

Who's hot and who's not: An early guide for the NCAA Bowl Championship Series

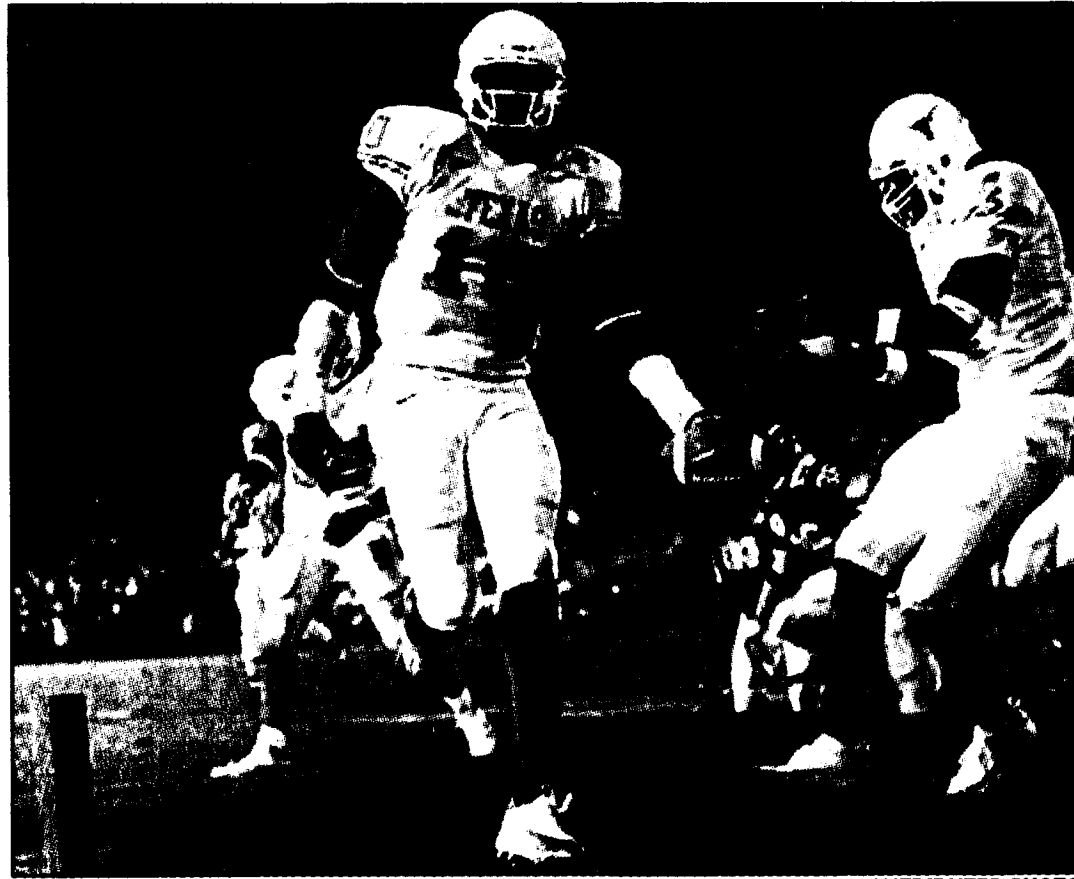
By Chris LaFuria
sports editor
cs15005@psu.edu

By Saturday night, the table will be set for another year-end gala featuring the top teams in the BCS. Amidst many unexpected results, close games and stellar performances, this year, like previous years, will come down to the wire. Atop the list of finalists for the BCS Championship are some perennial powerhouses, Heisman candidates and a few unexpected visitors. Even though it is entirely too early to start slating certain teams for Bowl games, I will attempt to do my best at predicting the finish of this year's BCS Championship.

The only team in the nation that has a definite chance of heading to Pasadena for the Rose Bowl is Texas. Vince Young and his Longhorns have the edge over the rest of the nation with their outstanding performances from their key players. It is very unusual for a quarterback to lead his team in both passing and rushing. With his 2,576 passing yards and 793 rushing yards, Young is the major statistical leader for Texas' offense. In addition to his impressive yards, Young also has the nation's fourth ranked Quarterback Rating at 165.03. I could spend all day praising Young's performances, but I will leave that for Heisman time.

The probable match-up for Texas is the USC Trojans who are seeking their third straight national title. With returning Heisman winner Matt Leinart piloting an explosive Trojan offense, USC will have their final test against the 9-1 UCLA Bruins. One of the biggest recent stories is the emergence of Reggie Bush and his all-around performances. With his performance of gaining more than 500 all-purpose yards, Bush's name is all over the lips of Heisman voters. Both Bush and fellow running back LenDale White have accumulated more than 1,000 yards rushing this year.

Chances are that the Trojans and the Longhorns will travel to Pasadena to meet each other in the



Texas Quarterback Vince Young ran all over, around and through Michigan last year in the Rose Bowl. Look for Young and his Longhorns to make a legitimate run at the National Title this year.

National Championship game. No National Title game has possessed as many Heisman candidates as this one. However, it's not the offensive performers that will decide the outcome of the game. Young and Texas will take the National Championship because of a Trojan defense that ranks 41 in total defense and 31 in defensive scoring. Texas is in the top 10 in each of these categories.

The next Bowl game that most Nittany Lion fans will be anxious to watch is the FedEx Orange Bowl. Here, coach Joe Paterno, who will appear in his first BCS bowl game, will lead his Michael Robinson-led offense. Robinson, running back

Tony Hunt and a cluster of talented freshmen including Deon Butler, Justin King, Jordan Norwood and Derrick Williams will lead an unpredictable offense. On the other side of the ball, defensive lineman Tamba Hali, linebacker Paul Posluszny and defensive back Alan Zemaitis look to prevent enemy offenses. Their probable opponents are the Virginia Tech Hookies led by quarterback Marcus Vick. With an offense that gains 381 yards per game and scores almost 35 points per game, the Hookies have the potential to

emphasize the "NO" in "Paterno." While V-Tech scores 35 points per game, the defense plays their role by allowing a mere 10.6 points per game. Running back Cedric Humes is coming off a personal best of 134 rushing yards and two touchdowns against North Carolina. Look for the Hoakie offense to give Penn State a struggle.

If Virginia can slide past Florida State in the ACC Title game, they should be able to build enough momentum to get past the Nittany Lions. Penn State has put up extremely strong offensive numbers; however, they face the type of defense that isn't fooled easily by Robinson's draws and can cover the young receiving core. If my predictions prevail, look for an Unhappy Valley.

The LSU Tigers, frustrated about being snubbed by the BCS polls, look to find the advantage in the SEC Title game against Georgia and land in the Nokia Sugar Bowl. The 10-1 Tigers have reasonable complaints after already being victorious over four Top 25 teams (five if they win over Georgia). LSU's offense is outscoring opponents by 16 points per game and accumulating more than 378 yards. Their defensive stand of 13.6 points per game is fourth in the nation. If the computers remain consistent, LSU will be playing in the Sugar Bowl.

One of the glitches in the BCS program is that there must be a representative from the Big East Conference. Let's face it, with the exception of WVU and Louisville, the conference is lackluster to say the least. Last year, a struggling Pittsburgh

team received a BCS Bowl bid that was not deserved. This year's BCS game thief is the West Virginia Mountaineers. The number 12 team in the nation is easily bound for a Bowl Game, just not one of the elite. With the exception of wide receiver Steve Slaton, no Mountaineer is close to amassing 1,000 yards in any offensive category (Slaton has only 838 yards). To add to West Virginia's list of reasons to be snubbed by a BCS Bowl is that they have only beaten one team in the Top 25: Louisville.

Look for LSU to dominate all aspects of the SEC Championship game and the Sugar Bowl. If it weren't for the nation's obsession with Joe Paterno's climb back to fame, the LSU Tigers may be playing for a more important Bowl title. Unfortunately, they must settle for the Sugar Bowl.

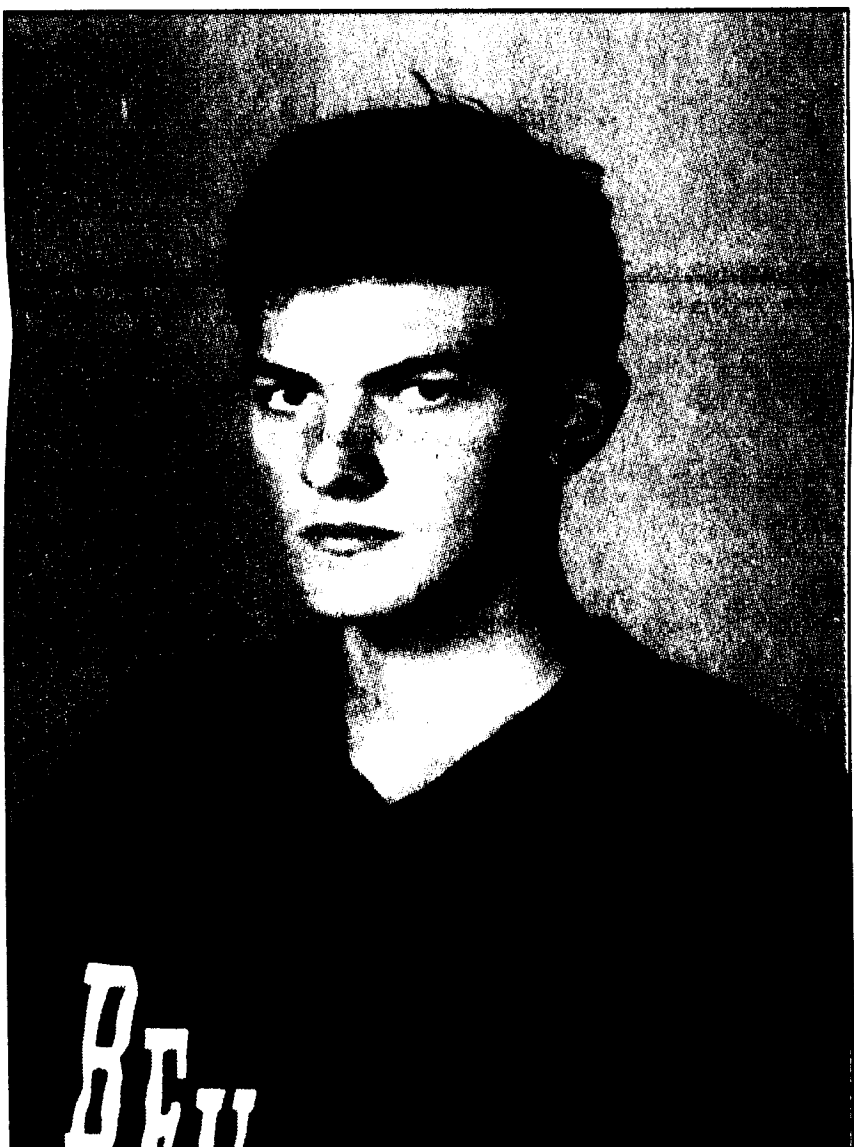
The last BCS Bowl game is the Tostitos Fiesta Bowl. This game will actually be one of the best head-to-head match-ups of the Bowl season. My prediction is for the Fighting Irish of Notre Dame to meet the Ohio State Buckeyes. Expect an offensive explosion from next year's Heisman winner Brady Quinn and his weapons that have produced an astounding 489 yards per game. One of the most exciting players to watch in college football is Irish receiver Jeff Samardzija. His ability to catch almost every ball thrown to him has been a delight to Quinn and head coach Charlie Weiss' offense. Samardzija will line up alongside Maurice Stovall, who also has gained more than 1,000 receiving yards. Let's not forget about running back Darius Walker, who is averaging almost five yards per carry.

Head Coach Jim Tressel's Buckeye line-up is filled with players that can simply do it all. Quarterback Troy Smith has scored 25 total touchdowns this year (14 passing, 11 rushing). He and wide receivers Santonio Holmes and Ted Ginn Jr. look to try and run all over the field against the Fighting Irish. Ohio State has scored almost 33 points per game and has gained more than 400 yards. A 7-1 record in one of the nation's toughest conferences adds credibility to Tressel and his squad.

With each team proving they are worthy of such a game, both sides will struggle to gain the advantage. This game should go down to the wire as Ohio State's secondary shuts down Quinn and the Irish aren't fooled by the Buckeye's trickery. The main factor in this affair- Jeff Samardzija. This kid is the real deal. Look for him to make some giant catches late in the game.

Now, before all of you warm up your Letters to the Editor, let me reiterate that these are just predictions. This year has one of the most competitive and unpredictable battles for the Title. At the end of this Saturday, all of these games may have different competitors. The only way to figure out who is going to play is to possess the mind of a BCS computer. And I wouldn't wish that on my enemies.

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BEHREND HOUSING AND FOOD SERVICES ATHLETE OF THE WEEK

NAME: Kevin Buczynski
SPORT: Men's Basketball
CLASS: Sophomore
DATE: Nov. 28, 2005

Behrend's Kevin Buczynski (Erie/Villa Maria) has been named Housing and Food Services Athlete of the Week. Buczynski helped the Blue and White capture the Behrend Tip-Off Tournament Championship with a 73-62 win over Mount Union. He scored 49 points in two games to take home the tournament MVP as well as being named to the all-tournament team.

"I am happy with the way he is playing this early in the season. He has had a great start and is improving and becoming more confident with every game that he plays," said head coach Dave Niland. Buczynski has started a strong 2005 campaign, averaging a team leading 24.5 points per game and 6.5 rebounds per game.

Buczynski and the rest of the Behrend Lions can next be seen in action at home on Tuesday, Jan. 3 at 7:00 p.m. against Allegheny College and on Jan. 6 at 8 p.m. against Penn State Altoona.

Housing and Food Service Athlete of the Week is selected by the Sports Information Staff.

Sports Calendar

Dec. 2, Men and Women Swimming and Diving	Eastern Michigan University Invitational	TBA
Dec. 2, Women's Basketball	Pitt-Greensburg	6 p.m.
Dec. 2, Men's Basketball	Pitt-Greensburg	8 p.m.
Dec. 3, Women's Basketball	Frostburg	4 p.m.
Dec. 3, Men's Basketball	Frostburg	6 p.m.
Dec. 3, Men and Women Swimming and Diving	Eastern Michigan University Invitational	TBA
Dec. 6, Women's Basketball	vs. Fredonia	7 p.m.
Dec. 8, Men and Women Swimming and Diving	vs. Gannon	6 p.m.

PSU football finishes season with more to come

By Kyle Woodside
staff writer
kdw1008@psu.edu

With the end of Penn State's football season taking place on Nov. 19, it is safe to say that Penn State football is back. It never left, but it hasn't been the same in recent years. The defense has been dominating, but it hasn't been enough to make the Nittany Lions one of the nation's top teams. This year, the tables have turned for the Blue and White.

With Michael Robinson at quarterback in place of Zack Mills, the Lions' offense has turned from stagnant to explosive. Robinson is a dangerous threat behind center. He has the ability to make defenders miss, which extends the play for receivers to get open. He also possesses a fairly accurate and strong arm, which has to be respected by opposing defenses. The combination of his passing and running attack has opened up the options for the Penn State offense.

In addition to the underrated Robinson were running back Tony Hunt and freshmen wide receivers Derrick Williams

and Deon Butler. All possess the skills necessary to excel in the NFL.

On the defensive side of the ball, linebacker Paul Posluszny has made a name for himself in the college football world with his brilliant tackling in every game. The secondary is bedecked with experience. Penn State is a tough team to move the ball against. This has also led to good field position for the Lions' offense, which has further enabled the offense to thrive.

Penn State defeated three teams in the top 25 this season: Ohio State, Minnesota and Wisconsin on their way to a 10-1 overall record, the Big Ten title and a number four rank in the country. The Nittany Lions will most likely play in the FedEx Orange Bowl, a Bowl Championship Series (BCS) bowl game. BCS games are the big payouts for the top college teams, which ultimately gain the most media coverage during the bowls. The 2006 projected payout for this year's Orange Bowl is estimated to be between \$14 and \$17 million. If the Blue and White get selected to this bowl, they will play on Jan. 3 at 8 p.m. on ABC, most likely against the Virginia

Tech Hokies, a tough defensive team from the Atlantic Coast Conference (ACC).

Many feel that it will be a sunny New Year's Holiday for Penn State fans, players and coaches this year, literally and symbolically. Penn State has all the momentum in the world right now. If it wasn't for a last second touchdown pass by Michigan, Penn State would arguably have the most momentum in the country while on the verge of playing in the national championship game, the Rose Bowl, this season. However, because USC and Texas are undefeated as well, they still might have edged PSU in the BCS standings, regardless of the Michigan vs. Penn State game due to factors that affect the BCS standings, such as strength of schedule and points scored.

Penn State hopes to finish the season on a high note with a victory in their BCS bowl game. Anything except a win would be considered a disappointment by many. Why? Because we are...PENN STATE!