

# Johnson sets record twice in three weeks

Penn State's leading rusher explodes for 279 yards against Fightin' Illini, breaks his own single-game team record

By Peter Strella  
Assistant Layout Editor

Larry Johnson is running through defenses like he's Forrest Gump. The only difference is that LJ knows where to stop and it's usually in the end zone. Johnson has 11 rushing touchdowns for the season; in addition to the three he has receiving. He is sixth in the nation in rushing yards (1221) and fifth in yards per carry (8.1).

To top it off, Johnson has set a team record for rushing yards in a game two of the last three weeks. First there was the 257-yard performance against Northwestern. Then, he rumbled for 279 yards against Illinois, which could have been 363 yards if his 84-yard run TD wasn't brought back by a penalty. In both games, Johnson had almost 200 yards by halftime.

Johnson is running the ball so well that even men are getting excited when they are too close to him (see band member in homecoming picture below).

The good news for Penn State is that they will play two of the worst defenses in the Big Ten (Indiana and Michigan State) and a Virginia defense that is sub-par. The Lions should at least go 2-1, if not 3-0. This means it's almost bowl time for the Nittany Lions, who haven't been to one since 1999.

And just when you thought this wasn't your father's Penn State football team, the Nittany Lions are winning games the old-fashioned way: rushing for a lot of yards and playing stingy defense. I am having trouble believing that this is the same defense that allowed Central Florida to pass for 409 yards. They allowed Ohio State's offense only two field goals. And before Illinois scored a late touchdown, the defense played 11 quarters of touchdown-free football.

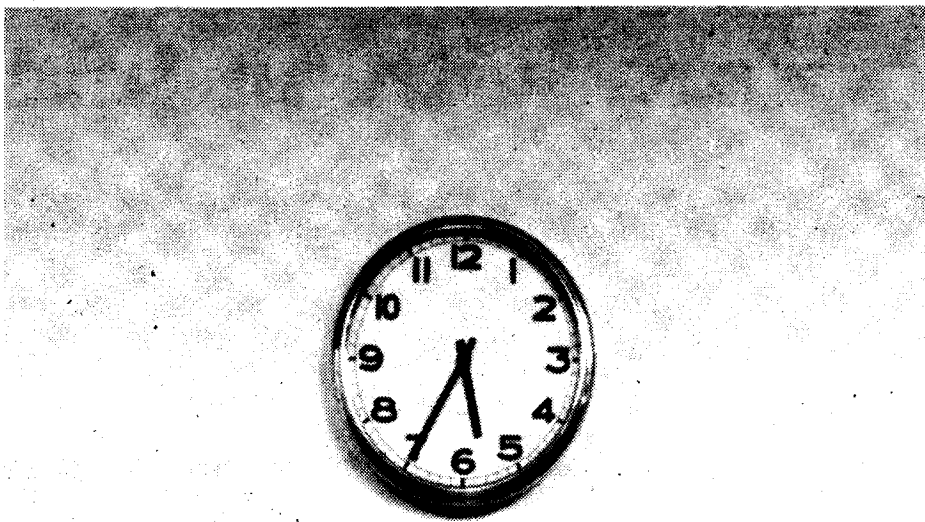
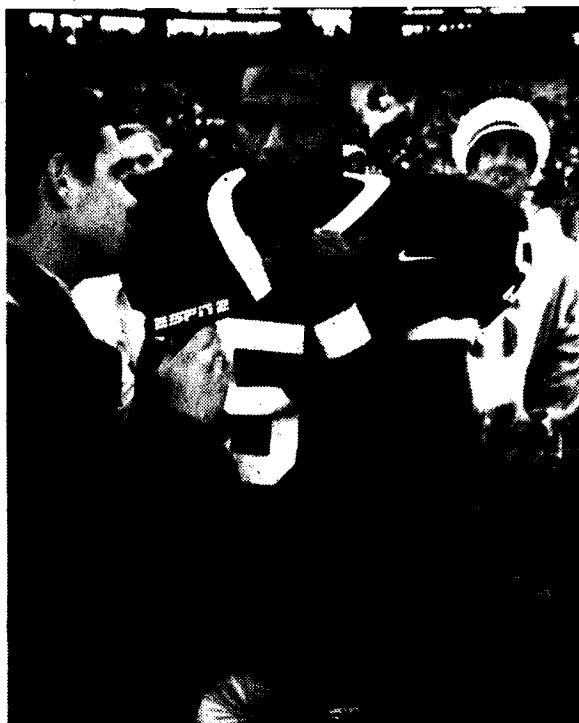
Free safety Shawn Mayer played an outstanding game against Ohio State; recording an interception, fumble recovery, and 12 tackles. With 109 tackles already, it looks like he'll lead the team in tackles for a second consecutive year.

Middle linebacker Gino Capone is second on the team in tackles with 81, and has clogged up the middle effectively. When combined that with a defensive line that has dominated the past three games, you have a unit that has opposing offenses from losing sleep.

The finesse passing offense, which was once considered to be Penn State's biggest strength, has been a detriment. **Message from Pete Strella to Quarterback Zack Mills: When you're under attack and surrounded by five defenders, throw the ball into the fifteenth row. DO NOT dance 30 yards back from the line of scrimmage and get tackled.** Mills' attempt to play the role of Superman cost PSU the game against Ohio State and held them back against Illinois. Bad decisions and 100 yards passing per game won't get it done every week.

Mills' interception to Ohio State's Chris Gamble was the turning point of the game. Another fluke interception didn't help the cause. The ball bounced right off Tony Johnson's helmet into the hands of the OSU defense. It was a fluke, but Mills needs to learn patience. You don't need to force passes. He threw four interceptions against the Buckeyes and was lucky he didn't throw seven. Mills is still the quarterback we knew in the beginning of the season, however, and he'll rebound for the end of the season.

I have jinxed Penn State football with all of my predictions; with the exception of the Nebraska game I predicted them to lose. Therefore, I predict that they will lose all three of their remaining games. This means the team will finish 9-3 with a trip to warm weather on the horizon.



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AND NOT THE OTHER?**



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