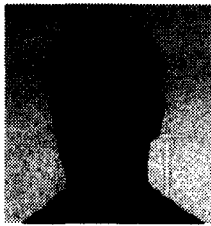


Penn State football achievement awards: highlighting the best and worst of 2002

by Peter Strella
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It's time to announce the Pete Strella Penn State Football Achievement Awards for the 2002 season. I was going to write a column about the Auburn-Penn State bowl game, but quite frankly it was one of the most boring games I've ever seen, not to mention a horrible performance by the Lions. But enough about that, here are the awards:

Player of the year: Larry Johnson - If you asked me this question in October, the immediate answer would have been Zack Mills. But as injuries began to affect Mills' accuracy, Larry Johnson launched an offensive explosion like nothing Penn State has ever seen. His 279-yard, four-touchdown performance against Michigan State was incredible even if their defense was mediocre. The same can be said about LJ gaining 1,063 yards in the final four games of the regular season.

Game of the year: Penn State v. Nebraska - It's obvious now that Nebraska is a program on the decline. But before their game against Penn State, there was little indication this was the case. Penn State gave the then eighth-ranked Cornhuskers a 40-7 shellacking for the ages. The game was a turning point for both programs and it foreshadowed that the Nittany Lions were going to have a good season.

Play of the year: LJ breaks 2,000 with 38-yard TD run - This play was hands down the most memorable play of the year. I can break it down for you in this simple scientific equation: Breaking 2,000 yards + scoring a touchdown on the same play = dank play. But I am a big fan of trick plays, so I am giving honorable mention to Chris Ganter's 30-yard touchdown run on a fake field goal. This score turned the game against Virginia into a 35-14 blowout.

Best show of strength: The Nittany Lion Mascot - It's true. Football players go out there every week and perform amazing feats of strength. But the

Nittany Lion mascot doesn't get the credit he deserves. He did over 350 one-armed push-ups when PSU crushed Michigan State 61-7. The Nittany Lion does a one-armed push-up for each point Penn State has, every time they score. I once considered trying out to be the mascot until I realized that my personal best of two one-armed push-ups wouldn't be good enough. I have decided to try out for the Cincinnati Bengals' field goal snap-holder instead.

The "Buy them some Johnson and Johnson No More Tears shampoo cause they're doing a lot of crying" award: This one goes out to the whole Penn State team for their disappointing display of immaturity after losing to Auburn. Nothing annoys me more than finger pointing after a bad loss and the team left us all with a sour taste in our mouths. I should be happy that Penn State football made a great turnaround this year, but their whining made me wanna tell them all to go stand in the corner.

"Best Case to start a Senior Citizens Olympics" Award: After I saw a valiant Nittany Lion comeback fail against Iowa, I noticed an image streaking across the television screen. "It's a bird," I thought to myself. "Wait. Now it looks like some old guy chasing after someone who stole his nachos. No. It's Joe Paterno running after the officials."

That guy is pretty fast despite being 76 years old. I think this is proof that there should be a senior citizens Olympics. Think about it. What is more intriguing and fun to watch than those amazing prodigy kids? Old people who can still perform physical miracles after all those years.

Other Notable Performances: Micheal Haynes led the team in sacks with 14. Shawn Mayer led the team in tackles with somewhere around 140. Jimmy Kennedy also had an outstanding year for the defense. Number 95 David Kimball had a stellar season. He is the guy who always kicked the ball out of the end zone on kickoffs, preventing long returns.

The Future: Penn State is losing a lot of players. A quarterback controversy is imminent. They will not top their record of this year. I predict they will finish 7-6

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