

PSU football at a glance

By Christian Torres
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The years are not hard to forget. 1983, 1986, 1994. These are the years that Penn State football was the best that it could be. These are the years that truly made "Happy Valley," happy. These are the years that transformed Joe Paterno from good coach to legend. Now everyone is asking the question that has somehow become cliché, what has happened to this football program? Why is Penn State looking like the old Northwestern teams that haunted the Big Ten conference for over 40 years? Well, maybe not that bad. But let's examine some possible problems and then some solutions. By doing some simple research, the cure to finding the problem with Penn State football can and will be found.

Maybe the problem is the Big Ten conference. In the years since Penn State has joined the Big Ten in 1994, they have had at least 9 wins except for three. They went undefeated in one year in which they were not even given a chance to play for the national championship. So the fact that they are in a tough conference does not seem to be the problem. Penn State has shown that it can compete in a big conference.

Let's try the weather! Well, the weather in Central Pennsylvania is not exactly the best weather in the fall and winter. It can get cold and sometimes it can even snow here and there, but that has not prevented the heroes in blue and white from winning two national championships. Granted, these titles were in the 80s and at this point, that decade seems like ancient history, but they won the titles nonetheless.

How about the presidency! Joe Paterno is a known republican. His son Scott just ran for Congress on the republican ticket. While Paterno has been coach, and that has been since the start of this country, republicans have overwhelmingly been elected president more times than democrats. In fact, Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan, George Bush I and George Bush II have all been president while Paterno has been coach. They are also all republican. Meanwhile, John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, Jimmy Carter and Bill Clinton have been presidents on the democratic side. So the republicans win by a slight margin in this area (i.e. 2000 and 2004, remember dems).

Let's try again. How about the ice cream? Well, Penn State has the world famous creamery at University Park. Not many colleges or universities can say that their football players get some of the best ice cream in the world. So ice cream also works in Penn State's corner.

So after hours of studying and research, it has been found that the problem with Penn State does not lie in conference position, weather, who the president is, or even the ice cream. So what is the true cause of Penn State's problems? Well, the lesson to be learned with this experiment is that any person does not have to be a rocket scientist to know that recruiting and coaching may be the big problems here.

Please see PSU on 8

Sports

College bowl controversy

BCS controversy may force changes

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The BCS. The Bowl Championship Series. Once known as the bowl alliance, it has been the definitive way of deciding the national champion in college football for almost ten years. The name of it may have changed, but the methods used

and the controversy created from the BCS has not.

The current standings in college football have five undefeated teams atop the polls. Behind the undefeated teams are many one loss teams in the top 25. The teams and the order that the polls are developed by a computer system that takes into account the regular season record and strength of schedule. In Division I-A college football, there is no playoff system to give more

teams chances to compete to get into a championship game.

Now take Division I-AA, Division II and Division III college football. They all have a playoff which definitively decides a national champion. The playoffs usually start in late November and go until mid-December. Now, the playoffs in these divisions do not usually get much press and media coverage, but they have something that the big daddy, Division I-A college football, does not have. They have a comprehensive playoff system which allows teams that have had great seasons and deserve to compete for a national championship to do so.

Big time college football and its system of bowl games and polls has created controversy for many years.

In 1994, Penn State and Nebraska were tied for the best record in college football. They both had records of 12-0 and both won their respective bowl games. Unfortunately for Penn State, that 12-0 record and that team, which is still considered one of the greatest offenses to ever play college football, was rewarded with nothing for its accomplishments. Nebraska was awarded the national championship after the two polls used at that time to determine the national champion both decided that Nebraska was the best.

In 2003, LSU and USC both had one loss at the end of the season. For USC, their 12-1 record landed them a spot in the Rose Bowl, which they won handily. LSU played in the BCS championship game at the Sugar Bowl which they also won. The question is, why didn't both

teams play each other? Well, the BCS poll had LSU at the top of their poll. The other polls from writers and coaches had USC at

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the top while LSU was second. However, the BCS and the computer system they used, had Oklahoma at second. Confused yet?

When LSU and USC won their respective games, the poll standings did not change. Because of this, LSU and USC were both crowned national champs. The strange thing about this is that the BCS was designed to eliminate any split national championship scenarios. It did not work here!

So the story last season, like almost every season in college football, ended in controversy because a true national champion was not crowned. College football fans were left to wonder what could have been if USC and LSU played in a national championship game just as they were wondering in 1994 with Penn State and Nebraska.

The people who run college football say that a playoff system

would not work because of the traditional New Year's Day bowl games. Maybe it can work. Maybe there can be a scenario where there can be a playoff system using some of the 28, yes 28, bowl games. In fact, college football could very well benefit from a playoff system.

Even though the bowl system is entertaining and keeps with tradition, a playoff system could be better.

Here is a scenario. Take the top eight teams in the polls and allow those teams to play in the playoff system. Select eight bowl games as sites to play the games. In the first round, four games will be played at four sites. The second round would involve two games at two different sites on New Year's Day. The final game would be played a week from New Year's Day at its own site. The championship game would rotate every year between the "big four" bowls; the Rose Bowl, Fiesta Bowl, Sugar Bowl and Orange Bowl.

Now this scenario is not perfect and would involve tweaking, but in the end, it would be three weeks of heart pounding college football and a true national champion.

The current system of polls and computers is a flawed system. Division I-A college football is the only sport that decides a national championship like this and maybe it is time for a change. Let us hope that some of the undefeated teams right now in college football lose. If not, college football will have yet another controversy on its hands and probably not a definitive national champion.



Photo courtesy of Jeff Gross/Getty Images

The exclusion of Reggie Bush and top ranked USC from the BCS title game could bring about a number of changes. The LSU and USC split national championship remains controversial.

Former Lady Lion joins PSH

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In the sports world, many athletes leave a small town, or big city, or even a home country to become successful. Some of those athletes go back to that town, city or country where it all got started for them. Others choose to stay away and never return. For basketball player Marissa Graby Hoover, it was a tough decision leaving her Lady Lion basketball team at Penn State after many years of success. Fortunately for her, she was given a second chance to return and did not hesitate to take advantage of that chance.

Four years ago, as a player for the Penn State women's basketball team, Hoover was at the pinnacle of her success. Not only was she a member of the team that made to the Women's Final Four in 2000 in Philadelphia, but she was also the captain of that team. For Hoover, the experience of being a part of that team was something she would never forget. "It was an exciting time there at State College," Hoover said. "My freshman year we (the basketball team) weren't too good. But the hard work that was put into it eventually paid off."

She not only had the chance to play with great players and almost win a championship, but she also had the chance to play for a highly respected coach in

Renee Portland. Getting the chance to play for Portland was something that Hoover said was tough at times, but it was a good experience. "She (Portland) could be tough on the team especially when we were not playing well," Hoover said. "When we were playing good though, she was great to us. She knew what kind of players she had and she respected us by the time 2000 rolled around."

Hoover also excelled in the classroom. She earned the highest grade-point average on her team for three straight seasons and was named a GTE Academic All-American three times. For Hoover, the experience of playing basketball taught her many lessons. Not only did she become a better basketball player, but she said that she became a better person at the same time. "I think playing the game of basketball was crucial for me. It taught me about being a better public speaker and being more comfortable around people," Hoover said. "Basketball can teach you to overcome obstacles and it also teaches time management and communication skills."

When a player is as successful in basketball or any sport at the collegiate level as Hoover was, the general consensus is that the player will probably make a professional career out of it. For women like Hoover, the chance of becoming a professional basketball player was not there until

just recently. Now with the WNBA and other smaller professional leagues, women coming out of college can get the same opportunities as male players to enjoy doing what they do best at the professional level.

Hoover took advantage of an opportunity of possibly becoming a pro when she played in the WABA right after graduating in 2000. She played for the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Scream where she averaged 14 points and 11 rebounds per game and made the WABA all-star team.

Even though she does not play basketball regularly anymore, Hoover still sees herself getting involved somehow in the game she loves. In fact, teaching the game is something she is very interested in. "I don't really see myself as a coach but I can possibly do individual lessons for players. I love the game and I would love to teach it to other people," Hoover said.

She finds herself in a familiar spot now, but she is playing a totally different role. As assistant director of development here at the Capital Campus, Hoover is in the role of fund-raiser. This includes sometimes traveling to many places and getting in contact with alumni. Hoover says that taking this role is a way for her to give back to her alma mater. "I got a full scholarship from Penn State in 1996 and without that my education wouldn't have been possible," Hoover said. "Taking this role allows me

to help others who want the opportunities to attend college and follow their dreams."

Few people get to say that they have full circle in their life, but for Marissa Graby Hoover, she is pretty close. For her, returning to the university where she had some of her greatest memories is like being home again. "Being

back is awesome. It's like being at home. Although not State College, it still is Penn State and brings back a lot of great memories," Hoover said.

As for the future, this newlywed is taking it easy. "I want to enjoy being a newlywed for a little bit and enjoy the time that I have with my new husband."

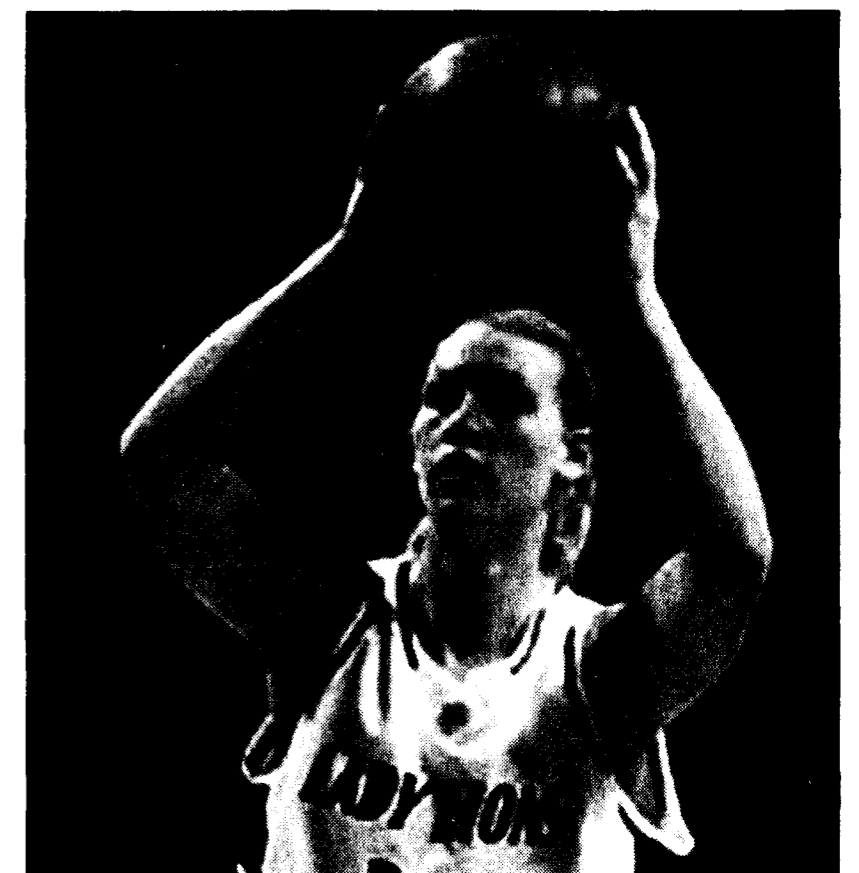


Photo courtesy of Google Images

Marissa Graby Hoover, once a PSU Lady Lion, has returned to the Penn State family as assistant director of development at PSH.