

Penn State shows a lot of heart, but little experience against 'Huskers'

By **PETE STRELLA**
Editor in Chief

Penn State's 18-10 loss against Nebraska Saturday night should have been a blowout, but the tenacious Nittany Lion defense kept the team in the game until the final minutes. Overall, the team showed a lot of heart, but lacked the size and experience needed to get over the hump.

The defense was tough in the red zone, allowing only one touchdown and three field goals and forcing a turnover. The Cornhuskers convincingly won the field position battle, but Penn State was getting stops when they needed them most.

The offense was out of sync and has yet to find its identity this year. Quarterback Zack Mills threw bad passes, wide receiver Tony Johnson dropped good passes, and Penn State's fullback caught the most passes. Attempts at getting Michael Robinson into the game served as a distraction more than anything else.

Mills threw for only 159 yards and fumbled a snap at a crucial point in the game. Unlike the Boston College nightmare, Mills had time to throw against the Huskers, but failed to get the ball downfield.

Some people are pleading for Michael Robinson to start. Yet teaming Mills with Robinson will not solve Penn State's accuracy problems at quarterback.

Penn State's running game was in total disarray against the Huskers. Paterno needs to make a decision between fifth-year senior Ricky Upton and true freshman Austin Scott. With Penn State running less, both players have trouble getting their heads into the game. Penn State netted only 44 yards on the ground and has yet to produce a one-hundred yard rusher in a game this season.

The bright spots were few, but special teams was one of them. Field goal kicker Robbie Gould showed his range by nailing a 47-yard field goal just before the half. Kickoff specialist David Kimball sent the ball out of the end zone every time, which prevented the possibility of long returns. Defensive tackle Scott Paxson blocked a 37-yard field goal attempt by Nebraska kicker David Dyches. If Jeremy Kapinos can stay out of trouble, the special teams will be well-rounded throughout the year.

The scary part for Penn State is their inability to stop the run. Four players have gained over 100 yards against the Lions so far this season. The defensive line was pounded in between the 20s against Nebraska and resembled a porous membrane on first down running plays. The game against Boston College was just as bad. Penn State will have a tough time beating anyone if they keep allowing second and short situations.

The defensive line is banged up right now. Four backups are out with injuries, forcing the starters to play longer and allowing opposing offensive lines to wear them down.

If Penn State had played a better game, Paterno might be after the officials. The referees blew two calls that should have gone Penn State's way. One was a fumbled punt which Penn State appeared to recover in Nebraska territory. Another was a beautiful catch by a Penn State wide receiver that was ruled out of bounds. This is not a good sign for Joe Pa, who still has a bad taste in his mouth from last year's bad calls.

Penn State is young and they will get better. Many of the mistakes they are making can be easily fixed. Fumbled snaps should not be a problem throughout the year. The Lions only committed one penalty against Nebraska. For a young team playing in a hostile environment, that is a good sign.

If they beat the teams they should, Kent St., Northwestern, and Indiana, they will be in good position. Most of their tough games are at home, and victories over Michigan St. and Purdue on the road are not far-fetched.

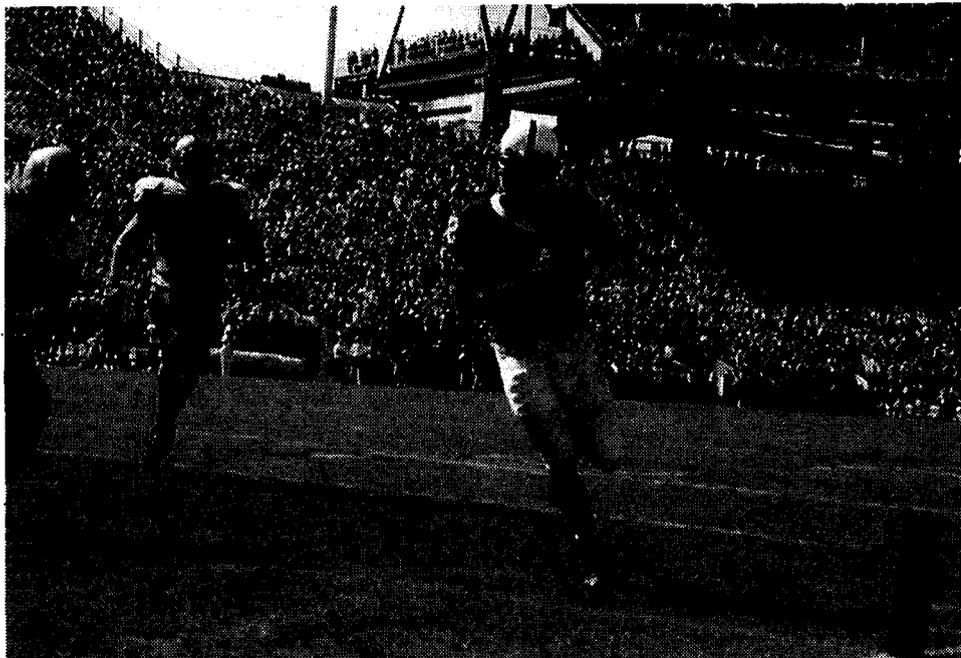


photo by Dan Storm

Back-up quarterback Michael Robinson runs for a 2-yard touchdown late in the fourth quarter in the second game of the season against Boston College.

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