

SPORTS

PATERNO'S YOUNG PRIDE

University Park-- Geographically, one would expect to find the Fountain of Youth in St. Augustine, Fla.

Philosophically, however, the Fountain has moved here where Joe Paterno has made "youth" the centerpiece of both his coaching credo and his 1990 football team.

In real years, Paterno will turn 64 shortly after the conclusion of the 1990 season, but in "attitude years" the Lions' leader is at least ten, perhaps a dozen years younger.

And, at an age when retirement looms for most, Paterno is talking about taking the Nittany Lions into the Big Ten Conference and coaching at the age of 70.

For someone with such a "youthful" outlook, a young football team is a nice fit. Even Paterno, though, would value a little "age" on his preseason roster.

Just ten percent of the players who will report to fall camp are in their final season of eligibility. There are 13 starters back from last year's 8-3-1 team, but the experience level beyond the first units on offense and defense ranges from modest to none.

"I don't recall a younger football team in all my years at Penn State," Paterno says.

Paterno has an exceptional frame of reference when it comes to Penn State football. He has been helping assemble teams at the base of Mount Nittany since 1950.

In his 24 seasons as head coach, Paterno has won more games (220) than any other active Division I-A coach. He has been to, and won, more bowl games than any collegiate coach other than Bear Bryant.

The Nittany Lions emerged from spring practice with a sense of where they want to go ... getting there will require negotiating a schedule that

includes six teams that appeared in postseason bowl games a year ago.

"We came out of spring knowing what we want to do offensively and defensively and with whom we want to do it with," Paterno said. "The inexperience of this team makes it difficult to do a lot of tinkering in fall camp. Injuries, particularly in some key positions, would also be disruptive."

Tri-captains Leroy Thompson (tailback), Matt McCartin (tackle), and Willie Thomas (safety) are expected to provide some of the leadership that was lost with the graduation of Blair Thomas, Andre Collins, Sherrod Ränge, Brian Chizmar and some of the other principals from last year's Lambert Trophy champions.

On offense, Paterno faces the prospect of replacing the multi-talented Thomas, who ended his career as the No. 2 rusher in Penn State history. There is better news at quarterback, where two players with starting experience, Tony Sacca and Tom Bill, return behind center.

Thompson followed up an eye-catching performance in the Holiday Bowl (68 rushing yards, two touchdowns) with a solid spring practice to claim the No. 1 tailback slot on the depth chart. Thompson has more than 1,300 all-purpose yards in three letter-winning seasons.

There is plenty of competition for the tailback role, including Gerry Collins, Richie Anderson, Bobby Samuels, and should he opt to return to offense, Gary Brown, who moved to hero at Paterno's request last fall when injuries thinned the defensive backfield ranks.

"We'll let Gary choose a position this year," Paterno says.

Fullback, which has been manned by a succession of undersized players since

the departure of Steve Smith and Tim Manoa in 1986, will benefit from the return of Sam Gash, out all of last year with injuries, and the development of Brian O'Neal. Both have the size and running and blocking skills to excel at the position.

Quarterback Tony Sacca has started 15 of the 23 games he's dressed for at Penn State and is just a couple of big performances away from the Lions' all-time Top Ten in career passing. His 206-yard night in the Holiday Bowl was the third-best postseason performance for a Lions' quarterback.

Penn State's 1990 football schedule is rated the tenth toughest among the nation's projected Top 40 football teams by The Sporting News in its preseason football magazine. The Lions' opponents include seven schools who are rated among the nation's Top 40 this fall. Only two of the postseason participants from last year will be at Beaver Stadium--Syracuse and Pitt. All of the other games against '89 bowl outfits (USC, Alabama, West Virginia, and Notre Dame) are on the road.

PennState

1990 Football Schedule

Sept. 8	.....	TEXAS
Sept. 15	.....	at Southern Cal
Sept. 22	.....	RUTGERS (1)
Oct. 6	.....	TEMPLE (2)
Oct. 13	.....	SYRACUSE
Oct. 20	.....	at Boston College
Oct. 27	.....	at Alabama
Nov. 3	.....	at West Virginia
Nov. 10	.....	MARYLAND
Nov. 17	.....	at Notre Dame
Nov. 24	.....	PITTSBURGH

(1) All-University Day
(2) Homecoming

COMMENTARY

CHIP AND CATCH

Don Walters
Capital Times Sports Editor

Having inherited a father who never quite grew up, I'd always had the extra allowance of a private coach to practice me through my early athletic endeavors. But while my father's teaching methods were always well-intended and productive, not to mention innovative, he unfortunately never developed a patented technique.

However, my personal favorite was the chip-n-catch drill. My father, a par golfer at the time needed to polish up his short game. I, a promising little-leaguer, intended to attain all-star status.

Being the enterprising kind of guy that he was, my father decided to combine our practice sessions. We'd go out in the backyard and he'd hit shot after shot into the air with his pitching wedge while I would patrol the field about 75 yards away, diligently snagging the plummeting golf balls with my Wilson A2131 glove.

When my father and I executed our tasks to perfection, it was beautiful. The ball would spring off his club and arc gracefully into the summer sky. I would take an early read on the shot, then slowly saunter back into position to make the catch. Baseball and golf were perfectly joined during those endless seconds spent waiting for the descending ball.

It was after several chip-in-catch sessions that both of us began to show marked improvement. In fact, I even began to add a little flair to my fielding. Outside of a bruised palm, life was great.

And then one day, it happened. Our next-door neighbor, an avid golfer, and his sheepdog, "Shep", began to take part in our practice sessions. Although his master was a real hacker, Shep was a great sport and made his share of remarkable catches.

The hardest thing about fielding a golf ball is when the shot is skulled. It flies off the clubface like a line drive. With a little practice though, I became pretty good at deciding which shots to field and which ones to avoid. Shep, however, was not so selective. One horrific yelp and then silence. The reality of chip-n-catch suddenly dawned on all of us.

Soon after, my mother learned of the mishap. Her face soured as she realized how unsafe our methods were. After ushering my father into the bedroom for a lengthy discussion, I knew that the future of chip-n-catch did not look good.

Sure enough, my father emerged from their conference a broken man. He somberly informed me that baseball skills would have to be practiced with baseballs from now on. Never again would I feel the sharp sting of a golf ball as it dropped into my leather mitt.

I never did reach all-star status, although my enterprising young father now owns a hobby shop and "flies" radio-controlled model air planes instead.

SPORTS TALK

ON MILLER'S CORNER

Eddie Miller
Capital Times Sports Reporter

NICE GESTURE on behalf of Eagle QB Randall Cunningham to take a payout to help pay those dire souls in financial need- contract holdouts. He should donate his money to a worthy cause not a worthless one.

SPEAKING OF Randall Cunningham--his starting QB status is under the gun of Buddy Ryan, waiting to be reloaded by none other than Jim "Injured Reserve" McMahon.

THE ITCHY TRIGGER FINGER of Eagle General Buddy Ryan could prove fatal with an already struggling Eagle offense. On final cut day, Ryan axed wide receiver Cris Carter, who was 3rd best among NFL receivers in touchdowns (11), and tight end Maurice Johnson, who started all four Eagle pre-season games. With only a healthy Mike Quick receiving corps (Keith Jackson is still a hold-out), and a shaky Randall, the Eagles offense could be bordering extinction.

ALSO FALLING TO THE AX on

final cut day were three former Penn State standouts: wide receiver Kenny Jackson (Oilers), kicker Matt Bahr (Browns), and line backer Walker Lee Ashley (Chiefs).

LOOK FOR THE LION quarterback Tony Sacca to show his true colors this season and quiet the critics. The addition of former Florida Head Coach Galen Hall (a former PSU quarterback), a Blair Thomas-less backfield, and an experienced offensive line and receiving corps is all the more reason for Joe Paterno to air it out this season.

I HEARD A RUMOR that two year tailback, one year safety PSU senior Gary Brown, will be red-shirted this season.

I HAVE TO ADMIT that Pitt, despite their annihilation of, uh, pastry Ohio U., is the third best football team in the country, trailing only Miami and Notre Dame.

CONFUSION IS THE WORD in Steeler camp. A new system and a new offensive coordinator: Joe Walton of recent N.Y. Jet fame has added a new dimension and is on the field 3/4ths of

the game.

THE KILLER B'S, Bobby Bonilla and Barry Bonds of the Pirates are head to head in the race for N.L. MVP. Only Chicago's Ryne Sandberg could challenge the B's for the award.

DON'T BET ON anyone catching Pirate pitcher Doug Drabek in the N.L. Cy Young award race. Drabek is 9-1 since the all-star break, 4-0 in his last 5 starts, 18-5 overall.

WOULDN'T Lenny Dykstra make a splendid chairperson for the American Cancer Society?

PENNANT RACES... Pirates over Reds in 6. A's over Red Sox in 7. Although I'm a Pirate fan at heart, the A's will prevail in 6.

IN THE WORLD OF TENNIS John McEnroe has made his presence felt once again by sneaking into the U.S. Open Semis. Despite recent criticism, McEnroe is fighting the odds (and judges) to prove he can play with the young guns of the tennis world. Hats off to John.