

Penn State defeats Ohio State

by Ray Parrillo
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STATE COLLEGE, Pa. -- After he was tackled on the final play of the game, Eric McCoo found a soft spot to land, and he stayed there for a moment while all around him his Penn State teammates went through the back-slapping ritual that's accorded to

of playing for No. 1 in the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 4.

Last weekend at Iowa, McCoo became the first Penn State running back this season to surpass 100 yards, which in the past has been a routine accomplishment in Happy Valley. Some took it as a sign that the Nittany Lions were finally rounding off their explosive, big-play offense with the kind of running game necessary to

fullback Mike Ceremele for a 7-0 lead who has been sharing the position

that made it 23-10.

For much of the game, though, Penn State's offense squandered opportunities. On five trips inside the Buckeyes' 25-yard line, the Nittany Lions came away with three field goals, and two other Forney field-goal attempts were blocked.

It didn't matter. Penn State's defense stuffed Ohio State the entire game, holding the Buckeyes to a paltry 143 yards total offense and 11 first downs, and sacking quarterback Steve Bellisari eight times. Linebacker LaVar Arrington had 2 sacks and

backup linebacker Ron Graham had two after coming off the bench for Mac Morrison, who had a slight concussion.

Punctuating their best defensive effort of the season, the Nittany Lions sent two Buckeyes to the sideline in a daze in the final minutes as Arrington collared Bellisari and free safety Askari Adams crushed receiver Reggie Germany.

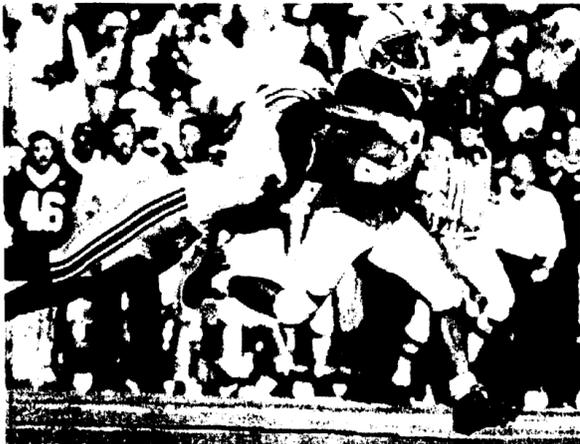
"We lost to a very good team," Ohio State coach John Cooper said. "They're as good or better than advertised."



NITTANY LIONS
23



BUCKEYES
10



Penn State's Eric McCoo gets caught from behind by a flying James Cotton of Ohio State in the Nittany Lions' 23-10 victory Saturday.

victors.

The sophomore running back with the shifty moves and squat, muscular legs deserved the brief rest on the Beaver Stadium turf. After all, for most of the sun-washed day, he owned it, darting past and running through Ohio State defenders until he had amassed 211 yards to trigger a 23-10 Big Ten Conference win over the Buckeyes before 97,007 spectators on Saturday.

"Eric ran his butt off today," Penn State guard Eric Cole said with admiration.

With McCoo shredding the Buckeyes and Penn State using a punishing defense to hold No. 18 Ohio State (4-3 overall, 1-2 conference) to its lowest point total in 34 games, the second-ranked Nittany Lions (7-0, 3-0) stayed on course toward their goal

survive in the Big Ten. Others questioned the validity of gaining all those yards against Iowa's sad-sack defense, and wondered if McCoo had really emerged as Penn State's featured back, even though he had led the team in rushing last season as a freshman.

"I feel like things are back to normal," McCoo said. "It was all because of execution. We executed last week, and a lot of people thought it was a fluke, a lot thought we were just fooling people."

Penn State didn't win without paying a price. Starting quarterback Kevin Thompson suffered a slightly separated right shoulder after he was driven to the ground by blitzing linebacker Na'il Diggs late in the second quarter and did not return to the game. It's not yet known whether Thompson, who tossed a 6-yard TD pass to

on the first possession, will be available for Saturday's game at Purdue.

"We're not sure how serious it is yet," said Penn State coach Joe Paterno, who moved into a third-place tie with Amos Alonzo Stagg in career wins among Division I-A coaches with 314. "We'll probably know Monday."

"It's just a painful thing," Thompson said. "It felt like a pop. I probably held on to the ball too long during the play."

While Thompson lay in his own end zone in obvious pain, the ball was recovered by Ohio State free safety Gary Berry for a touchdown that brought the Buckeyes within 13-10 with 2 minutes, 52 seconds remaining in the half. The play also triggered an eerie feeling in some of the Nittany Lions who recalled last year's game in Columbus, Ohio, when a Thompson fumble was recovered for a TD that spun the game in the Buckeyes' favor and gave them the impetus for a 28-9 win.

"It was deja vu," cornerback David Macklin said, "but we knew we wouldn't end up with the same result."

Still, leading by only 13-10 at the break had to be a bit unsettling for the Nittany Lions because they had dominated play and yet had little margin for error.

But quarterback Rashard Casey,

with Thompson all season, eased Penn State's concerns by leading a scoring drive on the team's first possession of the second half. McCoo opened the drive with a 12-yard run. Casey kept it going with completions of 12 yards to Bryant Johnson and 20 yards to Ceremele. On first and goal from the 5-yard line, the mobile Casey rolled to his left and went into the end zone untouched on a naked bootleg, pumping his fist during the entire run as the Nittany Lions fattened the lead to 20-10 with the successful extra-point kick.

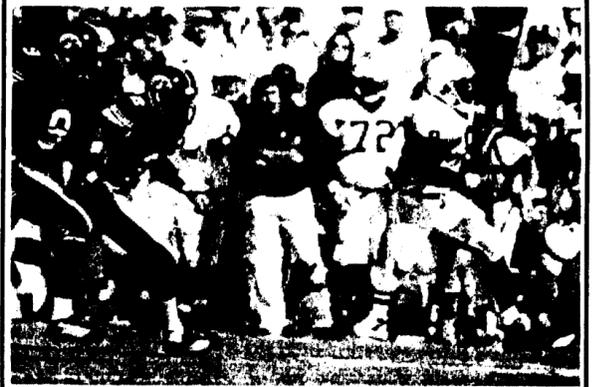
If Thompson is unavailable for the next game, Casey, a junior from Hoboken, N.J., will get his first career start.

"If that happens, I'll just take it a play earlier," said Casey, who completed 11 of 15 passes for 109 yards but was sacked four times and, except for his TD jaunt, found little running room on the corners. "I'll just go out and try to keep the team going."

Including four catches for 47 yards, McCoo accounted for 258 of Penn State's 422 total yards. His best run was when he swerved 16 yards and left Buckeyes clutching air after he took a Casey pass at the line of scrimmage. The play gave Penn State a first down late in the third quarter and eventually enabled Travis Forney to kick his third field goal, a 28-yarder

FLASHBACK

Penn State vs. Iowa
OCTOBER 9TH



Penn State's Eric McCoo runs for a touchdown in the second half as Iowa's Tarig Holman and Matt Bowen trail behind. Penn State won 31-7.

NEXT GAME:

October 23 at Purdue



WILT CHAMBERLAIN

August 21, 1936 - October 12, 1999

*Excerpts from a final
interview with Wilt Chamberlain*



by Sam Donnellon
Knight-Ridder Newspapers
October 13, 1999

PHILADELPHIA -- We had talked about childhood, adulthood and parenthood. Spend a little time with Wilt Chamberlain and you were struck with this incongruity in his short life:

He never married.

"But I tell you what, I'm still looking," he told me last spring as I spent a day roaming around with him in his cathedral-like home in Bel-Air, a section of Los Angeles. "I haven't excluded it. Now especially, because I think the older people are, the more suited they are for marriage. The older you are, the more set in your ways you are."

"You meet your wife at 50, she's done most of her changing. What you see is what you are going to get."

I left that day thinking what a neat last chapter to a remarkable life that would have been. Wilt Chamberlain, perhaps the world's most infamous bachelor this side of Mick Jagger, would spend the final quadrant of his life not alone on a hill, but rather traveling with a companion, taking walks, discovering the friendship that his parents had, the friendship that produced a man who never stopped embracing a society that so often pushed him away.

I pictured him dying alone Tuesday in that crumbling home and couldn't help but feel sadness for him.

He grew to be a lot of things to a lot of people, but that day he sounded very much like a happy kid from a happy, two-parent family. He revered his mother and father, spoke

proudly of the morals they had instilled and the sacrifices they had made, spoke poetically about how it insulated him from the ridicule that marked the early part of his career.

Even when people made Wilt feel like a monster, he said, he never thought of the people as monsters.

"I live on top of a hill not to separate myself from everybody else, but because it is a beautiful hill and it expresses a lot of the things that I feel," he explained, as we looked out on the valley and reservoir below his home. "I got into views living in New York and in San Francisco. I had choices of going to the beaches and living in Malibu or going to the hills. I chose this. The beaches, where I was playing volleyball, never gave you a chance to get away from the adoration and people . . ."

"I don't even think it is even complex that you can like people and you can like your own solitude. I think given the choice, most of us are like that. I would think that one of the reasons that many marriages don't become fruitful over a long period of time is that there is not enough space, and to survive they have to become one."

Wilt loved his solitude. He loved that house on the hill, even after an earthquake popped holes in its roof and cracked the pool and patio that surrounded it. He loved to work into the early-morning hours, sleep until noon. It was a lifestyle he forged as a player and maintained as a private entrepreneur.

I remember he was mad at me a little that morning when I showed up at his gate about an hour early, my cross-country flight arriving early, the cab ride landing me there at 10:30 a.m. his time.

He greeted me in silk drawstrings and no shirt, the early makings of a middle-aged paunch around his midsection. His feet, I will remember until my death, were a mess, the result of too much sun, too much beach volleyball. There were calluses and scabs on their bottoms. The tops were dry and cracked, like the skin of an elephant.

But he was so alive, so vibrant, it's hard to believe he's gone just five months later. He was writing screenplays. He had a movie company and oversaw a marathon for Operation Smile, one of the truly noble efforts on this earth.

Doctors dedicate their expertise and time, traveling to perform surgery on underprivileged people with various facial problems.

The doctors make children, ostracized over how they look, like themselves again. Wilt loved his charities, loved to boast about the good work they, not he, did. He saw his involvement as his way of being a parent without that oneness thing engulfing him.

"I come from a wholesome marriage situation," he said that day. "And lots of happiness. And in (that) lies the one fear in my humble existence. And that is, could I ever match what they had? Not thinking in this day and age that is possible. It's an almost impossible task. I'm a man of odds. And I believe the odds are against you."

I mentioned then that he had chased long odds all his life. He had taken on challenges, from private business to basketball. "But the only difference there is, the odds that I chase are about me," he said. "If I fail, it's about me. Now when you get married, you become one, you become a family. So if you fail, it's not just you failing. It's a lot of people failing."

Like a team, I said. He agreed. To an extent. "But this is bigger than basketball," he said. "Bigger than a game. This is life. You have children to deal with. And a wife. So it becomes more than you just lost a game. If you lose this game, you have affected the life of a great many people have. And I have been chicken (bleep) to take responsibility in that area. Because I never thought I was truly ready to take that responsibility."

So he learned to live alone, and give back in other ways. "I have tried to supplement by being involved in other areas," he said. "Because I learned a long time ago that many of us male idiots could father a son or a daughter. That's no big deal. But it's what you do afterwards. So if I can do some good things for young kids, or not-so young kids, they're my family in some respects . . ."

Before I went out to Los Angeles that day, I heard a lot of things about Wilt Chamberlain, good and bad. Some people, because of that chapter in his book in which he claimed to have bedded 20,000 women, had a cartoonish image of him, like some buffoon who chased everything and reflected on little.

Maybe some of it was true at one time. But the Wilt of that day, the Wilt of age 62, was all about reflection and thought. He kept trying to get me to eat something. He insisted on driving me back to the airport later that day, when I offered repeatedly to call a cab.

I will remember that. I will remember always that he died on my 41st birthday.

I will remember him as a nice guy.

He would have made any woman a great companion.