

Visions of Sugar Bowl fade away for Penn State

by Ray Parrillo
Knight-Ridder Newspapers
November 07, 1999

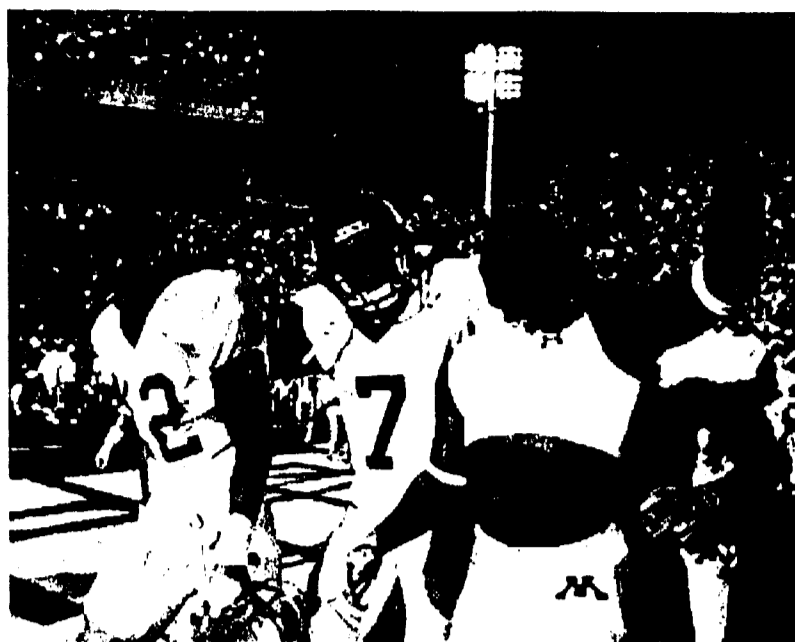
STATE COLLEGE, Pa. -- His eyes still puffy from the tears that had been flowing moments earlier, LaVar Arrington shook his head as he painfully relished the miraculous play that broke so many hearts Saturday in Happy Valley, the play that may forever be remembered as the one that cost Penn State a crack at a national championship.

"I got so close, so close," the Nittany Lions' brilliant linebacker said, talking barely above a whisper. "I almost had him. But I let myself get cut. What can you do?"

Like so many of his teammates, Arrington was torturing himself. He was lamenting how close he had come to getting a piece of Billy Cockerham on a blitz before the Minnesota quarterback heaved an ugly desperation pass into the wind on fourth-and-16 from the Penn State 40-yard line with little more than a minute remaining.

To the shock of the Nittany Lions, the throw caromed off the outstretched hands of the Golden Gophers' Ron Johnson, ricocheted behind him, and, just as it was about to fall to the Beaver Stadium turf, landed in the arms of Arland Bruce for a 27-yard completion.

The stunning development set up Dan Nystrom's 32-yard field goal on the final play that gave Minnesota a 24-23 upset of second-ranked Penn State, ending the Nittany Lions' 11-game winning streak and, most likely, their dreams of playing in the Sugar Bowl for No. 1.



Minnesota players celebrate a 24-23 victory over Penn State Saturday. TMS PHOTO

For one of the few times in his 34-year career as Penn State's head coach, 72-year-old Joe Paterno appeared genuinely crushed by a defeat.

"I thought we batted it down and the game was over," said Paterno, who may have seen his last best shot at a national title disappear. "I just feel sorry for these kids, for the seniors who don't have a chance to do what they wanted to do. But we can still have a great season."

Leading 23-21 with just under two minutes left, Paterno decided to punt on fourth down at the Minnesota 33 rather than allow Travis Forney to attempt a 50-yard field goal with a wind gusting to 20 m.p.h. at his back.

Minnesota coach Glen Mason, whose hard-luck team had lost to Wisconsin, Ohio State and Purdue by a combined 11 points, was thrilled by Paterno's decision.

"I was happy, because Forney is that good of a kicker, and I knew he could hit one from 50 yards out," Mason said. "But I agreed with their decision to try to pin us deep."

But Pat Pidgeon's punt didn't pin the Golden Gophers deep. Instead, it went into the end zone, giving them the ball on their own 20, and on first down, Cockerham completed a 46-yard pass to



Penn State's Joe Paterno will have to wait for another national championship. TMS PHOTO

Johnson.

The Golden Gophers, who entered the game with the Big Ten's top-ranked defense, took away the big-play capability that had served the Nittany Lions so well, and they took few risks on offense, using Thomas Hamner (96 yards in 38 carries) to neutralize the big-play nature of Penn State's defense.

Bears have someone on their side

by J.A. Adande
Los Angeles Times

GREEN BAY, Wis. Just when we finished watching every last frame of Walter Payton in the NFL Films library, the Chicago Bears produced a reel that must have come straight from DreamWorks.

The Bears capped off an emotional week that began with Payton's death on Monday by blocking a last-second field goal Sunday to preserve a 14-13 victory over the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau Field.

"It was wonderful, it was magical," Bears linebacker Barry Minter said. "I think the appropriate word would be 'sweet.'"

As in Sweetness, Payton's nickname.

It had to end like this. Not because Walter would have wanted it this way but because he deserved to be honored with a worthy effort.

That's all his brother, Eddie, asked for after the Bears said they would dedicate the remainder of the season to Sweetness. That was a risky move for a team off to a 3-5 start, and Eddie wanted to make sure the "tribute" wouldn't be lost amid a string of losses.

This victory wasn't particularly artistic or impressive. It was simply a team getting the most out of what limited ability it had.

"I told you (Saturday) we would play for Walter for the rest of the season," offensive tackle James "Big Cat" Williams said. "Walter's in our hearts."

And on their chests (in the form of a football-shaped patch with the number 34 sewn onto the uniforms) and who knows where else.

"You have to believe he had a hand in the final play," Bear Coach Dick Jauron said.

Or both hands.

"I think Walter Payton actually picked me up a little and boosted me in the air," said Bryan Robinson, the 295-pound defensive end who blocked Ryan Longwell's kick. "I know he did, because I can't jump that high."

You'll have to excuse the Bears for looking to the hereafter for explanations because, well, they're the Bears and they don't have much going for them.

How else are you going to explain them winning a game in which starting quarterback Cade McNown was knocked out with a knee injury in the first quarter?

What's the rationale behind backup Jim Miller matching Brett Favre drive for drive in the second half?

Why now, of all times, for the Bears to end a 10-game losing streak to the Packers?

"We don't want to use Walter Payton's death in a cheap fashion," Miller said. "But I'll tell you what: if everyone on this team plays with the effort 34 did his whole career, we'll win a lot of games."

So add one more lesson learned from Payton and another tribute to him.

And now this young team can use its own examples of what it takes to win.

They can look at the way Miller bounced back from a first half in which he had as many interceptions as completions (three) to go 13-for-18 for 122 yards and a touchdown in the second half.

They can learn from Santa Monica High School's Glyn Milburn, who rushed for only 31 yards through the first eight games but ran 49 yards for a touchdown Sunday.

They can learn from the way they didn't give up even though Favre, the most clutch player in the NFL today, was driving on them and already pondering his postgame victory comments.

They hung in until the very end and blocked the field goal.

So now it's the Packers who most sort through issues - albeit less profound - such as why they're 4-4, and why Favre has been so erratic, with 13 interceptions to 12 touchdowns.

The Bears can relax, savor and reflect.

"It's been an emotional week all across the board for us," Milburn said.

Usually the rivalry produces enough drama by itself. When the Packers play the Bears is when the strange, silly stuff happens, like an outburst of profanity by Mike Ditka during his weekly news conference before the Green Bay game in 1992.

The rivalry is so contentious that the Bears media guide still carries an asterisk by the Packers' 14-13 victory on Nov. 5, 1989, to mark it as the "Instant Replay Game", decided when a video judge overruled a field official's call that Green Bay quarterback Don Majkowski had passed the line of scrimmage before throwing the winning touchdown pass.

Fortunately the partisan feelings were put aside temporarily as the locals paid the appropriate respects to Payton. There was a pause for a moment of silence before the game. The Lambeau Field video screen even showed a clip of Payton running through their beloved Packers before Sunday's game.

When the University of Wisconsin marching band's tuba players came out for their fourth quarter serenade, a tradition at Badgers games, their tubas had covers that spelled out "34 SWEETNESS."

The Packers just didn't plan on giving Payton's Bears a victory as well. "I was thinking about coming down here [to the interview room] and saying, 'It was another great come from behind win,'"

Favre said of his thoughts on the final drive. "It just wasn't our day, I guess."

We all know whose day it was.

1999-2000 NBA Preview: Part 2

by Matt Buser
staff writer

The 1999-2000 NBA season is in full swing now, and San Antonio and Portland have come out of the gate quick in the West. In the East, Boston and Milwaukee are surprising a few people, but it's too early to put a lot of weight on these games. That being said, it's time for my long-awaited Eastern Conference preview, and my post-season predictions.

EASTERN CONFERENCE

Playoff Teams:

1. Miami Heat

Alonzo Mourning, the reigning NBA Defensive Player of the Year, led the league in blocks (3.9 per game), and had his best overall season. Tim Hardaway was slowed by a knee injury for much of the season, but still managed 17 points and 7 assists per game. With Hardaway healthy, and Jamal Mashburn and Voshon Lenard being all the way back from last year's injuries, the Heat will be tough to beat. Dan Majerle and Otis Thorpe are solid veterans off an otherwise suspect bench. Pat Riley always has them at or near the top of the Eastern Conference standings, and this year shouldn't be any different.

Best Player: Mourning, as intense and intimidating as anyone in the league. On the rise: Lenard, after missing 35 games with a broken leg last year, will regain his deadly outside touch.

2. New York Knicks

The Knicks will be a great team until Patrick Ewing comes back from his injury. If Marcus Camby was given enough starts, he would challenge Mourning for the blocked shots title. His ability to run with Latrell Sprewell, Allen Houston, and Charlie Ward will make the Knicks one of the best fast-break teams in the league. Once Ewing is back, however, he'll be given every opportunity to reduce this team that wants to run, to a bunch of guys waiting for him to hobble up the court and anchor himself in the low-post...unless Camby plays beyond expectations.

Best player: Sprewell, with a new fat contract, will love the Knicks' run-and-gun ways. On the rise: Camby will make it really hard for Van Gundy to take him out of the starting lineup.

3. Charlotte Hornets

The Hornets have as talented a first seven as anyone in the league. David Wesley, Eddie Jones, Bobby Phillips, Anthony Mason, Elden Campbell are the starters, and Derrick Coleman and Baron Davis come off the bench. Unless there is bickering for minutes at the power forward spot, this rotation could carry the Hornets deep into the playoffs. Jones and Campbell are superior defenders, and Mason, who missed all of last season, can pass as well as any big man in the league. The Hornets could be the team in the East that no one wants to face come playoff time.

Best player: Jones, on a balanced scoring team, will break out. On the rise: Mason will be named the Comeback Player of the Year.

4. Philadelphia 76ers

The best defensive team in the league, once Theo Ratliff and Matt Geiger return. Allen Iverson, Larry Hughes, and Eric Snow are a great trio at guard. Billy Owens, Tyrone Hill, and rookie Todd McCulloch will get extra playing time while Ratliff and Geiger are back. If they can regain their chemistry before the playoffs, Iverson could carry them pretty far.

Best player: Iverson; love him or hate him, you know he's great. On the rise: Hughes-everyone (including me) says it's his time to flourish.

5. Indiana Pacers

The Utah Jazz of the Eastern Conference. Listed this high on reputation, this is their last run at a title, if you can call it that. Mark Jackson, Rik Smits, and Chris Mullin are nearing the end of solid pro careers. Once Coach Larry Bird retires, Pacer ownership will dismantle this team and rebuild. Reggie Miller will have to do more than just nail the big three for the Pacers to make any noise this year. The loss of Antonio Davis will rear its ugly head once the playoffs come and Smits and Dale Davis are too tired to play. They could be the team everyone wants to face in the playoffs.

Best player: Miller-he always nails the big three(s). On the rise: Jalen Rose, starts this year with Mullin coming off the bench, will show he has the tools.

6. Toronto Raptors

Vince Carter's high flying act will gain more credibility this year when his team actually makes the playoffs. The leagues "most exciting player" is surrounded by a great mix of young talent and veteran muscle. Doug Christie is as athletic and well-rounded as any guard in the league, and doesn't mind that you don't know about him. Tracy

McGrady has merely scratched the surface as far as his talents go. Charles Oakley, Kevin Willis, and newcomer Antonio Davis in the middle provide lots of leadership, rebounds, and intimidation. Dell Curry, Dee Brown and Muggsy Bogues will give the young guns a rest, if they ever need one. The Raptors should be fun to watch.

Best player: Carter, what will he do to follow his opening act? On the rise: Carter, McGrady, and Christie, these guys are all going to have fun this year.

7. Milwaukee Bucks

The Bucks are strong at the perimeter, but pretty weak inside. They named J.R. Reid their starting center before the season started, if that helps clarify. He's decent, but not an NBA starting center. Danny Manning, Ervin Johnson, and Robert Traylor all platoon with Reid at the power forward and center spot. They're all decent, but not spectacular. What the Bucks do have is fiery Sam Cassell at point, superstar Ray Allen at shooting guard, and "The Big Dog" Glenn Robinson at the small forward spot. Dale Ellis, Haywoode Workman, and Tim Thomas are the reserves at guard/forward. The Bucks are an enigma. If Coach George Karl can get enough out of his big men, and if his big three provide all the scoring, they will win more games than they lose.

Best player: Allen, who is still coming into his own as a total player. On the rise: See "Best player."

8. Atlanta Hawks

The Hawks have a completely different team than they had for the past...long time. But, whether that's good or bad remains to be seen. Mookie and Steve Smith are gone, replaced (sort of) by Binbo Coles and Isaiah Rider, and Jim Jackson when Rider doesn't feel like playing. Mr. Injury-Prone LaPhonso Ellis, Alan Henderson, and Dikembe Mutombo round out the starters. Lorenzen Wright should fill in admirably when Ellis goes down for the year, and rookie Jason Terry won't play behind Binbo all year long. They do have talent, and they should make the playoffs, but Rider's inevitable impact has yet to be felt on this team. Best player: Mutombo, with guaranteed double-double, and lots of finger-wagging. On the rise: Terry; he's a rookie, so he's a lock to be a better NBA player than he was last year.

Best player: Allen, who is still coming into his own as a total player. On the rise: See "Best player."

9. New Jersey Nets: The talent on board should push Hawks for final playoff spot.

Best player: Stephon Marbury, Keith Van Horn, former: 21 points, 9 assists per; latter: 22 points, 9 rebounds per. On the rise: Marbury, who could have Iverson-like numbers this year.

10. Detroit Pistons: Grant Hill will leave after this season. Sorry, Detroit.

Best player: Hill, a fantasy basketball owner's dream. On the rise: Jerry Stackhouse, starting this year; Hill will help make him look good.

11. Washington Wizards: They could surprise us if they get any help from their bench.

Best player: Juwan Howard, Mitch Richmond, Rod Strickland, all good, none great. On the rise: Isaac Austin, should put up solid numbers after last year's embarrassing campaign.

12. Cleveland Cavaliers: Zydrunas Ilgauskas' injury dropped them a few spots.

Best player: Shawn Kemp, who's their only "threat" to score. On the rise: Andre Miller, who will see plenty of minutes at the point.

13. Boston Celtics: Fortson would have helped, but they really need a legitimate center.

Best player: Antoine Walker; He needs to improve his shot selection, but that's about it. On the rise: Paul Pierce; he doesn't even need to improve his shot selection.

14. Orlando Magic: They won't finish tied for first this year.

Best player: Darrell Armstrong; he's good, but will struggle without Hardaway. On the rise: Corey Maggette, who needs to be "the franchise" sooner than he actually will be.

15. Chicago Bulls: Hey, at least they have lots of salary cap room for next season.

Best player: Toni Kukoc; he will have another really good season, but it won't matter. On the rise: Elton Brand, who will be "the franchise" very soon.

Post-Season Predictions:

West: Trailblazers over Spurs

East: Heat over Hornets

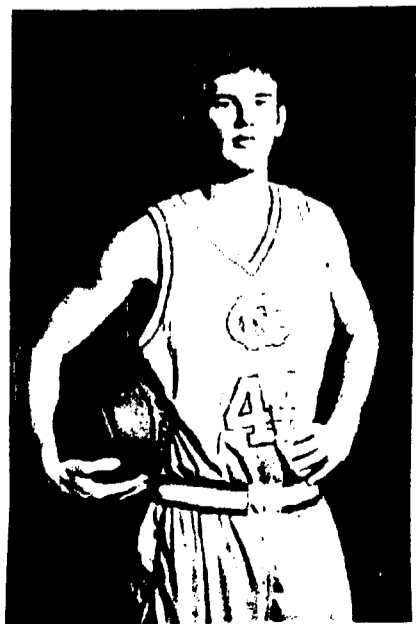
Finals: Trailblazers over Heat

MVP: Tim Duncan

Best Rookie: Lamar Odom

What are your predictions for the 1999-2000 NBA season? WE WANT TO KNOW! Email the *Beacon* at behrcoll5@aol.com with your predictions. Enjoy the season!

NEW UNI'S FOR UNC



Freshman forward Will Johnson shows off the University of North Carolina's new basketball uniform.