

JoePa's Lions thinking positive despite setbacks, criticism

by Matthew Bowman

The Nittany Lions football squad has taken the field again this year under the direction of University icon and head coach, Joe Paterno. Even with the loss of several outstanding offensive players, the Lions are optimistic about the season and are poised to prove their critics wrong.

Many experts foresee the Blue and White finishing in the middle of the Big Ten with no real shot at the national title whatsoever.

But the players have a different outlook. Kenny Watson, junior kick and punt returner and Harrisburg native said, "I think we have been working as hard as any team we've had, and as long as we come together as a team we'll do all right."

In retrospect, Watson feels that the loss of key players may be beneficial for the team in the long run. Without a lot of standout, big name players, everyone has to pick it up, and it becomes a total team effort, he said. "Everyone has to produce."

With the vacancy left by Mike McQueary, the Lions will have their third different starting quarterback in as many years. The leading signal caller candidates are junior Kevin Thompson and sophomore Rashard Casey; both of whom had good performances this spring. As for who becomes the starter, no

official decision has been handed down yet. Offensive coordinator Fran Ganter was quoted by Chris Masse, *Collegian* staff writer, as saying however, "Right now Kevin would take the first snap, but they're in a good battle." Both players throw the ball well, but Casey brings another dimension to the offense. He can run well with good speed, a factor that critics think will be the reason why Casey gets the nod after several games.

Joining the quarterback behind the line is a solid running back corps which has recently taken some serious hits. Anthony Cleary decided to leave Penn State and is now attending Shippensburg University, and Watson has decided to red-shirt this season due to injury. Watson was to see some carries at tailback as well as continue as kick and punt returner. On a positive note, Aaron Harris is a possible starter while recovering from the anterior cruciate ligament tear that he received last year. The staff feels that Harris could be the first to fill Curtis Enis' shoes, but that would mean a move from the fullback to tailback position. Also making waves in the backfield are Cordell Mitchell and Chris Eberly, both who have experience and have produced for the team in the past.

The offensive line will be key to say the least for Penn State's offensive production, and several questions still remain. Who will replace Kevin Conlin and Phil Ostrowski? Can the returning starters guide the young players and form a cohesive unit? Eric Cole, John Blick and Floyd Wedderburn hope to do so and should be the leaders in the trenches.

Rounding out the offense are the receivers who will try to make 1997 standout Joe Jurevicius just a name from the past. Chafie Fields brings his big play ability to the front, and Joe Nastasi will be there as well. The staff is optimistic and is thinking positive about these two. Corey Jones and Sam Crenshaw will also see the ball. Senior tight end Cuncho Brown will be very important to the attack and makes a nice target for passes down the middle as well as being able to gain yards after the catch.

On the defensive side of the ball the line is anchored by returning end Courtney Brown. With excellent outside rushing ability and strength, Brown looks to repeat his sophomore year performance which consisted of 33 tackles, 15 of which were for losses, and six sacks. Like Watson, Brown feels confi-

dent in the team's chances. "We seem to be coming together more as a unit," he said. That will be of utmost importance for the defense as they will face some potent offenses during the Big Ten season. A second bright spot for the defense is the return of Brad Scioli to the line who made a move last year to the tight end position. Junior tackle David Fleischhauer is a probable starter with Justin Kurpeikis battling for the other end position.

The old saying of Penn State being "line-backer U" holds true once again for this year's squad as well. Butkus Award nominee Brandon Short leads the backs and the defense on the field with his tenacious pursuit of the pigskin. Despite missing the majority of three games with an ankle injury, Short still managed to bring down 55 ball carriers during the 1997 campaign. Joining Short will be La Var Arrington, Maurice Daniels, Mac Morrison and Aaron Gatten; all of whom will do battle for starting positions.

The secondary is trying to rebuild after the loss of Jason Collins and Shino Prater, and opposing offenses will look to key on the pass. That, however, makes seniors Shawn Lee and Matt Joyner and junior Derek Fox all the more ready to make a name for themselves. Also in the mix will be junior conerback David Macklin and Titcus Pettigrew who moved from wide out to hero.

"... as long as we come together as a team, we'll do all right."
- Kenny Watson

The Campus Calendar for Penn State Harrisburg

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6 The Urban Landscape Drawings, paintings, mixed media showing in the Gallery Lounge through Oct. 30	7 LABOR DAY No Classes	8 SGA meetings <u>Every Tuesday</u> 12:30 pm	9 "What's Goin' On" MHCC - 9 p.m.	10 Capital Times staff meeting 1:30 p.m. Clubfest Vartan Plaza or Rm. 216 (rain) Noon	11	12 PSU vs Bowling Green (H)
13 Grandparents Day	14	15 Blizzard of Bucks MHCC - 9 p.m.	16 Philadelphia Brass Gallery Lounge - Noon	17 Capital Times staff meeting 12:30 p.m.	18	19 PSU vs Pittsburgh (A)
20 Rosh Hashanah begins at sunset	21	22	23 First day of Autumn	24 Capital Times staff meeting 12:30 p.m.	25	26 Student Leader- ship Workshop "Strange Like Me" 9 a.m.
27	28	29 Yom Kippur begins at sunset	30	Oct. 1 Capital Times staff meeting 12:30 p.m.	2	3 Arts & Craft Show PSU vs Ohio State (A)