

Nittany Lions wrapping up another strong recruiting season

by Ray Parrillo
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The youngster was nearly 3,000 miles from State College, but Penn State's football recruiters knew tight end Mike Seidman of Westlake Village (Calif.) High had Pennsylvania roots, so they pursued the 6-foot-5, 246-pounder with a "future star" label slapped on him by almost every recruiting service in existence.

But while evaluating Seidman on video, the Nittany Lions' staff fell in love with the school's tall, strong-armed quarterback who was throwing the ball to him. Still a junior at the time, Zac Wasserman was wooed by Joe Paterno. Seidman is now a freshman at UCLA, but Penn State was rewarded for its early pursuit of Wasserman, and the recently named *Parade* magazine all-American will be a freshman in Happy Valley next season.

Shows you how scientific this frantic recruiting business can be, huh?

Today, the first in which thousands of college football hopefuls with visions of glory are permitted to sign binding letters of intent, the 6-3, 200-pound Wasserman will officially become a key figure in Penn State's massive, talented incoming freshman class.

Penn State's class of 29 players, which includes four *Parade* all-Americans, is ranked among the five best in the nation by just about every recruiting service. One recruiting analyst, Bobby Burton, has it rated No. 1. Phil Grosz, publisher of the well-respected G&W Recruiting Report, ranked it No. 5, though first in the Big Ten.

"Despite the fact Penn State didn't bring in a lot of skill position players on offense, they did a marvelous job of recruiting for need," said Grosz, who is based in State College. "They needed help in the secondary and they're signing three cornerbacks and possibly two safeties. They needed help at defensive end and they've got five defensive ends. They have as



Penn State head football coach Joe Paterno recently wrapped up another successful recruiting season. 29 talented new faces will join the Happy Valley squad this coming fall.

many as seven linebackers, and they've got two of 20 top-rated quarterbacks in country."

It appears, then, that even though he's 73, Paterno's well-known power of persuasion remains. The university last week announced that Paterno's contract had been extended through 2004, which could be construed as a move to appease incoming recruits wondering how much longer the legendary coach will remain. Grosz, for one, doesn't see it that way.

"They had commitments from 27 of the 29 recruits before Christmas, so I don't think that announcement had anything to do with recruiting," Grosz said.

During his senior season, Wasserman reinforced his potential as a top-notch prospect by throwing for more than 2,900 yards and 37 touchdowns to lead Westlake Village to a 13-1 record and a California Interscholastic Federation championship.

He ended his career with 90 TD passes and more than 8,000 yards in the air. Wasserman, ranked No. 6 on *Parade's* list of high school quarterbacks, was also pursued by Michigan, Tennessee and Texas A&M.

The Nittany Lions are expected to sign quarterback Zack Mills, who set Maryland Public League career passing records with 5,462 yards and 58 TDs. Like most other schools, Penn State also tried to land Jeff Smoker of Manheim (Pa.) Central, but *Parade's* No. 2-rated quarterback prospect chose Michigan State.

As usual, Penn State did well harvesting talent from the Philadelphia region. Perhaps the best of the incoming linemen is North Penn's Chris McKelvy, also a *Parade* all-American and second-team all-USA *Today* choice. McKelvy selected Penn State over Florida State, Nebraska, Michigan and Ohio State.

Two of the leading prospects in

South Jersey, Eastern's Adam Taliaferro and Kingsway's Jason Robinson, are also in the class. The speedy Taliaferro, *The Inquirer's* all-area player of the year, ran for more than 1,500 yards. At 5-11, 187, he's projected as a cornerback. At 6-5, 260, Robinson should develop as a defensive end.

Penn State's other two *Parade* all-Americans played within shouting distance of Beaver Stadium. Running back Tony Johnson, brother of Nittany Lions' tailback Larry Johnson Jr., orally committed to Penn State last week after a brilliant career at State College High. He has promise as a receiver. His teammate, David Kimball, is considered the nation's top placekicker by SuperPrep magazine. He kicked a 54-yard field goal for State College.

A familiar name for Penn State followers is Nick Gasparato Jr., a talented running back for Dutch Fork

High in Columbia, S.C. Gasparato's father, Nick, was a former assistant coach at Penn State and Temple before joining the staff at South Carolina.

While at Temple, Gasparato lived in Marlton, N.J., and would have played for Cherokee High if the family hadn't moved to Columbia. At Dutch Fork, Gasparato made all-state as a running back and kick returner, rushing for 3,212 yards and catching 1,867 yards worth of passes in his career.

Penn State's incoming group also includes tight end Sean McHugh, Ohio's Division IV offensive player of the year; defensive lineman Erik Noll, Maryland's Gatorade player of the year; defensive lineman Sam Ruhe, Ohio's Division II defensive player of the year; linebacker/defensive end Derek Wake, the *Washington Post* all-metro defensive player of the year; and defensive lineman Ellery Moore, Ohio's Division I defensive player of the year.

A prized recruit who got away from Penn State is receiver Carlos Perez of Hoboken (N.J.) High, where Rashard Casey, the Nittany Lions' starting quarterback next season, was a high school all-American. Penn State had four offers on the table but only two remaining scholarships last week. When Wake and Tony Johnson committed to Penn State, there was no scholarship remaining for Perez, who yesterday announced he will attend Florida.

"They desperately wanted Perez, but they ran out of scholarships," Grosz said. "Paterno was scheduled to visit Perez last Thursday, but he had to cancel."

The NCAA places a limit of 25 scholarships for an incoming class. Penn State was able to bring in 29 players because four of them will enroll in January and be eligible for the 2001 season.

Grosz ranks Penn State's recruiting class as the best in the Big Ten Conference.

Seton Hall ends Syracuse win streak at 19

by Kevin T. Czerwinski
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SYRACUSE, N.Y.—Stamp Seton Hall legitimate.

The Pirates put to rest all the questions about whether they are worthy of NCAA tournament consideration with one mighty effort Monday night at the Carrier Dome. The Hall withstood charge after charge from No. 4 Syracuse and showed the mettle that most thought they were lacking, holding on for a stunning 69-67 victory over the previously undefeated Orangemen.

The victory ended Syracuse's seasonlong, 19-game winning streak while extending the Pirates' mastery over Jim Boeheim's club in its own building. For the third consecutive year, the Hall (16-4, 8-2 Big East) traveled to upstate New York as a huge underdog, and for the third consecutive trip it pulled out a victory.

This time, the win almost assuredly will put the Pirates in next week's Top 25 and virtually secured them a position in the NCAA tournament. It also pulled the Hall to within a game of the first-place Orangemen (19-1, 9-1) in the Big East.

"For us to come in here, against a terrific team in this environment, and win... I'm just proud of the way we pulled together in a tough time," Seton Hall coach Tommy Amaker said. "Very rarely is a team going to go undefeated. The law of averages says it's tough to do that. So I told our guys: 'Why not us? Why not our team? Why can't we come in here and win a game?'"

And in silencing the 23,735 fans that formed a screaming, teaming sea of orange, the Pirates surpassed the win total (15) they had in each of Amaker's first two seasons as head coach.

"This is the way we like it," said senior guard Shaheen Holloway, who had 12 points and nine assists, and tied a career high with 11 rebounds. "I've been saying all year long that we don't like to be in the public eye. We like being the underdog because we earn everything we get. And to get 16 wins, that's great."

The Hall certainly earned this one, busting Syracuse's vaunted zone defense to connect on 12 three-pointers. The biggest came with 39 seconds remaining as Darius Lane took a Holloway pass and buried a trey from the left wing, giving the Pirates the 69-67 advantage.

And though Lane missed a potential game-icing front end of a one-and-one 22 seconds later, the Pirates didn't break. They held off Ryan Blackwell's last-moment drive at the basket with Samuel Dalembert slapping the ball away to preserve the win.

"I like the 1/8wing 3/8," said Lane, who scored a game-high 20 points hours after being named Big East Rookie of the Week for the fourth time this season. "The guy was standing off me, so I just release and shoot. I just love to shoot from the 1/8wing 3/8. I knew time was running down, and I just saw it go in. Then I just wanted to get back and play defense."

If you're making a list of Pirates heroes, don't leave off Al Harris' name. The freshman forward played the best game of his career, stepping in for the Pirates after Dalembert got into foul trouble for a third consecutive game. Harris battled Syracuse's Etan Thomas, pushing the big man around in the paint.

Though Thomas ended with 13 points and 14 rebounds, Harris had a career-best 10 points, many of which came with the shot clock winding down.

"Al really stepped up along the baseline," Amaker said. "He's our strongest kid and the best one we could put on Thomas in the low post. And he did a great job."

The big effort from Lane and Holloway in the waning seconds also overshadowed a strong finish by DeShaun Williams. The former Paterson Catholic star was the key reason the Orangemen erased an eight-point deficit with four minutes remaining. He scored five of his 11 points over that stretch and made a diving, out-of-bounds save on an errant pass that led to a Jason Hart basket.

Williams also had four assists, three rebounds, and two steals. Hart ended with a team-high 14 points.

Tiger Woods comes from behind to win at Pebble Beach

by Craig Bestrom
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Tiger Woods' historic final-round charge was building momentum, and golf's greatest comeback artist shook his head in disbelief. "Amazing," Jack Nicklaus said, after seeing that Woods was only two behind the leader with three holes to play.

"Absolutely amazing."

The best was yet to come.

Golf's reigning superhero did what mere mortals could never have accomplished Monday afternoon at Pebble Beach Golf Links. Trailing by seven shots with seven holes to play, Woods won the AT&T Pebble Beach National Pro-Am for his sixth consecutive PGA Tour victory.

"It's less pressure to come from behind, no doubt about it," Woods said, "but coming from behind is definitely a pretty nice taste in your mouth. I don't know why. Maybe it's because it generally happens when you shoot a great round of golf."

Woods was sensational, but what else is new? His 8-under-par 64, especially the 5-under 31 on the back nine, led to his greatest final-round comeback on tour. The 64 was the lowest final round by a winner in the 53-year history of the tournament, bettering the 65 by Peter Jacobsen in 1995. And it sealed Woods' 72-hole total of 15-under 273 that made him a two-shot winner over runners-up Matt Gogel and Vijay Singh.

Woods' sixth consecutive tour victory made him only the second to achieve that feat, accomplished by Ben Hogan in 1948. Woods has tried to downplay the streak this year, saying it's not the equal of Hogan's because Hogan won his six in one calendar year. But it counts just the same, and

as the streak continues, Woods conceded, Byron Nelson's 11 in a row in 1945 is suddenly worth thinking about.

"It's definitely more intriguing," said Woods, whose 17th tour victory earned him \$720,000 and increased his career earnings in 31/2 years as a pro to \$12,035,128. "I'm actually more proud of the fact I've won eight out of nine in the same stretch. The only tournament I didn't win in the same stretch was (the Johnnie Walker Classic) in Taiwan. I won at Malaysia playing pretty good there, and I also won the Grand Slam (in Hawaii)."

For a while, it appeared Woods had no business winning the AT&T, but Gogel couldn't hold on. Tied for the lead to start the final round, Gogel birdied Nos. 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7 to get to 17 under with a commanding six-shot lead over Singh. Woods wasn't even on leader boards at the time, having birdied only three of his first 10 holes to get to 10 under.

Gogel reached the 11th tee, leading the tournament by four, when things began to unravel. He bogeyed Nos. 11 and 12 by hitting into bunkers on both and failing to hole clutch putts. By the time he got to the 13th green, Woods had pulled to within two. He got there thanks to a little genius and some luck, spinning a 97-yard wedge shot into the cup for a 2 on the par-4 15th.

The accompanying roar echoed to the cliffs along the water, and Gogel's wife, Blair, began to fear for her husband's fate.

"We knew this was coming," Blair Gogel said. "Sometimes Matt doesn't look at the scoreboards. Maybe he won't see it."

He didn't need to; he only had to listen.

Not far from Gogel, and standing with Nicklaus on the ninth tee, Mark

O'Meara and Ken Griffey Jr. simply shook their heads and smiled. Yet another ovation thundered in the distance, and everyone knew what it meant. Woods' run had reached the 16th green, where his 115-yard approach shot nearly disappeared for his second straight 2.

The few fans who weren't there raced to join the rumble, hoping for a glimpse. An estimated 4,000 spectators watched the final round, and everyone of them will say: "I was there."

With the crowd at five and six deep around the 16th green, Woods banged home the two-foot birdie putt that got him to 7 under for the round and 14 under for the tournament. Finally, he was within a shot of the lead, and his coach, Butch Harmon, was as fired up as the fans.

"I just figured if I could hang in there, keep plodding along, make a few birdies here and there, you never know," said Woods, who trails only Ben Crenshaw (18) and Greg Norman (19) in victories among active players who aren't playing the Senior PGA Tour. "It's not over until it's over, and I know how difficult it is to win out there, especially when you've never won."

Harmon shared a loud, stinging high-five with Jerry Chang, Woods' amateur partner, as Chang and the group marched confidently toward the tee at No. 17.

"I'd like to know what Gogel's heartbeat is like when he sees that on the scoreboard," said Harmon, resisting the urge to boast but confident his man would win. "Nothing this young man does amazes me anymore. He's just an amazing athlete. He has been a long way behind all day, trying to figure out a way to do this, and now he's getting it done. There is absolutely no quit in him."

Former baseball commissioner and 1984 Summer Olympics organizer Peter Ueberroth was also in the group, and feeling out of place. He and pro partner Jim Furyk were just doing their best to stay out of the way. Ueberroth said "natural" pars he made on holes 16 and 17 felt like triple bogeys compared to what he was witnessing.

"I was on the field, with a moving front-row seat, and got to see history," said Ueberroth, part of the ownership group that purchased Pebble Beach last year. "I've been to a lot of sporting events, the Olympics, lots of World Series; I can't think of anything that was better than this."

Woods missed the green to the left on 17 but chipped close enough for a tap-in par. He crushed a drive into the wind down the famous, 545-yard, par-5 18th, and when he got to his ball he was only 228 yards from the hole. A terrific 2-iron landed a few yards short of the green, and his chip stopped only four feet from a 64.

Needing the birdie putt to grab the lead by himself, Woods stared it down from both sides, then poured it in the middle. He clenched his fist and pumped it up and down, then shared a hug with Chang and shook hands with the others.

Gogel was on the 16th hole, now



Tiger Woods celebrates at a recent PGA tour event. Woods just won his 6th consecutive tournament this week.

one shot behind, while Singh and Notah Begay III were standing on the 18th, both needing eagle-3s just to tie.

Begay hooked his drive into the water, and Singh did no better than par. It all came down to Gogel, who needed a birdie to force a playoff. But he three-putted for bogey, and Woods had another win.

"It adds to the whole mystique of Tiger," said Begay, who tied for fourth and took home a check for more than \$165,000. "His dad says it best: The legend grows."

Woods said, "It's really interesting when you are coming down the stretch in a tournament and everything is on the line at that moment. You forget how bad you have played or how good you have played. What really counts is the moment; it's right now."