

Stop Whining about Officials, Special Teams Cost PSU

By Pete Strella
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If there's one thing that annoys me most in sports, it's blaming a loss on bad officiating when bad officiating wasn't the problem. Yes, BOTH of Tony Johnson's feet were in bounds when the official ruled that he was out. Yes Penn State did have to punt after the call and they probably would have kicked a field goal to win if the correct call was made.

But this wouldn't have been an issue if, just a couple plays before, the official correctly called Tony Johnson's catch on third down incomplete. If the official makes this call correctly, Penn State punts and Michigan has plenty of time to score. The game may not have even gotten to overtime.

The problem was that Penn State never fell behind the entire game until they blew it in the second half. The main reason: James Million's foolish roughing the kicker penalty on a Michigan punt in the third quarter. Now I have a million reasons to buy him "The Idiots Guide to Playing Football" as a much-needed Christmas present this year. This brought the tired defense back onto the field and, as a result, Michigan drives right down the field to score a touchdown.

The defense allowed Michigan to score on three of its final four possessions. And the one they didn't score on was a kneel down at the end of regulation.

It was a tough loss. The PSU offense played OK, but an injured Larry Johnson could only rush for 78 yards on 17 carries. Zack Mills completed 19 of 31 passes for 264 yards and two touchdowns, once again putting up a solid performance. Bryant Johnson made some excellent catches over Michigan's star cornerback Marlin Jackson. He tallied seven catches for 138 yards and a touchdown.

The bottom line: the Wolverines overcame the horrible officiating and the Nittany Lions did not.

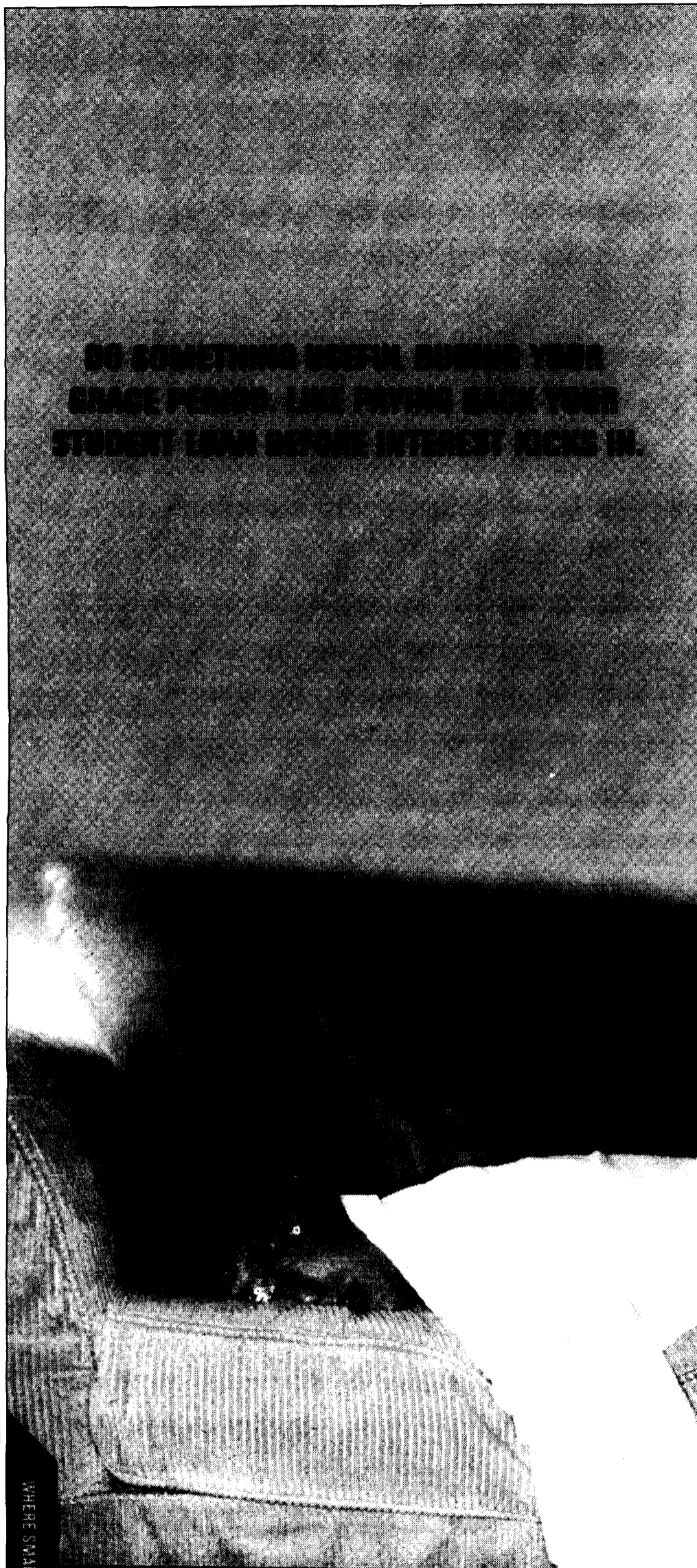
However PSU was fortunate enough to play Northwestern the following week. Let me say that they must be the Bengals of the Big Ten (Although they could possibly beat the Bengals in a head-to-head match-up).

I can't analyze this game because there is nothing to analyze. PSU crushed 'em. PSU's third string was even taking it to 'em in the fourth quarter. Larry Johnson gained 191 yards in the first half! Then he set a new school rushing record less than two minutes into the third quarter. He ended up with 257 yards on 23 carries for two touchdowns and averaged 11.6 yards per carry! **Official Pete Strella Prediction: If Larry Johnson had played the whole game, he would have gained 1,212,536 yards.** Johnson played an incredible game, even if it was against the worst rushing defense in the country.

Penn State needed this game for two reasons: too have an easy week after three tough games in a row, and to gain confidence for their upcoming contest with fourth-ranked Ohio State.

The game next week against the Buckeyes should be a classic. Mills and Johnson had an easy week to let their injuries heal a bit. And the mighty Ohio State Buckeyes didn't look all that tough against Cincinatti and Northwestern, although they beat Wisconsin last week 19-14.

PSU over Ohio State 28-24



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