.

They came to Wrigley last night for the history.

This was Home Run Derby, Part II. Sosa has 61. And, in this game, a 7-2 victory for St. Louis, McGwire hit 59.

"If I wasn't having the kind of year I'm having, the situation would be

pretty ugly," Sosa said.

Before the game, McGwire and Sosa talked on the outfield grass. On Saturday, Sosa became the first man in baseball history to have consecutive 60 home-run seasons. Later this week, McGwire will become the second.

"It's an awesome achievement and I wanted to congratulate Sammy," McGwire said. "I don't think he got the due press he should have for something as historical as that. It should have been leading off every sportscast."

"I don't know why it wasn't. You guys hold the pens and the cameras and the microphones. But I was really surprised to turn on CNN, ESPN, all those guys, and he wasn't the lead story."

"To be the first person in history to hit 60 twice, how can he not receive the same kind of attention we received last year? I told him it wasn't right."

Last year McGwire hit 70 home runs and Sosa hit 66. It was supposed to be a once-in-a-lifetime race. Now they're revisiting that place.

"Last year was unbelievable because both guys were trying to get to a record that was there for 37 years," Sosa said before the game. "This year the record is 70 and it's not such a surprise anymore. But I'm not thinking about that. It's more for the fans to enjoy."

Every time McGwire and Sosa come to the plate, life inside the ballpark stops.

In the ninth inning last night, with the Cubs trailing 7-0 and the temperature dropping into the low 50s, Wrigley still was filled because Sosa was leading off the inning.

He was given a standing ovation and, when he struck out, the place emptied as if there was a fire raging in the box seats.

"It's been a year when I've been doing my part, but the team still is in

the position we're in," Sosa said. "It's not fun like that."

There is another home-run race in the Midwest, but the pennant race is far from here.

"There's really nothing to hype as far as I'm concerned," McGwire said. "The home-run title is not something I look at and say it's important to me. It never has been and it never will be."

"Winning a home-run title has never been a goal of mine. You don't win a prize for it. There's no trophy. I've won it before and nobody ever talked about it. So now, all of a sudden it's a big deal?"

It should be a big deal. There should be hype. Whether or not he wants to participate in the celebration, McGwire, with Sosa, is performing another historical home-run pas de deux.

"I don't get into that. I'm sorry," McGwire said. "When I came in in 1987 and tied for the title with 49 home runs, nobody came to me and

said 'Congratulations, you won a home-run title.' Nobody said it in '96. Nobody said it in '97."

I had some pretty good home-run battles with Ken Griffey in the American League and nobody ever wanted to talk about it.

"Now it's such a big deal. I set goals I think I can reach. For me 50 home runs is something that's reasonable. That's what I'm going to expect from myself until the day I retire. Everything else is just icing on the cake."

But Wrigley Field was sold out because of the dingers.

And McGwire delivered.

Cub starter Jon Lieber retired the first 20 hitters. He struck out McGwire twice and threw a nasty, biting slider to McGwire to get ahead 0-1.

Then he got a fastball over the plate and McGwire hit it into the teeth of a 15-mph wind and into the center-field bleachers, just to the right of the 400-

foot marker.

His 59th home run broke up a perfect game.

"The way he was pitching, I wasn't sure I was going to make any contact tonight," McGwire said.

But they came for the dingers.

In the first, Sosa hit a towering fly to right-center that the wind stopped and Thomas Howard caught on the warning track in front of the 368-foot sign.

"Any other day, that's into the street," Cub Manager Jim Riggleman said.

They came for the dingers, because that's what they expect from Sosa and McGwire.

"When you hit home runs, nobody's going to talk about the rest of your game," McGwire said. "Look at Hank Aaron. He won Gold Gloves and nobody talks about it. I won a Gold Glove. Nobody talks about it. I accept that."

Reluctantly.