

# Larry Johnson runs for 327 yards

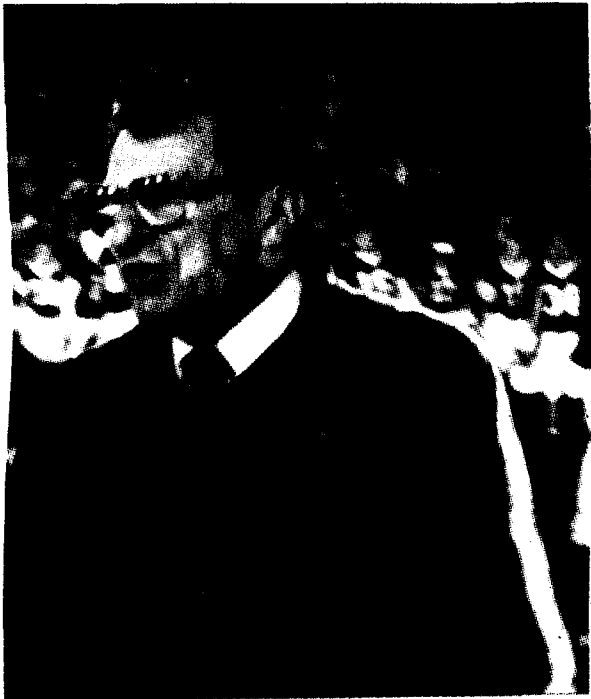
Nittany Lions bulldoze over Indiana 58-25 for an 8-3 record. Hoosier Daddy?

By Peter Strella  
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When Larry Johnson runs the football, it's as if he's peacefully strolling through the park on a sunny day. He doesn't run the ball, he jogs it. He doesn't rush for yards, he glides or coasts for them.

So why is it that every time I go to write a column, Larry Johnson breaks another record. In a time when running backs are more of an ongoing attempt to be the next Carl Lewis, Johnson is the marathon runner that outlasts them all week after week.

It is this patient style of running that allowed Johnson to slither through the Indiana Hoosier



JoPa gives a funny look after his 334th victory. Could be trying to chew on a Gobstopper or possibly a Crybaby.

defense for 327 yards and four touchdowns. The guy had 100 yards by the end of the first quarter and helped his team bulldoze over Indiana 58-25.

Not only did Johnson break his school record for rushing yards in a game again, he eclipsed

Lydell Mitchell's mark of 1,567 yards to become Penn State's all-time leading single season rusher.

To top it off, Johnson had to run on a surface that looked more like a sandbox than a football field. A quote from Larry Johnson I found in Bob Flounder's "Penn State Notebook" in the Patriot-News summed it up the best. "All you needed was some water and you could have thrown a beach party out there," said Johnson.

In addition, Johnson has given himself an outside shot at winning the Heisman Trophy. But he won't win it unless Ken Dorsey fails to take his team to the Fiesta Bowl. For some reason, how many wins a player's team has counts more than the statistics he puts up or the records he breaks.

The same thing happens in other sports. I still don't understand how you can give the American League MVP to Miguel Tejada. Alex Rodriguez had the best season in the American League, even if his team was horrible. He was the most valuable player. If the Rangers were without Rodriguez, they would

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have only won three games the whole year. And those would have only been because the Rangers were so horrible, the other team didn't feel a need to show up.

This same notion will likely prevent LJ from winning the Heisman. If Dorsey gets his team to the championship, he's going to win it.

There's only one reason I would pick Dorsey over LJ, team records aside. In the big games that Penn State lost, Johnson only gained 66,168, and 78 yards respectively. Heisman winners come up big in big games. Johnson did not play terribly in these close losses, but he didn't play all that great either.



Larry Johnson shoots a look to the ladies after gaining 188 yards.

This was Johnson's first full year at running back, so he's still learning. Johnson shared the running back duties with two other backs last year and, consequently, only gained 337 yards. Hindsight is 20/20, but now it's obvious Penn State didn't need the other two. Unfortunately the Heisman committee doesn't care too much about learning experiences.

The Nittany Lions are now 8-3 (4-3) and have put themselves in a position for a nice bowl game. They just have to beat a Michigan State team that is reeling. Their quarterback Jeff Smoker is out with a drug problem, and their coach was fired a couple of weeks ago. Larry Johnson should eat the Spartans defense alive. He has a good opportunity to turn the 1,736 yards he already has into 2,000. The home crowd of over 100,000 will help.

On a side note, how about that fake field goal against Illinois two weeks ago. I always thought that Paterno couldn't fake out a 10-year-old if he tapped him on the shoulder and went to the other side. But the fake field goal translated into a Chris Ganter 30-yard touchdown run. The fake turned what could have been a close game into 35-14 near blowout.



Johnson following the block of #39 Fullback Paul Jefferson



Photos by Stacy DeAngelo and Dan Storm