

PATERNO RETIRE?

He can still bring it

By **PETER STRELLA**

Editor in Chief

Let's put this in perspective. You dedicate almost 40 years of your life to an institution, single-handedly transforming it from a small-time venture into a national force. You have been one of the most successful people to ever do what you do. Then, you have a couple bad years and everyone wants you to leave.

Joe Paterno deserves better than this. You would figure that after 338 wins, people would have some patience. Do we really want to see Paterno leave after such a bad stretch? You wouldn't think so. But Penn State fans have been spoiled by winning season after winning season. At the first sign that the program is in a slump, they cry for impeachment. It says a lot that, in 40 years, this is the worst it has ever been. I don't think giving Paterno a couple more seasons is too much to ask.

When people say the game has passed Paterno by, I wonder if they have any clue what they are talking about. I'll be the first to say I've seen some bad coaching decisions this year, most notably in the game against Minnesota. But that isn't the only reason the team is so bad. We've all heard about how many players the Lions lost in the draft this year. I'd like to see any other team bounce back after losing Larry Johnson, Anthony Adams, Jimmy Kennedy, and Bryant Johnson in the same year. And because of this, the Lions are a young team. This weekend, former Penn State linebacker Jack Ham said it takes a player about a year to get used to the speed of college football. When half of your line-up consists of first-year starters, the results are not going to come as quickly as you'd like them to.

Some of the things are beyond Paterno's control. Many times this season, a good play has been called, but the receiver drops a perfect pass. You can't blame

JoePa when Tony Johnson, a sure-handed receiver last year, starts dropping passes all of a sudden. As a coach, you can call the plays, but you can't go on the field and do it yourself.

The main problem is that Penn State's recruiting has been lackluster over the past several years. Opposing coaches are hitting Paterno where it counts: his age. They are telling players that Penn State is not a good place to go because Paterno could retire at any time. A lot of good players from Pennsylvania are getting away from Penn State, which wasn't the case a couple years ago.

An adjustment needs to be made. It would be in the team's best interest if Paterno gave a timetable as to when he's going to retire. From what we've heard so far, Paterno might be planning to coach for the next 20 years. Once he gives a timetable, whether it's one year or five years, recruiters can go to potential players and tell them what to expect. The question of "when" should be addressed, but the "when" doesn't have to be now.

Since Paterno became the head coach at Penn State in 1966, there have been 728 head coaching changes in Division I-A, an average of six per school. When Paterno was offered a million-dollar contract to coach for the New England Patriots, he stayed at Penn State. Paterno has remained at Penn State when it may have been in his best interests to do otherwise. I just don't understand why fans can't stick with him now that the situation has been reversed.

Paterno deserves at least one more year.



Joe Paterno

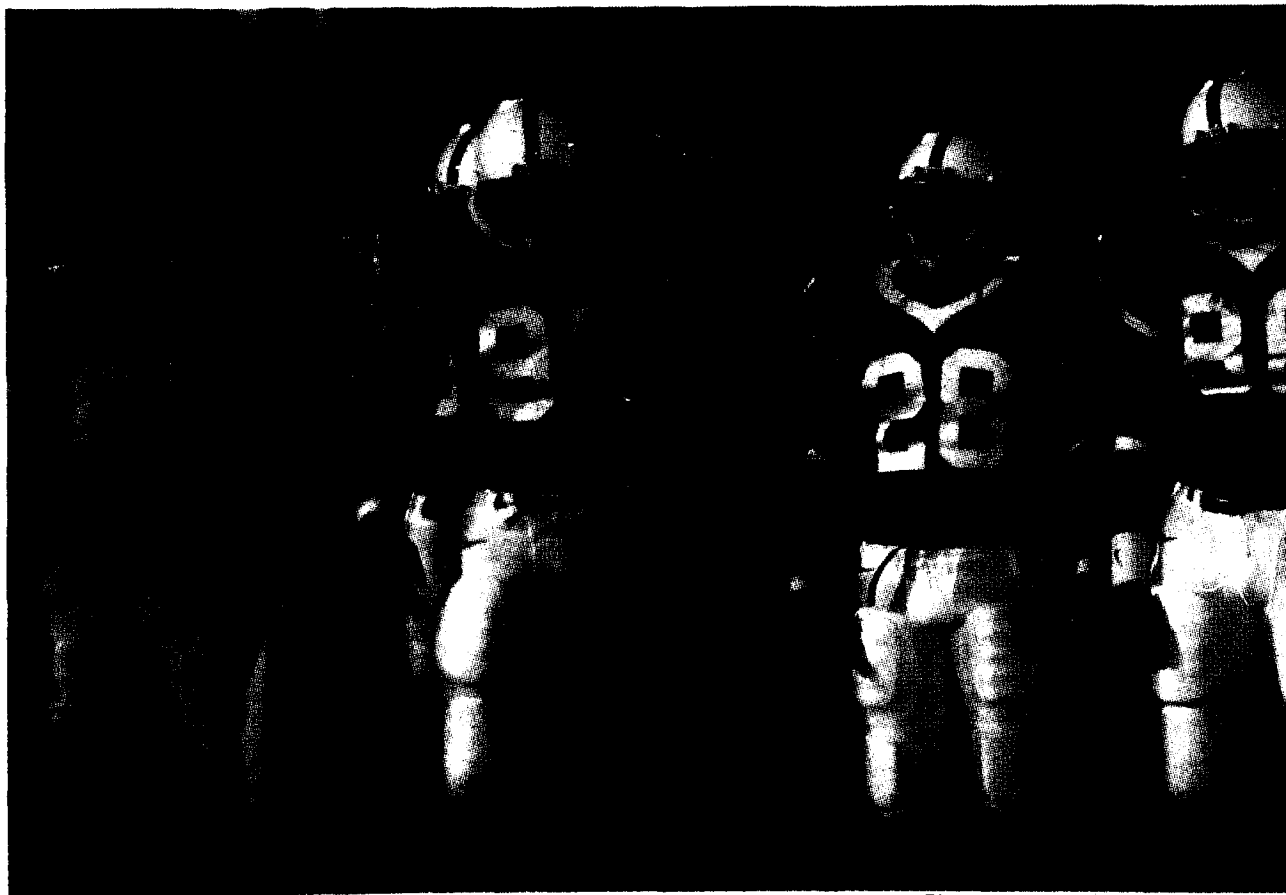


Photo by Jerry Lodriguss/ KRT

Paterno grouches as his team gets crushed by the Miami Hurricanes in 2001

Penn State Trivia

In what year did Joe Paterno have his first losing season as head coach of Penn State?

Answer from last issue

Joe Paterno was captain of Brown University's football team in 1949 and was recruited to Brown's All-American team. What other Penn State trivia do you know?