

SPORTS

PSU Sports @ a Glance

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Three common knocks on Joe Paterno are that he can't compete in the BCS era in college football, he won't play freshman, and he can't consistently recruit premium athletes into the program.

With the past season resulting in a thrilling Orange Bowl victory against a perennial power known for their team speed and with the contributions of so many freshmen this year, it looked like the last thing Paterno had to prove was his ability to recruit the nation's best. So far, Penn State has put together an impressive recruiting class for 2006 that many experts believe could be one of the Nation's best.

So here's a simple message to all those Paterno critics, "Go back into hibernation, Penn State is back."

Although there might not be the instant impact of freshmen like Derrick Williams or Justin King in the class of 2006, there is certainly enough incoming talent to enable Penn State to compete with the best teams for the next several years.

Williams, King, running back/wide receiver Lydell Sargeant and linebacker Jerome Hayes are the cream of last year's crop and will probably be the only future key players for the Lions from the 2005 class. But this year's class is loaded with future stars in almost all offensive and defensive positions.

Defensive end Maurice Evans was one of the best players on the field, Jan. 9, at the U.S. Army All American Bowl, which features the best high school players across the country. He will be especially important next year in replacing All-American Tamba Hali. A great pass rusher like Hali, Evans will compete for immediate playing time next year.

Penn State picked up two elite defensive tackles in Jared Odrick and Tom McEwen. Both are from PA and both are highly regarded nationally. Odrick is viewed as one of the best defensive tackles in the country, but because of his quick feet, some experts predict he will make the move to offensive tackle just like 2nd team All-American and current Penn State left tackle Levi Brown did.

For the second straight year, Penn State has recruited arguably the best cornerbacks in the country; King last year, and A.J. Wallace this year. Like King, Wallace is 6'1" and possesses great speed. In two years, the Lions will have two outstanding corners that will be able to cover any receiver.

Two positions where immediate help is not needed but Penn State has successfully recruited are linebacker and wide receiver. Bani Gbadyu and Navorro Bowman will help in special teams and eventually as starters when Paul Posluszny and Dan Connor graduate.

Probably the deepest position for the Lions is wide receiver, but this did not scare away high school All-American receiver Chris Bell from committing. At 6'3", he will give the receiving core some height they don't have. Also, if the passing attack isn't dangerous enough, one of the top tight ends in the country, Andrew Quarless will give it yet another weapon.

Penn State is still in the running for several other big name prospects and will more than likely receive commitment from some. Several elite offensive guards and one offensive tackle are still on the board.

So for those who think this 11-1 year for Penn State was a fluke and next year they will go back to the bottom of the Big Ten where they belong, think again. Penn State is recruiting the nation's best once again and especially putting an emphasis on speed. With some experts calling this year's recruiting class the best in the last ten years, it is quite apparent that Penn State is back.

With as many as 12 starters leaving, there will no doubt have to be a learning curve for next year's team. But with the 2006 recruiting class, the talent will be replenished and the Lions will stay competitive. The future is bright indeed.

Sea of blue and white among the oranges

By **JAMES GRAP**
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At the end of last semester I swore I wouldn't write about the Orange Bowl. I knew the first edition of the paper would be coming out weeks after the game and it just didn't seem appropriate.

That was before I had the privilege of attending the Orange Bowl. That was before I witnessed what was possibly the greatest game in Penn State history.

Before Jan. 3, the unquestionably best game in Penn State history was the 1987 Fiesta Bowl, which capped an undefeated 1986 season and gave Penn State a national championship in thrilling fashion. What we saw in the Orange bowl exceeded that game in my opinion.

To understand how great this game was you have to understand how great the 1987 Fiesta bowl was. Seeing as most of you students were only a few years old, I am sure you don't remember how it went down. Some of you probably have never seen or even heard of this game. If that is the case stop reading this article, do yourself a favor, and buy the DVD of the game. It pitted number one Miami vs. number two Penn State.

In the 1987 Fiesta Bowl Penn State was considered a big underdog to the heavily favored Miami Hurricanes. The Heisman Trophy winner, Vinny Testaverde, led Miami. It was a back and forth game with Penn State intercepting Testaverde five times.

With only eighteen seconds left Miami was threatening down 17-10. Testaverde dropped back and let a pass fly toward the end zone. Penn State Linebacker, Pete Giftopolous, stepped in front and made a miraculous interception to seal the game and the national championship.

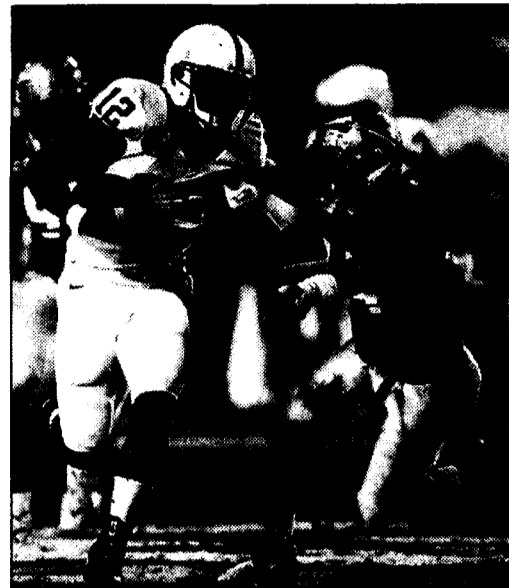
The underdog Nittany Lions had done what most deemed impossible. Up until this year's magnificent Rose Bowl it was the most watched college football game in history.

Now turn to this year's Orange Bowl. Penn State came into this season with expectations of a mediocre season at best by most

people. Against all odds they were 10 and one going into the Orange Bowl and I won't even get into that one "loss."

This was an overachieving Penn State team. This was a team the experts were waiting to crumble. They would be facing a surprise Florida State team.

Make no mistake about it this was a talented Florida State team. They had four losses on the season but beat Miami and Virginia Tech in the ACC championship game.



Full back Adam Senk blocks his opponent in attempt to gain yards.

That is a Virginia Tech team many people had challenging for the national championship before they lost to the very same Miami team Florida State beat. It was an obvious trap game.

On top of that it was a battle between the two most accomplished coaches in division I football. Between Joe Paterno and Bobby Bowden they have over 700 wins including 40 bowl wins.

A monumental match up was set. The game was incredible, spectacular, amazing, and any other superlatives you can come up with. With over 70 thousand fans in attendance at the Orange Bowl this year nearly 50 thousand of them were Penn State fans. The atmosphere was electric. If you closed your eyes you would have believed you were back in Happy Valley.

Inside the stadium the fans had answered the call for a "white-

out". The stadium was a sea of white. While I waited for the game to start two Florida State fans made their way up to my section. When they got to their seats they took a look around and muttered, "Oh my God, there is no one else".

Yeah, we packed the house. We came in full force to support our team and we shut those obnoxious Florida State fans up, hard.

Penn State lost their starting running back, Tony Hunt, on the first series of the game. However, this overachieving team continued to do just fine when Austin Scott ignited an eight play 85-yard drive, including a 3-yard touchdown run.

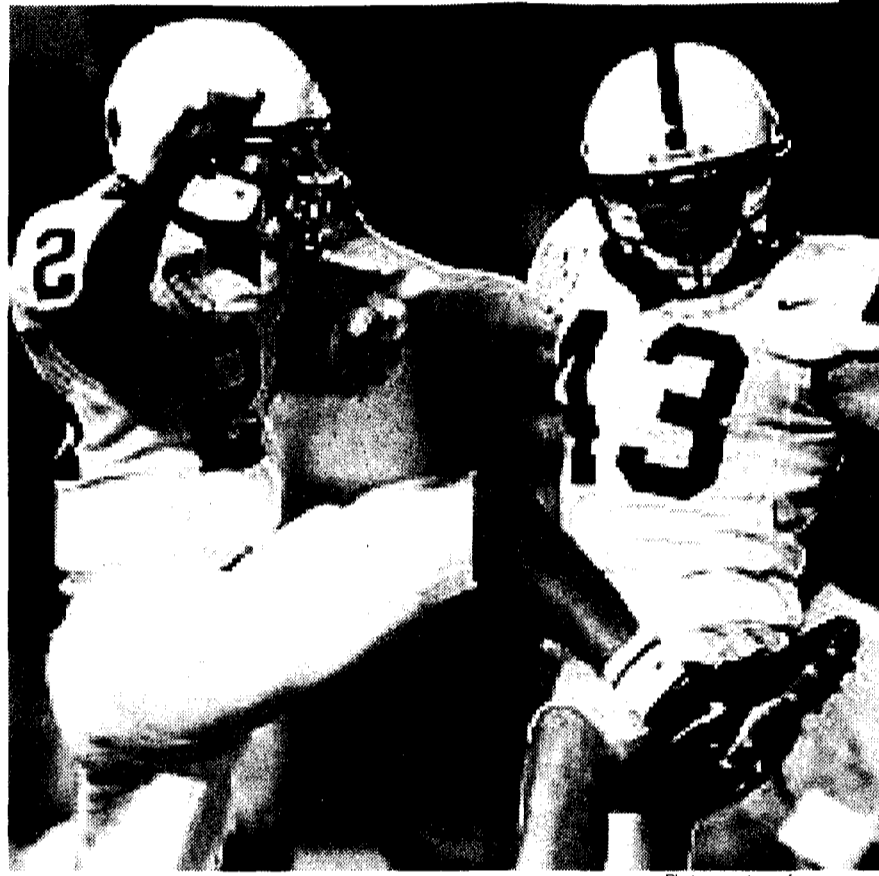
The second quarter saw Florida State try to land a knockout blow. The always-dangerous Willie Reid took a Kapinos punt 87-yards for a touchdown. A revitalized Florida State offense landed a second blow when running back Lorenzo Booker took a Drew Weatherford screen pass 57-yards for a touchdown. Florida State kicker Gary Cismesia would miss the extra point.

Remember that? After forcing a Florida State punt, Penn State got the ball back with less than thirty seconds remaining in the half.

The Nittany Lions would continue to overachieve. Jordan Norwood hauled in a Michael Robinson pass for a 35-yard gain on the sideline. Norwood, a freshman out of State College recruited by nobody but Penn State, would have six catches for 110 yards to lead the team.

With six seconds left, Penn State landed their own haymaker when Ethan Kilmer made a spectacular catch in the end zone. Kilmer

Please see **ORANGE** on page 8



Penn State players celebrate another touchdown against Florida State.

Flyers paddle Penguins

Philadelphia defeats Pittsburgh 2-1 in six-minute

ASSOCIATED PRESS

PITTSBURGH (AP) Playing in his first game in more than a month, Robert Esche made 32 saves for his first shutout of the season in the Philadelphia Flyers' 2-1 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins Saturday afternoon.

The Flyers broke a four-game losing streak while Pittsburgh lost in regulation for the ninth consecutive time.

Esche, who improved to 12-4-2, had not played since Dec. 15 due to a groin strain, and Antero Niittymaki made 17 consecutive starts in his place.

Rookies R.J. Umberger and Jeff Carter scored the Philadelphia goals.

Umberger, a Pittsburgh-area native, gave the Flyers a 1-0 lead

when he scored his eighth of the season while on the power play on a shot from close range on goalie Marc-Andre Fleury. Petr Nedved playing in his first game since being acquired via trade from Phoenix Friday and Sami Kapanen assisted on the goal, which occurred less than six minutes into the contest.

The teams played scoreless hockey until there were just less than six minutes left in regulation when Carter beat Fleury on the short side from the left circle on a five-on-three power play for his 12th goal of the season.

The Penguins have allowed multiple power-play goals in six of their last nine games.

Esche did not appear as if he was suffering from any rust after

the long layoff. He made several challenging saves, including stopping Sidney Crosby in the slot with the man-advantage toward the end of the first period and Sergei Gonchar on a wrist shot from his left with four minutes to play in the second.

The teams combined for only one shot on goal during the first eight and a half minutes of the third period.

Philadelphia did not register a shot on goal in the period until its two-man advantage midway through the period.

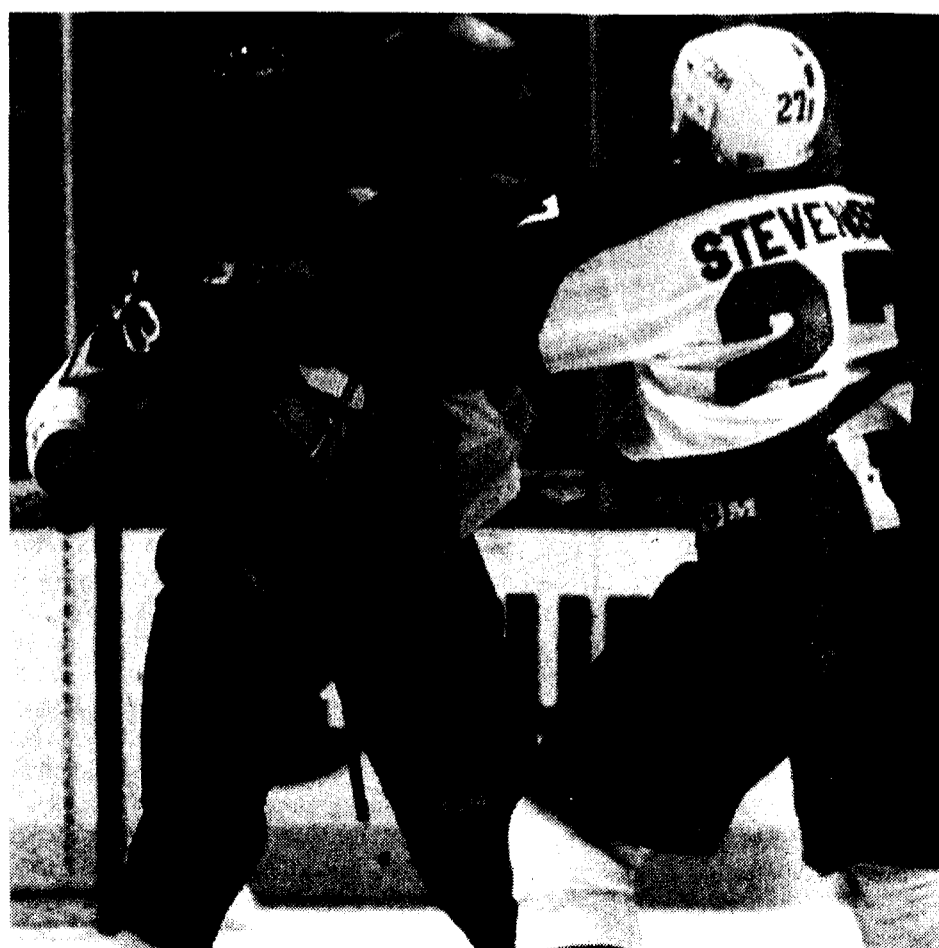
But the final six minutes of regulation was furious, highlighted by a Pittsburgh goal by Colby Armstrong with 3:49 to play. It was the fourth goal for the rookie, who redirected a Gonchar pass from the left corner behind Esche.

The Penguins out-shot an opponent for only the 15th time this season and fell to 5-8-2 in such circumstances. Pittsburgh had 33 shots to the Flyers' 26.

Flyers had lost five of their last six coming into the game. Pittsburgh hasn't earned a point in a game since a 6-4 win at Montreal Jan. 3.

NOTES: Fleury's mask was fitted with a small camera as the NBC regional telecast was in its second Saturday of the season.

Philadelphia center Peter Forsberg, tied for eighth in the league with 60 points, missed his second consecutive game with an abdominal muscle injury. Flyers defenseman Kim Johnson was scratched because he was experiencing concussion-like symptoms.



The Flyers and Penguins battled a scoreless game until only six minutes were left in the game.

A sulk to remember

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Don't hate me because I cheered against the Steelers in their nail-biting divisional playoff win against the Colts; rather hate me for missing the entire first three quarters of the game.

After I picked my jaw up off the ground when I discovered the Colts were losing 21-3 at the start of the fourth quarter, I tried to reconcile what could put the unbeatable Colts in this position.

My first guess was a technical difficulty on the scoreboard. I mean, it had to be, this is the Colts, the team that embarrassed the Steelers just a few weeks earlier in the season.

After a few excruciating minutes of no change to the scoreboard I realized this was not the problem. So I began to think of what events must have unfolded while I was sleeping during the first three quarters.

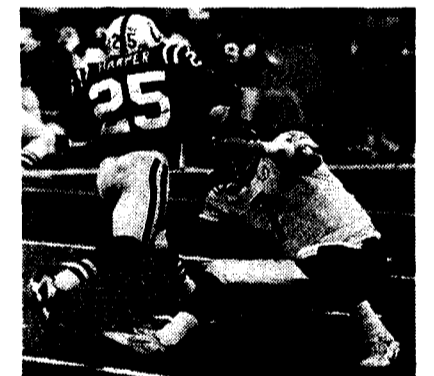
I assumed that Edgerrin James and Marvin Harrison had been shot, and Peyton Manning's arm fell off, leading to a lack luster offensive performance.

When I saw them take the field in the fourth quarter I was amazed at how quickly they had recovered, but later discovered all my assumptions were false.

Could it be? Were the Steelers legitimately beating the Colts? Maybe this was true, but my brain wasn't ready to accept an answer of that magnitude, so rather I went into "denial mode". Grass was red, the sky was brown, up was down, and the café made good food.

As I drifted into oblivion the world began to take shape again as the Colts rallied and closed the game to a three point gap. Finally, a glimmer of hope for every Steelers hater in the land; the Colts had the ball, time to score, and Peyton Manning at the helm. A few plays later, yada-yada-yada, I was in tears.

The Steelers had possession of the ball on the Colt's two-yard line.



Roethlisberger trips up Harper preventing a Colts victory.

Roethlisberger hands the ball off to Jerome Bettis and the series of events that followed were equal to the levels of happiness one experiences at a birth, a wedding, or from a grande meal at Taco Bell.

Bettis had fumbled; the ball was recovered by Nick Harper and returned thirty-five yards to the Indianapolis 42-yard line. At this point I had restored my faith, kissed a baby, and saved a bunch of money on my car insurance; happy days were here again.

Manning marched the Colt's down the field, where the game was placed on the foot of the most accurate kicker of all-time, Mike Vanderjagt.

To the unexpected joy of every Steelers fan in the nation, Vanderjagt missed that kick.

That very same baby I had just kissed was now ready to receive a punch, and as I pulled my arm back to strike, something hit me; these two teams had just played one of the greatest playoff games of the decade and, perhaps the history of the NFL, and I was upset.

I realized that this is what football is all about, two teams determined to win, but only one winner can survive. It was a glorious epiphany for the baby and me.

So congratulations to all the Steelers fans around the world, that was one of the best games, or in my case, quarters of football I have ever seen.