

NFL season begins to wind down

By Herb Smith
Staff Reporter
hjs135@psu.edu

As the NFL passes its halfway point, it is time to stop, catch your breath and look back on what has been, so far, another great and unpredictable season. Up and down the league, divisions look nothing like they did a year ago and some players are putting up numbers that certainly were not expected. While everyone expected New England to be back atop the AFC East, no one predicted the NY Jets would be so close to them in the standings. The Jets are within striking distance, thanks in part to the inspired play of their 31-year-old, 10 year veteran running back, Curtis Martin. Martin is on pace to break his personal best of 1,513 rushing yards in a season. His play, combined with the stellar play of one of the good young quarterbacks in the game Chad Pennington, has the Jets right in the middle of the playoff hunt. In the AFC North, the Pittsburgh

Steelers are tops in their division led by rookie quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger. "Big Ben", as he is known to the fans in the Steel City, came in to replace injured Tommy Maddox, and has not

"The Washington Redskins and Dallas Cowboys have grossly underachieved under their great head coaches..."

given the job back. Roethlisberger has the Rookie of the Year award locked up and has the Steelers among the elite teams in the AFC. In the AFC South, the Indianapolis Colts are battling the Jacksonville Jaguars for the lead in the division. The Tennessee Titans have fallen out

of the race with their injured quarterback, Steve McNair, and the Houston Texans have shown they are a team on the rise. This division could be the best in football. In the AFC West, the Denver Broncos are leading the division, but the surprise out west is the play of the San Diego Chargers and their quarterback, Drew Brees. Brees, who was supposed to be keeping the seat warm for rookie Philip Rivers, instead has turned in an MVP-like season and has made a case for himself to be a starting quarterback in this league.

Meanwhile, over in the NFC, the Philadelphia Eagles are right where they are supposed to be; tops in the Conference. However, in the East, they are being challenged by the NY Giants and Kurt Warner. Warner, like Brees, was supposed to be a temporary fill-in for high profile rookie, Eli Manning. But Warner has turned in a season reminiscent of his days in St. Louis and at the halfway point, the Giants are in the playoff picture, and

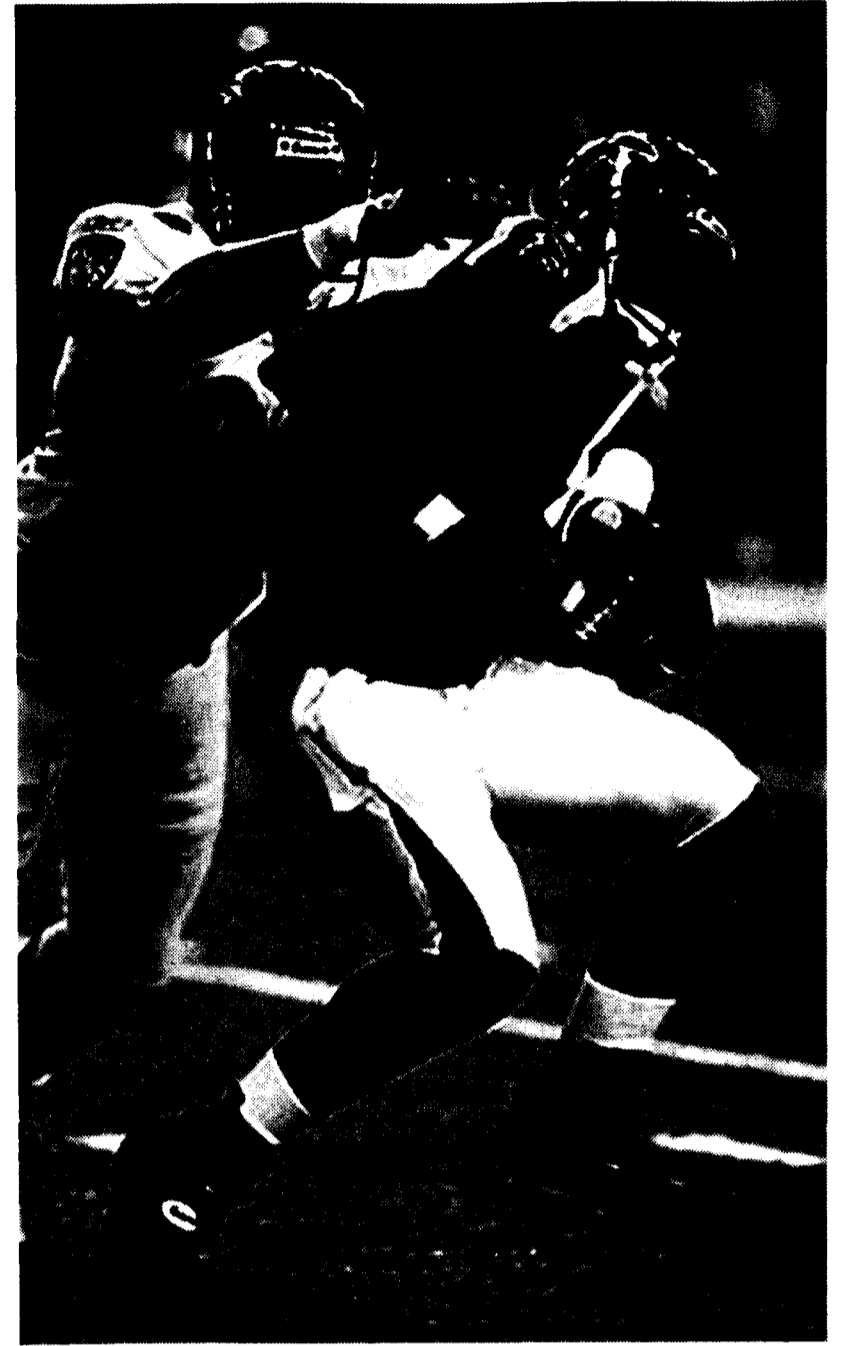
Manning is still on the bench.

The Washington Redskins and Dallas Cowboys have grossly underachieved under their great head coaches, Joe Gibbs and Bill Parcells, respectively. Gibbs' first year back in the league after more than a decade has not gone as well as those in Washington would have hoped, and while Vinny Testaverde has put up big numbers in Big D, the Cowboys find themselves sharing the basement of the East with the 'Skins.

As expected, the Minnesota Vikings and Green Bay Packers are fighting it out for best in the Black-n-Blue division, the NFC North. However, few would have expected that the Detroit Lions would be right there in the hunt. The Lions have been near the bottom of the league for several years but have seen their high draft picks, such as Joey Harrington and Roy Williams, pay off. Both players have had great seasons and while the Lions probably won't make the playoffs this season, they are a team to watch next year.

In the NFC South, the Atlanta Falcons are back in the playoff picture with the return of superstar Mike Vick. Vick missed most of last season due to injury, but his return has the Falcons leading the South division. While the Patriots are back atop the league, the team they played in last season's Super Bowl, the Carolina Panthers, have the worst record in the league. Losing top receiver Steve Smith put a damper on the Panthers' high hopes for a return to the Super Bowl.

In the NFC West, the St. Louis Rams and Seattle Seahawks are tops in the division. However, the Arizona Cardinals and new head coach Dennis Green have won more games than expected, thanks in large part to the play of Emmitt Smith. Smith, after his



Photos courtesy of Google Images

The Atlanta Falcons' Mike Vick recently got back to the playing field after an injury.



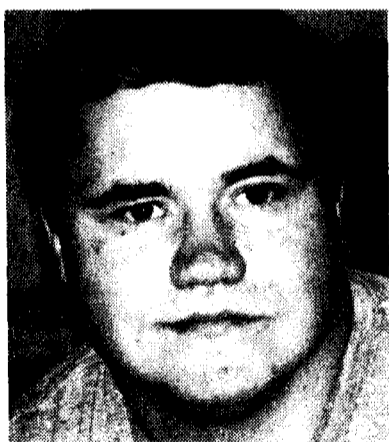
Curtis Martin is a 10-year veteran of the New York Jets. Martin could break his personal rushing yard record this season.

first year in Arizona was marred by injuries, has seen his second season be much more productive. Smith, the league's all-time leading rusher, is on pace for his 12th 1,000 yard rushing season, breaking his own record of 11. Smith has rebounded from poor showings in his last two seasons

to once again returning to the league's top ten leading rushers. The NFL season will soon be winding down. However, as that long off season approaches, fans can be comforted in knowing they saw another wild NFL season and that another is on the way in September.

Capital Times staff picks big NFL winners

Herb Smith, Staff Reporter



Baltimore @
New England
Baltimore
Philadelphia @
N.Y. Giants
New York

Week #13

Pittsburgh @
Jacksonville
Pittsburgh
Houston @ N.Y. Jets
New York
Denver @ San Diego
Denver
Green Bay @
Philadelphia
Green Bay

Week #12

Indianapolis @
Detroit
Indianapolis
Chicago @ Dallas
Dallas

Christian Torres, Staff Reporter



Baltimore @
New England
New England
Philadelphia @
N.Y. Giants
Philadelphia

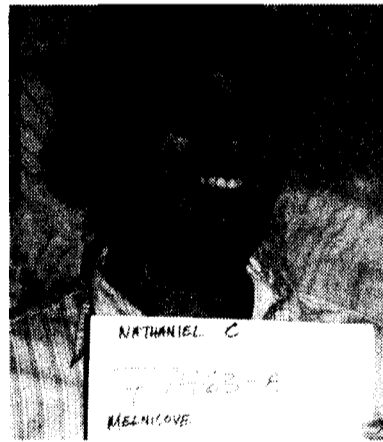
Week #13

Pittsburgh @
Jacksonville
Jacksonville
Houston @ N.Y. Jets
Houston
Denver @ San Diego
San Diego
Green Bay @
Philadelphia
Philadelphia

Week #12

Indianapolis @
Detroit
Indianapolis
Chicago @ Dallas
Dallas

Nat Melnicove, Staff Reporter



Baltimore @
New England
New England
Philadelphia @
N.Y. Giants
Philadelphia

Week #13

Pittsburgh @
Jacksonville
Jacksonville
Houston @ N.Y. Jets
New York
Denver @ San Diego
San Diego
Green Bay @
Philadelphia
Green Bay

Week #12

Indianapolis @
Detroit
Indianapolis
Chicago @ Dallas
Dallas

State of PSU football unsure

PSU continued from 7

It is hard enough for Penn State to recruit players just for the simple fact of where it is located in the heart of Pennsylvania and the Susquehanna valley is actually pretty hard to compete with Florida, Florida, Florida. And Florida means, hate to say it, sunshine, great weather, and winning football. But it is not only Florida. How about traditional rivals like Michigan, Ohio State, or even Michigan State? Not to mention the programs on the rise like Iowa, Minnesota and even Northwestern. Northwestern?! Notice that all of these teams are

in the Big Ten conference.

How about the fact that Penn State's offense has become downright offensive. Their schemes and game plans look so outdated that some people wonder if JoePa is bringing back playbooks from the 1800s.

There is also the question of whether the team respects the coach anymore. Joe Paterno, no question, is the single greatest coach in Penn State history and possibly in the history of college football. But let's face it, he is in his mid-70s and when his coaching contract expires, he will be in his 80s. Can he get young players to play for him anymore? Will the young players even respect what he says?

This is what Penn State football has unfortunately become. In the past, this football team was almost guaranteed to compete

recruiting, the management, and the coach. The problem is this, these questions have no easy answers.

The program is full of question marks. Question marks about the recruiting, the management, and the coach. The problem is this, these questions have no easy answer.

for a national championship every year. Now, the question is whether this team can reach three wins in 2004. The program is full of question marks. Question marks about the

Many will say that firing Joe Paterno is the easiest answer. In other programs and other sports, that is usually what happens when hard times appear. But this situation is different. Joe Paterno

is Penn State University. Joe Paterno is Penn State football. Joe Paterno is also a huge fundraiser. Firing Joe Paterno after all that he has done for PSU could mean a public relations nightmare for Graham Spanier and company.

So what will Penn State do? The university invested millions of dollars into improvements at Beaver Stadium including increasing the overall capacity to over 110,000. The football team is under constant scrutiny from the national media as to when they will do something to turn the program around. Even students that go to Penn State are wondering when the team will finally return to the form of national

powerhouse.

There is no clear solution. Penn State is in a situation where sit-and-wait is the only option. Paterno has what would be considered a lifetime contract to coach at the university. Given all that he has done for the university, Paterno will probably stay until he retires or dies.

In the mean time, the same questions will continue to be asked. Can Penn State attract top notch high school players again? Can Joe Paterno get the program back on track? Do the players even respect the legendary JoePa? Just like the people who run the university, we will also do the same thing. Wait-and-see.