

SPORTS

NFL Stars lead teams toward playoffs

By Bryan L. Spry
staff writer

The National Football League is entering into its 13th week of the season. There are a few rookies this year, as well as star veterans, making the 2004 season worth watching. With the emergence of rookie "Big Ben" Roethlisberger and the ever flamboyant veteran Terrell Owens, NFL teams are relying on the play of their superstars to take them into the playoffs.

The team records of the 2004 NFL season appear to be a bit unbalanced. While some teams this year appear as though they just can't win, other teams are looking as if they just can't be stopped. Three teams this year have recorded only one setback thus far; the Philadelphia Eagles, Pittsburgh Steelers and the New England Patriots. These three teams have also not yet lost a game on their home field.

The play of the rookies and veterans this season, some veterans resurrected, have been outstanding in crucial divisional games this year. Donovan McNabb, with touchdown sensation Terrell Owens, has lead the Philadelphia Eagles to an outstanding record of 10-1. A lot of attention has been brought to the team this year due to Terrell Owens talk of himself being the best player. Terrell Owens has 969 yards receiving and 13 touchdowns.

Behrend student, junior Jason Weckoski says, "Terrell Owens can



Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger laughs as Steelers Head Coach Bill Cowher gives him instructions during a sideline conference late in the game against the Philadelphia Eagles. The Steelers defeated the Eagles 27-3 at Heinz Field on Nov. 2.

say whatever he wants as long as he performs on the field, and so far he has done just that. He makes the players around him better," said Weckoski. The Eagles have already clinched a playoff birth in the NFC East, ahead of the now struggling NY Giants (5-6) and Dallas Cowboys (4-7).

The Super Bowl champion New England Patriots (10-1) led by pro bowl quarterback, Tom Brady and the revitalized game of Corry Dillon, are still one of the top teams in the NFL.

They lead the AFC East ahead of the NY Jets (8-3) and the Buffalo Bills (5-6). The Jets are not out of the playoff hunt yet, but the Patriots are bound to clinch the division with a rather easy schedule remaining, playing the Cleveland Browns (3-8), Miami Dolphins (2-9) and San Fran Forty-niners (1-10).

Sophomore Herbert O'Beng said "the Patriots are a good team, but have not been really tested this year. I don't see them going far in the playoffs because they are bound to have to play some team that is actually

good."

Leading the AFC South is the Indianapolis Colts. The Colts (8-3) are lead by Peyton Manning who is on track to break the NFL single season record for touchdown passes. So far Peyton has thrown 41 touchdown passes and is seven shy of the record 48 which is held by hall of fame quarterback, Dan Marino. Junior Anthony Vietmeier said, "Peyton is bound to break the record with five games left to go. This quarterback is the best in the league and fans watch the Colts just to see him play." The Colts are followed by Jacksonville Jaguars (6-5) and the "still waiting to come to life" Houston Texans.

The regional teams in the AFC North, Pittsburgh Steelers (10-1) and Cleveland Browns (3-8) are on opposite ends of the win column. The struggling Cleveland Brown's head coach Butch Davis "resigned" this week due to pressures from the front office. Behrend freshman Matt Decker was asked if it was a wise move for the Browns to release their coach with the season not even over yet.

"They should have waited until the season was over because it really hurts a team's morale. I also think the front office loses a lot of credibility with the team," said Decker.

The regional favorite Pittsburgh Steelers have once again been brought back to life. Rookie sen-

sation Ben Roethlisberger has started out with the best recorded record by a rookie in NFL history including wins over two undefeated teams earlier this year. Roethlisberger has thrown 12 touchdowns this year and has the Steelers on a ten game win streak. The Steelers fans are also going crazy over the resurrection of "the Bus." For those who have not been in this country for the last 10 years, "the bus" refers to Pro-bowl veteran Jerome Bettis. Bettis has had four consecutive one hundred yard games and has come through for the team while replacing the Steelers injured starter Duce Staley, who is expected to return this weekend.

When asked if the aging Jerome Bettis will be able to go the distance this year if the Steelers go deep into the playoffs, junior Nick Muscarella said, "The Steelers need to give him a break during the games. He wants to run the ball and is excited to play, but he needs a little rest from time to time."

The NFL season ends Jan. 2 and the playoffs are set to begin on Jan. 8. There are still plenty of playoff spots to fill with five games remaining. Many teams continue to strive for a playoff birth. Teams like the Baltimore Ravens (7-4), NY Jets (8-3), Atlanta Falcons (9-2) and Minnesota Vikings (7-4) are still in the playoff hunt. Who will represent the AFC and the NFC on Feb. 6 in Super Bowl XXXIX?

One Wild Week of Sports

By Chris LaFuria
sports commentary

While many people across the United States celebrated Thanksgiving with their families and loved ones, students enjoyed a break from hectic class schedules and shopping malls endured hours of the legendary "Black Friday," the world of sports stayed alive and captivating. Titles were won, records were tied or broken, and mesmerizing performances were delivered by the country's elite.

In the world of NCAA Football, the BCS committee is up and about selecting their teams for the respected bowls. Southern California, who defeated Notre Dame 41-10 this past Sunday, is one of the favorites for the National Title. The top five in the BCS is rounded out by Oklahoma, Auburn, California and Texas.

Golf emerged exciting once again as various players displayed their tour dominance. From the men's tee, Fred Couples captured his record fifth Skins Game title, winning \$640,000 and eclipsing the ever-impressive Tiger Woods. In the women's tour, hot-swinging Annika Sorenstam captured her league-leading eighth tour victory. One last stellar performance was given by Phil Mickelson, who shot a stunning and rarely seen 59 in the finals of the PGA Grand Slam of Golf.

The Laval Rouge et Or won their second straight Desjardins Vanier Cup (the championship of Canadian Football) by defeating the Saskatchewan Huskies 7-1 in the lowest scoring Desjardins Vanier Cup game in CFL history.

From one end of the scoring spectrum to the other, the Cleveland Browns and

the Cincinnati Bengals each took part in the second highest scoring game in NFL history. With Cincinnati's 58-48 win over the Dawgs of Cleveland, the 106 point defensive atrocity remains the high point for each of the struggling teams.

One impressive record is at stake this week as McKendree College's Harry Statham tied North Carolina's Dean Smith as the winning coaches in college basketball with 879 wins. Statham has surmounted his opponents of the NAIA to become to winningest coach in leagues history. Carolina's Smith will remain atop the NCAA record list for wins.

Back to the NFL where the Indianapolis Colts' Peyton Manning has sling-shot his way to 10 touchdown passes in one week (two games) and a league-leading 41 overall. Manning is closing in on Dan Marino's season record of 48. With five games left in the regular season, Manning should toss his way into the record book.

The NFL's iron man, Brett Favre, has accumulated 200 straight starts with his start this past Monday against the St. Louis Rams. Favre has fought through concussions, broken fingers, and even deaths in the family to remain at the helm for the Green Bay Packers.

This past Thanksgiving vacation saw many records and nonstop brilliant performances. If you were to turn your television off once, you would have overlooked these occurrences (unless of course you have DVR). All of these performances may not overlook the miscellaneous ego trips of basketball players who duel fans, or even overshadow Terrell Owens, the NFL's *Lord of the Dance*, but it has been one interesting week in sports. One last thing - I miss hockey.

Penn State, Paterno finish season strong

By Ray Parrillo
Knight Ridder Newspapers
(KRT)

It was a brief but emotional moment between the coach who refuses to be pushed through the exit door by blitzing detractors, and the quarterback who refused to be beaten into submission by blitzing linebackers during an up-and-down career.

When senior Zack Mills jogged to the Beaver Stadium sideline for the final time near the end of Penn State's 37-13 rout of Michigan State on Saturday in the final game of the season for the Nittany Lions, he and Joe Paterno embraced.

"We kind of drew closer the last couple years," Mills said after Penn State closed out a frustrating season with back-to-back wins in the Big Ten Conference. "He's taken a lot of heat and I've taken a lot of heat, and I think the respect between us became very, very strong."

Mills was having such a good time, he didn't want to leave the game, but Paterno arranged a curtain call for him, and the crowd that had booed him so frequently gave him a standing ovation.

"I didn't think he did that for guys, but he did and I got a nice ovation," said Mills, who had touchdown runs of 8 and 10 yards and tossed a 6-yard scoring pass to Michael Robinson to equal the school career record of 41 held by Todd Blackledge and Tony Sacca.

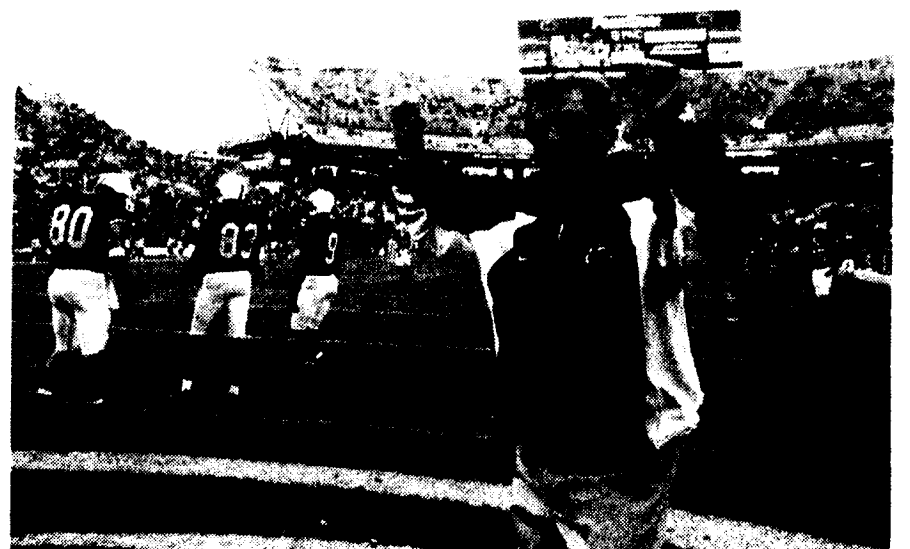
And afterward, Paterno made it clear he won't leave the game at least not before next season. Asked if he plans to return for his 40th year, Paterno, who will turn 78 next month, said, "Have I ever said I wasn't?"

"Is that wishful thinking? I'm planning to be back next year. As I've said, I'd like to be able to put together a scenario where I can pick the time I want to leave and have somebody in-house ready to take over."

For one of the few times this season, Paterno, whose teams have had four losing seasons in the last five, was in a cheery mood, seemingly oblivious to the notion held even by so many of his loyalists that his time is past.

Certainly, he had reason to be pleased. The Nittany Lions (4-7, 2-6), whose only two conference victories the last two seasons had come against sad-sack Indiana, had finally beaten a decent team and had at last found the end zone with some regularity.

Michigan State (5-6, 4-4) was coming off a stunning 49-14 rout of previously unbeaten Wisconsin, and needed the win to stay in contention for a bowl game. Though they had been schizophrenic as always, the Spartans were



MICHAEL PREEZ/PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER

Penn State's Joe Paterno pumps up the crowd before the last regular season game against Michigan State in State College, Pa., on Saturday, Nov. 20. Penn State defeated Michigan State, 32-13.

averaging 30.2 points and a conference-best 458.4 yards a game in total offense.

But Penn State's defense, one of only two in the nation that never allowed more than 21 points in a game, once again had the answers. And the offense, which had scored a total of seven TDs in the seven previous conference games, scored four TDs within 8 minutes of the third quarter, turning a 6-3 halftime deficit into a 31-6 lead.

"That third quarter was the most fun I've ever had playing football," said defensive tackle Scott Paxson, a junior from Roman Catholic High.

Penn State opened the second half with a 75-yard scoring drive, which finished with Tony Hunt's 1-yard dive for a 10-6 lead. Mills said the drive was critical after a first half in which the Nittany Lions had nothing but a 47-yard field goal by Robbie Gould.

"I think that first drive was so important," Mills said. "If we had gone three and out or if they had stopped us, it could have been a different ball game. But I think when we got that touchdown, it got the defense fired up and they did a great job."

Defensive end Tamba Hali made a leaping interception of a screen pass by Drew Stanton at the Michigan State 8-yard line. On the next play, Mills, who ran for 74 yards, raced around the right side for a TD. A shifty runner, Mills had not been carrying the ball much in recent games because he hadn't been completely healthy.

"They were joking and saying we were going with the QB run more this game because I didn't have to be healthy for the next game," Mills said, smiling.

With a 17-6 lead, Penn State went on a rare scoring tear.

Linebacker Paul Posluszny intercepted a pass by Damon Dowdell and ran it 18 yards to the Spartans' 10-yard line. On the next play, Mills went 10 yards untouched up the middle on a draw. A blocked punt by Donnie Johnson set up Penn State at the Michigan State 22-yard line, setting up Mills' TD throw to Robinson and fattening the lead to 31-6.

"Now that was our team out there today," senior strong safety Andrew Guman said. "I hope we helped establish something for the future."

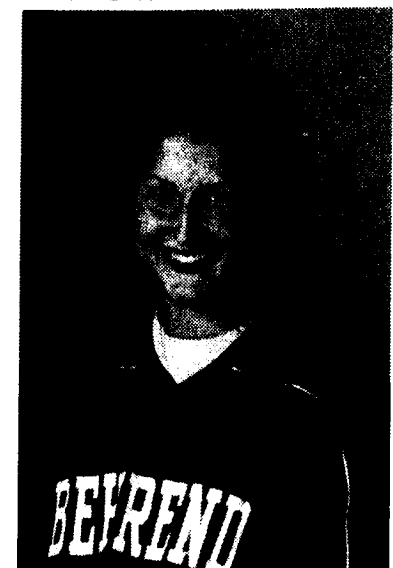
Guman is one of only two starters who won't return for a defense that held Michigan State 120 yards below its average.

"We can build on what we have," Paterno said.

Notes. Adam Taliaferro, who suffered a career-ending spinal injury in 2000 but made a miraculous recovery from temporary paralysis, was among 13 seniors introduced before the game. He received a rousing ovation before he was hoisted in the air by lineman Scott Davis.

"When Adam ran out of the tunnel, it really set the tone for us," junior center E.Z. Smith said. Taliaferro, from Voorhees, Camden County, is scheduled to graduate in May. He plans to attend law school. Dan Connor, the freshman linebacker from Strath Haven High, left the game late in the fourth quarter after suffering a stinger. Penn State intercepted five passes by three Michigan State quarterbacks. The Nittany Lions had scored 66 points combined in their previous seven conference games.

HOUSING AND FOOD SERVICES



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PENNS STATE
Athlete of the Week ...
Eric

Slomski shot 4-5 from the field and 3-4 at the line to help her team take the win over Hiram. She finished with 11 points, 3 rebounds, 2 steals and dished out 2 assists in the close 50-47 game. Slomski is leading the team in shooting percentage at 65 percent and is averaging 11.0 ppg and 4.0 rpg.

The blue and white will kick off their first conference match of the season when they welcome Pitt-Greensburg to the Junker Center, Friday at 6:00 p.m.

Rachel Slomski
Women's Basketball