

Coaching staff drops the ball in 20-14 loss to Minnesota

By **PETE STRELLA**
Editor in Chief

Penn State's 20-14 loss at the hands of Minnesota could have been a win. But if you ask the Nittany Lion coaching staff, they may tell you it could have been a draw.

Coach Joe Paterno puzzled the hometown crowd by calling draw plays towards the end of each half. Both yielded minimal yardage and allowed valuable time to elapse from the clock. Both killed potential scoring drives, one that could have won the game for the Nittany Lions in the fourth quarter.

The first draw play came near the end of the first half when Penn State had the ball at the Minnesota 8. Ricky Upton took a Michael Robinson handoff for two yards on a play that Minnesota snuffed out from the start.

Time ran off the clock as Robinson tried to set the offense for a spike, all the while forgetting about Penn State's one remaining time-out. But Penn State got a whistle for its fourth illegal procedure penalty before Robinson could snap the ball.

Sound like a team with sound coaching?

The drive ended on a controversial interception by Minnesota linebacker Terrance Campbell. Though replays clearly showed that Campbell trapped the ball, Penn State should have played for the field goal after the busted draw play.

The second questionable call came with 25 seconds left in the game and one Nittany Lion time-out remaining. Robinson drove his team down to the Minnesota 15 with precise passing and sensible scrambling. But Paterno tried to deliver one more jab to the dead horse, calling a draw play to Austin Scott that gained two yards. The last time-out was called.

This gave the Nittany Lions two shots at the end zone with 15 seconds left. But the Gophers were now able to cheat towards the sidelines and drop eight or nine players into pass coverage. Robinson had nowhere to throw.

Paterno said these calls were "brilliant" after the game. In truth, they took away from the best team effort his players have put forth this season. This team is not good enough to overcome bad coaching decisions. Paterno's "the team is young" excuse becomes tougher to digest as the losses pile up.

Now Paterno has to name Robinson the starting quarterback if he wants to bring his team out of the doldrums. A two-quarterback system will be ineffective and Mills, who left the Minnesota game with a sprained medial collateral ligament, does not have the accuracy to turn this team around.

After the Minnesota game, it is clear that Robinson is winning the quarterback battle. On second thought, maybe its a draw.

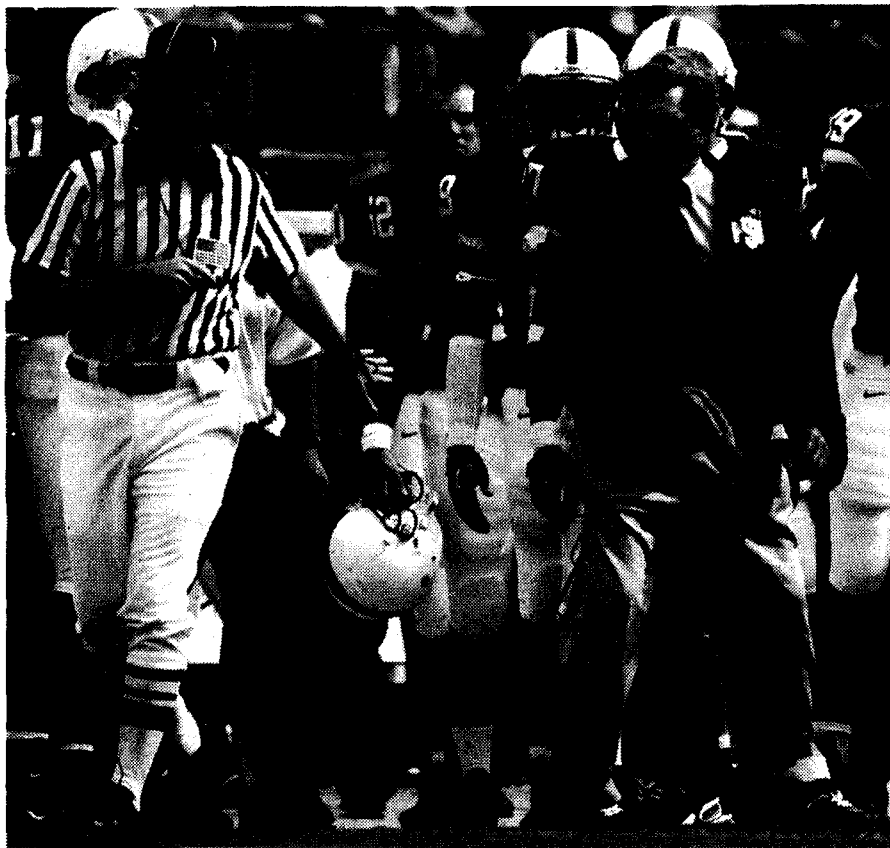


photo by Craig Houtz/ KRT

ABOVE: Coach Joe Paterno argues an interception call towards the end of the first half.

RIGHT: Greald Smith (19) drops a Zack Mills pass in the first quarter



photo by Nabil K. Mark/ KRT

Penn State Trivia

Joe Paterno was captain of Brown's football team in 1949 and was recently named to Brown's All-Decade Team. What other sport did Paterno play when he went to college?

Answer from last issue:
 When was the last time a Penn State football game was not televised before their game against Kent St. on Sept. 30?

Answer:
 Penn State has never had a game that was not televised.

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