

LJ over 2,000 yards

By Peter Strella
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When I watch Penn State football games, I sometimes wonder what I'll say to the grandchildren when I'm old. It always seems to go something like this: "When I was a kid, we sat in 10 hours of traffic both ways to get to Penn State games. There wasn't any of this four-lane B.S. you kids have. And the name of the highway should have been Route Construction, 'cause it was always being worked on. So don't complain about a two-hour trip. You kids have it easy."

But if my bitterness over years of agonizing traffic ever wore off, I'd tell them about the time when Larry Johnson rushed for 279 yards against Michigan State, giving him 2,015 yards for the season.

"And when I was a kid," I'd say to my annoyed grandchildren, "we didn't need two halves of football to get the job done. The job was done in one." Then they'd hear how LJ broke the 2,000-yard barrier on a 38-yard touchdown run with 2:38 left in the second quarter! I'd then ramble on about how Johnson averaged 14.7 yards per carry, scored four touchdowns, and was on pace to gain over 500 yards for the game. And so my grandkids would silently stare out the window as we headed to Penn State's latest home game.

Johnson helped his team to a 61-7 shellacking of the Spartans. The game was over when Penn State exploded for 34 points in the second quarter. Johnson's performance was so memorable that the score of the game seemed to take a backseat. He electrified the crowd with lengthy touchdown runs of 38 and 78 yards.

LJ finished the regular season with 2,015 yards and will most likely end the year as the nation's leading rusher. (The NCAA voted this year to include bowl game statistics as part of a player's numbers for the year) Johnson is 99 yards ahead of Northern Illinois' Michael Turner, who has 1,916 yards. Both Johnson and Turner have a bowl game yet to play.

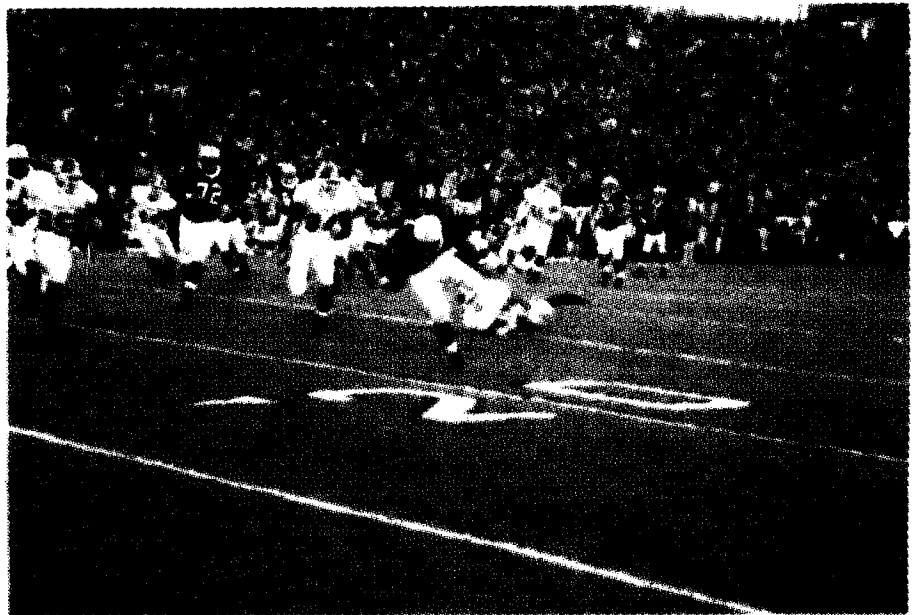
In gaining over 2,000 yards for the season, Johnson has placed his name among great running backs such as Barry Sanders, Marcus Allen, Ricky Williams, and LaDainian Tomlinson, all of whom gained over 2,000 yards in college.

LJ should be a finalist for the Heisman Trophy. He had big games towards the end of the season, when the Heisman committee members pay most attention. Johnson gained no less than 188 yards in any of his last four games. However, LJ gained only 66, 68, and 78 yards respectively in Penn State's three losses. Heisman Trophy winners always come up big in big games. Johnson didn't always do so.

The Nittany Lions ended the regular season at 9-3 (5-3) and have sole possession of fourth place in the Big Ten Conference. They will most likely play in the Capital One Bowl in Orlando on January 1. The Big Ten's third-place team, Michigan, was supposed to be invited, but the Wolverines have lost badly at the Capital One Bowl in recent years. Michigan has indicated they want to play elsewhere.

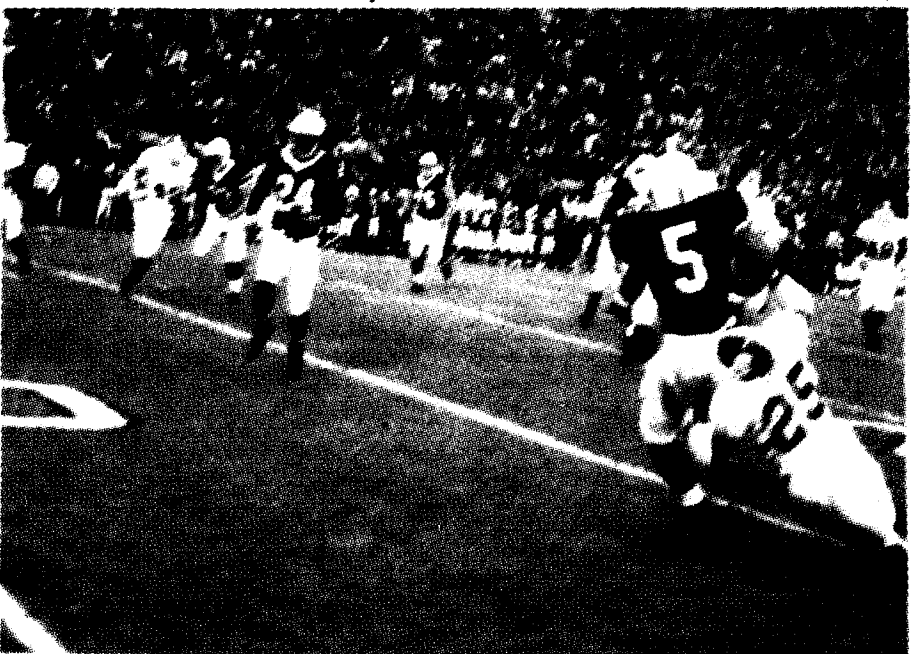
There has been no word as to whom Penn State will play at the Capital One Bowl. But if they win, they might be able to crack the top ten. The Nittany Lions are currently ranked 11th in the country.

My grandkids will hear one last complaint as we commute home from Beaver Stadium. "When I was a kid, there were only five NFL games on TV a



(Above) Larry Johnson stumbles to the 20-yard line after breaking a tackle. (Below) Johnson is tackled by a Michigan State player as Bryant Johnson watches.

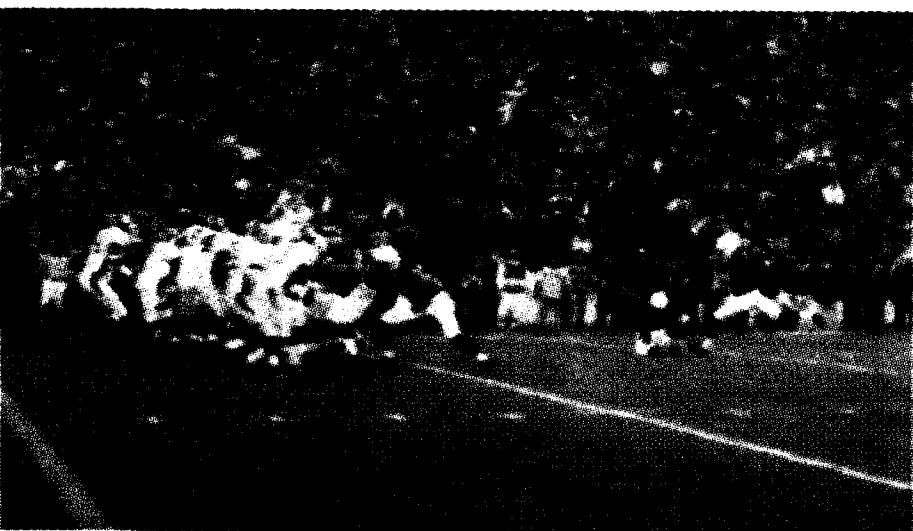
Pictures taken by Stacey DeAngelo and Dan Storm



week. We didn't get to see all the games like you kids. If you wanted to see your favorite west coast team in action, you had to watch Sportscenter and hope that they showed highlights." Hopefully, the television stations will work this one out before I'm 75 years old. But I'm not holding my breath.



Coach Paterno gets in the zone before his 336th win



Chris Ganter botches a snap, a field goal is missed