

NO CRYING IN BASEBALL

# SPORTS

## Lions smack Spartans 31-22

By RALPH D. RUSSO  
AP Sports Writer

EAST LANSING, Mich. As the Penn State players bounced around the field, exchanging hugs and saluting the thousands of fans who came to see the Nittany Lions become champions again, Joe Paterno ducked and ran for cover.

After 40 seasons and 353 wins, the 78-year-old coach has been part of more celebrations than he can count.

But for his players, it's been a long hard road to the program's first appearance in the Bowl Championship Series.

Joe Paterno and the fifth-ranked Nittany Lions locked up their first Big Ten title in 11 years and the BCS bid that goes with it by defeating Michigan State 31-22 Saturday.

Michael Robinson ran for 90 yards and a touchdown and passed for another score, and Alan Zemaitis had three interceptions for Penn State (10-1, 6-1).

Coming off a 4-7 season, its fourth losing year in the last five, Penn State tied Ohio State for the Big Ten lead but will get the league's automatic BCS bid because the Lions beat the Buckeyes in October.

"I've been around a lot of good football teams, and I've been in a lot of locker rooms where we've felt pretty good about what we had done," Paterno said. "The kids are the ones that are all fired up and they should be, because they went through all that junk... the losing years, everyone doubting them and they got together and went to work. They're the guys that should be happy."

Michigan State (5-6, 2-6), which began the season 4-0, finished it with six losses in seven games to post consecutive losing seasons for the first time since 1992.

When it was over, the Nittany Lions partied in Spartan Stadium but Paterno bolted to the tunnel with his head down, looking up

just long enough to give the Penn State section a wave on the way out.

"He deserves it," said Robinson, who had a 33-yard TD run in the second quarter. "He really does. He's worked so hard. He stayed with us. People told him to retire. Now look at him. Nobody's saying

to retire and no more Joe must go Web sites. None of that. I'm just so happy for him."

Paterno wasn't too happy with his team earlier in the week, so he booted the whole bunch from practice on Tuesday.

"They took it," Paterno said. "Nobody pouted. The captains

got them together and all's well that ends well."

Zemaitis' second pick came in third quarter, and he returned it 17 yards to the Michigan State 4. Robinson threw a 3-yard TD pass to Deon Butler moments later for a 24-7 lead.

Paterno, pant-cuffs rolled and kept warm on a cold, windy night by a long, dark winter coat, barely reacted to the score, turning away to resume pacing the sideline as his players and coaches jumped for joy.

The last time Penn State was Big Ten champs, Kerry Collins and Ki-Jana Carter were piling up big numbers during the Nittany Lions' second season in the league.

Who would have believed then that Paterno's program would eventually drop to the Big Ten's second division?

That Penn State completed its return to the top against Michigan State provided a bit of symmetry to the revival. Penn State completed last season with a 37-13 victory over the Spartans in Happy Valley that injected some optimism into the program heading into 2005.

With a new, dynamic offense, directed by the versatile senior Robinson, and the best defense Penn State has had since LaVar Arrington was a Nittany Lion, Paterno has been vindicated.

He said throughout the 2004 season that he felt the team was close to being a winner again... and he was right.

"I feel wonderful," Zemaitis said. "It's something when you put your mind to it, battle all adversity and nobody giving us respect... when you get what you wanted at the end, it makes it that much better."

Michigan State looked as if it might be the surprise team in the Big Ten after beating Notre Dame in September, but coach John L. Smith's Spartans lost consecutive heartbreakers to Michigan and Ohio State in October and never recovered.

"We're not satisfied with this season," Spartans defensive end SirDarean Adams said. "We want to come back next year and really play ball."

The Spartans couldn't be accused of quitting in this one, even after trailing 17-0 at half.

Jason Teague had a 25-yard touchdown run and receiver Jerramy Scott ran 4 yards for a score on a direct snap to make it 24-14 after three quarters.

Michigan State was on the verge of making it even tighter, driving to the Penn State 11 at the start of the fourth quarter. But Drew Stanton was sacked by Jay Alford for a 13-yard loss and Michigan State botched the snap and hold on a 43-yard field goal attempt, never even getting a kick off.

Stanton finished 23-for-36 for 233 yards with four interceptions and a late TD pass.

The Lions took advantage of the special teams' gaffe as Tony Hunt capped a nice drive with a 1-yard touchdown run to make it 31-14 with 4:58 left.

Smith dropped to 18-18 in three seasons in East Lansing, a mark that probably won't stop speculation about his job security, though athletic director Ron Mason said has given no indication that he'd fire Smith halfway through a six-year contract.

"I don't even worry about it," Smith said. "That's not my decision. My job is to go out and recruit young men."

Michigan State had been 9-1 against top-10 opponents since 1997, including 6-0 at home, but they couldn't play spoiler against Penn State.

Robinson was 10-for-20 passing for 105 yards and Hunt surpassed 1,000 yards rushing on the season with 89 in the game.

"People picked us to go sixth in the Big Ten," Robinson said. "People said we should be happy with six or seven wins. Now we're on top of the Big Ten right now."



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There has been a storm brewing in Happy Valley these past four years. It finally hit landfall this year in the form of the Penn State offense. A combination of thunder and lightning, this year's offense has been giving opponents headaches.

Led by Michael Robinson, the Penn State offense took on a totally new look this year. Joe Paterno spread the offense out using four wide receivers often. He and Galen Hall have mixed the play calling to a near perfect mix of run and pass. It has worked to the tune of an average of almost 37 points per game, up nearly 20 points from last season.

Opponents can no longer sit on the run with eight men in the box or they will get burned on the outside. Four freshmen wide receivers are to thank for that. Highly touted recruits Derrick Williams and Justin King both run sub 4.4 forties. However, it has been the emergence of the other wide receivers that has really opened things up. Jordan Norwood and Deon Butler have been the big surprise this year. Both of them run in the 4.4 range; Butler leads the team with 32 receptions for 632 yards. A former walk-on defensive back, Paterno switched him to wide receiver and has never looked back.

So, double team Williams or King and Butler or Norwood will burn you. Single cover all of them and you will be burned by all of them. The only question is then, whom does Robinson want to throw to? Add to that the improved vision and accuracy of Robinson and every play is a potential touchdown.

If you think you can load up the secondary and sit back on the pass you will be run over by powerful running back Tony Hunt. Hunt is on the cusp of 1,000 yards this season. Hunt is a downhill runner with serious power. You will not tackle him with one man. You will not tackle him with two. If you have three big strong men, then you have a shot at bringing him down, but don't count on it. Every time a so-called "Heisman" running back has come into Happy Valley, they have been embarrassed by the performance of Hunt. This includes Brian Calhoun, Wisconsin running back that was held to 38 yards as opposed to the 151 Hunt ran for.

Now theoretically if you could slow the wide receivers, which you can't, and contain Tony Hunt, which you can't, then Robinson will run wild all over the opposing defense like he did against Wisconsin for 125 yards. Just when you think you have the offense figured out, Robinson comes busting out of the pocket with speed and power. He will put a juke on you that will break your ankles or, if you want to try to tackle him, he will break your collarbone (true story). It is this rare combination of speed and power that makes this offense so potent.

This is one thunderstorm that will make even the mightiest hurricane look like a spring shower.



Photo courtesy Joe Hermit/Patriot-News

From left, Matt Rice and Michael Robinson celebrate their last regular season victory. Penn State won 31-22.

## Hey, it could happen.....

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So you want a new car? Maybe a Mercedes or a BMW. No, how about a Porsche, yeah, a new Porsche is just what you need. What's wrong? Don't think it's going to happen? Well, the chances of you getting a new Porsche are slightly better than PSU making the National Championship; but it could happen. Penn State is currently ranked fourth on the BCS rankings list, below USC, Texas, and Miami.

In order for PSU to make the National Championship, it will take a lot. In major, the two L's; losing and luck. With only one game remaining this season, Penn State can do nothing to improve its own ranking after their game versus Michigan State. Therefore, they will have to depend mainly on the performance of other teams; specifically USC, Texas, Miami, and LSU.

Let us start from the top; number one ranked USC has two games remaining this season. One verses #16 Fresno State, and the

other verses #12 UCLA. Besides Notre Dame, these two games could be USC's most difficult of the season. Fresno State has huge upset potential, but overall

the season, but in order for Penn State to have a shot at the Rose Bowl, USC or Texas must lose.

Now let's move onto Texas, who is almost a lock for a Rose

through this game. Averaging 50 points per game, and a 36 point margin of victory, it is unlikely Texas will lose. Regardless, upsets can happen and will be necessary for Penn State to make a run for the title.

Moving east of Texas, the Miami Hurricanes may be the hottest team in the nation. After losing their opener to arch rival FSU, the Canes have gone a perfect 9-0; with key wins against Clemson, Colorado, and Virginia Tech. It is important that Miami loses due to the fact they are the only team between PSU and the number three spot of the BCS rankings. Even if Texas or USC would fall, Miami would get the bid to play for roses. Of all the teams in the running for the Championship, Miami has the most difficult schedule remaining, with three key ACC match-ups. Their most difficult challenge will come versus Florida State in the ACC championship game. Adding to the difficulty is their long list of injuries, the most key being sophomore tailback Tyrone Moss. The combination of injuries and difficult opponents could lead to their demise; Miami stands a great chance of falling

before seasons end.

This brings us to the fourth ranked Lions who play Michigan State this weekend. Although PSU is fourth in the rankings there is one team prowling beneath them, LSU. The Tigers are coming off their biggest win of the season verses former unbeaten Alabama. LSU will most likely win their division of the SEC and face Georgia in the SEC championship game. If LSU could win this match-up they could potentially leap-frog PSU in the BCS rankings and effectively eliminate PSU from the National Championship race. The only hope is a Georgia win to keep LSU back from the National Championship hunt.

So there you have it, like I said before it will take a lot of losing, and a lot of luck. Now let us review...it will take losses from either USC or Texas, and losses from Miami and LSU; plus a win from the Nittany Lions against MSU. Yes I know it's a lot to ask for, but hey, weirder things have happened. And if it does, maybe you will get that Porsche you have been wishing for all year... talk about a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

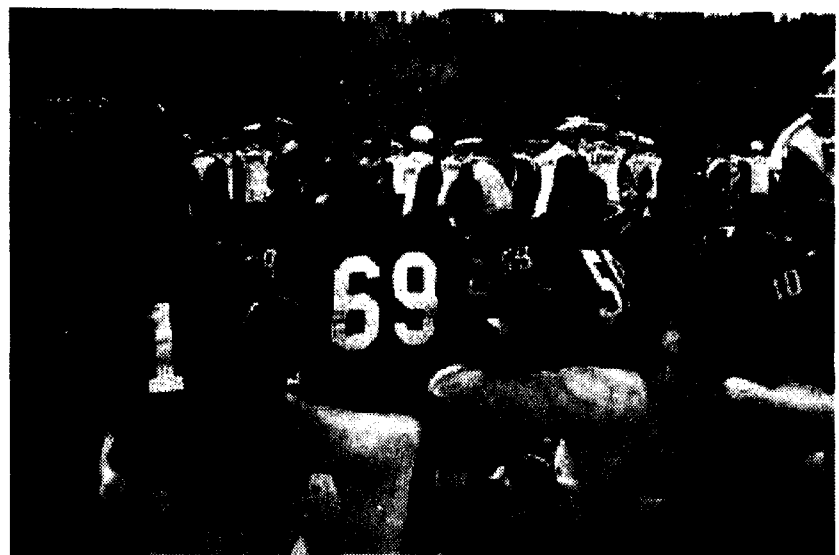


Photo courtesy of Google Images

PSU takes a knee before a half. PSU will need a prayer for a BCS.

it depends on which USC team shows up, the one who has some weaknesses or the one who absolutely embarrasses opponents. On the whole it appears as if USC should remain undefeated the rest of

Bowl bid. Their toughest game remains to be played in the Big 12 championship, which will most likely be against Colorado. Despite them playing in the additional championship game the Longhorns should stampede