

SPORTS

PSU Sports @ A Glance

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Basketball season in Happy Valley has been nothing more than a lull between football seasons for years. You heard it here first; that is about to change.

The Nittany Lions basketball team appears to be headed in the right direction, finally. This season they are 10-9 overall. They broke a 33 game losing streak on the road in the Big Ten when they beat Northwestern.

As I watched Penn State outplay 12th ranked Michigan State on my biggest hopes and fears were confirmed.

First, Penn State has the talent in place to compete nationally with any team and, second, that talent may have to overcome poor coaching by Ed DeChellis to do so.

The source of this resurgence is coming from young talent on the team. Get used to hearing the names I am about to give you because I believe you will be hearing a lot from them very soon.

Perhaps the most talented player on the team is sophomore Geary Claxton. This 6'5", 210-pound forward/guard is averaging 15 points and 7 rebounds. He is a top tier player in the big ten who can take you off the dribble or post you up.

If there is one player who may be more talented than Claxton on the team it has to be Jamelle Cornley. He is a 6'6", 235-pound freshman who is averaging 13 points and 5 rebounds. He is near impossible to stop when he gets the ball in the post and he has a nice mid-range jumper.

Mike Walker, a local player from Trinity, now a sophomore, is seeing significant playing time. He is averaging 7 points but is getting better and better everyday. He is still one of the deadliest three-point shooters in the game and can distribute the ball effectively.

Milos Bogetic is a 6'1", 245-pound freshman. He is your prototypical European basketball player. He has a nice outside game to complement his inside game that can make him a match-up problem for many schools.

If Penn State is going to be playing in March next year (and I think they will) they will need veteran leadership from Ben Luber. The junior point guard is averaging 8 points and 4 assists this season. He has nice range and is very capable of hitting the big shot given the opportunity.

The most important thing about these young players, particularly Claxton and Cornley, is the intensity with which they play. They play hard night after night which is something Happy Valley hasn't seen in a while.

The Nittany Lions clearly have the talent to compete with any team in the nation as they demonstrated against twelfth ranked Michigan State. Claxton lead the way with 19 points and 13 rebounds. Walker who had 13 points and Bogetic who scored 10 points followed him.

Michigan State was able to find holes in the zone DeChellis refused to get out of in the second half leading to their win.

This is a young team and hiccups are to be expected. However, when a team can compete with Iowa and Michigan State one night and then turn around and get blown out by Ohio State, and Pittsburgh on another night, that is coaching.

Against Michigan State, DeChellis refused to change his zone defense. Brown scored 21 points in the second half against the zone. That is just one example of many this season.

The talent is in place but, in my opinion, DeChellis is not preparing the team to play every night. Penn State has let talent slip away far too often lately and they need to capitalize on talented players if they are going to rebuild the basketball program.

Penn State has made the right choices with coaches of other sports. I just hope they do here. Either way, the basketball program is on its way back and there is plenty of room on the bandwagon for everyone, so get up to State College and show them the support they deserve.

Steelers steal victory from Seahawks

By JOE KAY
AP Sports Writer

DETROIT (AP) - Ben Roethlisberger's pass floated right toward his hands. Hines Ward made sure he got both feet down in the end zone, then started closing his fingers around the ball.

Remarkably, he dropped it. No excuses. The Pittsburgh Steelers' top receiver flat-out dropped it.

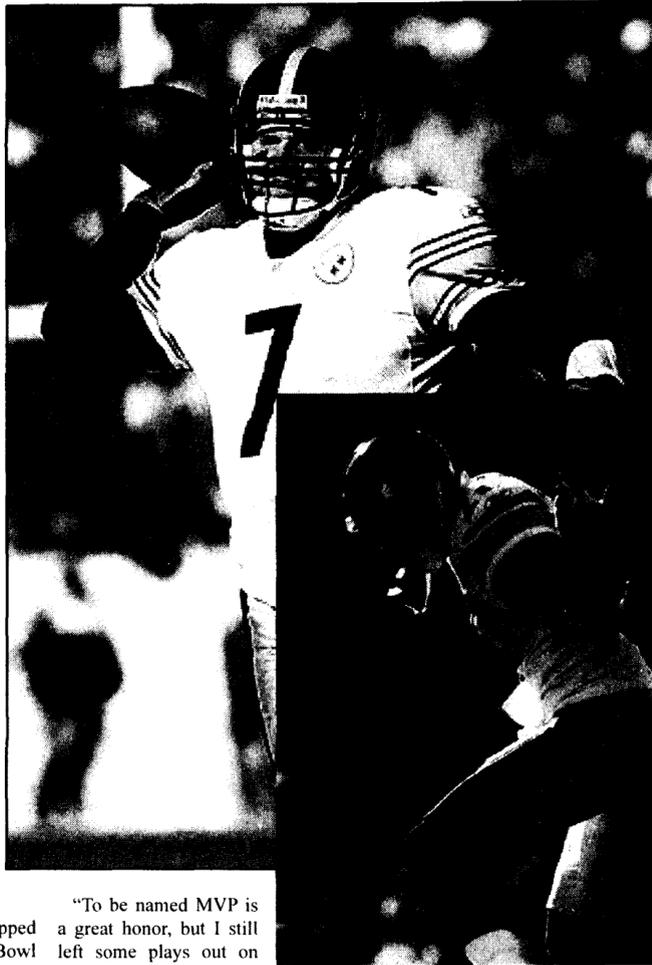
"The great ones don't miss balls in the Super Bowl," Ward said. "And I want to be considered one of the great ones."

Before this Super Bowl ended, Ward would get more chances to prove he deserves to be counted among the greats. And, he wouldn't bumble those chances away.

Ward completed an MVP performance Sunday by catching a 43-yard touchdown pass from receiver Antwaan Randle El, a trick play that became the decisive play in the Steelers' 21-10 victory over the Seattle Seahawks.

Pittsburgh's Lynn Swann won the Super Bowl MVP in 1976 for making one big catch after another against Dallas, including a diving grab of a tipped ball that makes all of the Super Bowl highlight reels.

Ward's game wasn't nearly as memorable, that end zone drop was just his most glaring mistake, but it was good enough to win the MVP award in a ragged game that came down to two big plays.



"To be named MVP is a great honor, but I still left some plays out on the field," Ward said. "I could have had an even better day."

Same for Roethlisberger, who at age 23 became the youngest quarterback to win a Super Bowl

even though he finished with the worst passer rating by any winning quarterback, 22.6. Play after play, he played down to his age.

Jerome Bettis, Detroit's favorite son, gained only 43 yards in what turned out to be his final game, a nondescript performance by one of football's most unforgettable runners.

In fact, the entire Pittsburgh offense had little to crow about, other than two plays that were enough to bring coach Bill Cowher his first championship.

The first was some old-fashioned

rust-belt offense: Hand the ball off and clear a path. Pulling left guard Alan Faneca opened a huge hole for Willie Parker on the second play of the second half, setting up a 75-yard touchdown run that was the longest in Super Bowl history.

"It was a great play when it was called," Parker said. "They called it at the right time, and Faneca just paved the way."

That play alone could have been enough - should have been enough. But Roethlisberger wasn't up to it, throwing an interception near the goal line with a chance to put it away.

The Steelers would need one more score. And Ward would get it by teaming with the Steelers' most versatile player.

Randle El was the X-factor in Super Bowl XL, the college quarterback turned receiver who can catch the ball, run with it or throw it. He had already thrown a 51-yard touchdown pass this season in a victory over Cleveland.

Offensive coordinator Ken Whisenand decided to include the same play in his Super Bowl playbook, and Pittsburgh waited for the perfect time to call it.

The Steelers had gone conservative all game, getting away from the air-it-out approach that helped them win three playoff games on the road. The last thing the Seahawks expected was a trick play with

Please see **STEELERS** on B

From L: Ben Roethlisberger gets ready to throw a pass to a waiting receiver while Bryant McFadden and Joey Porter celebrate a well earned Super Bowl victory. For Pittsburgh, the victory could not have been much sweeter, especially for longtime rusher Jerome Bettis and coach Bill Cowles.

Photos courtesy of google.com

Putting the best in baseball to the test Inaugural World Baseball Classic Set for March 3-20, 2006

By TIM NARRIGAN
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Baseball's long wait for a World Cup-style international tournament, with the game's best professional players representing their countries, is finally over. This March, a 16 team tournament will take place that will allow Major League Baseball players to represent their countries instead of minor league players that have traditionally been the only players eligible to play in international tournaments.

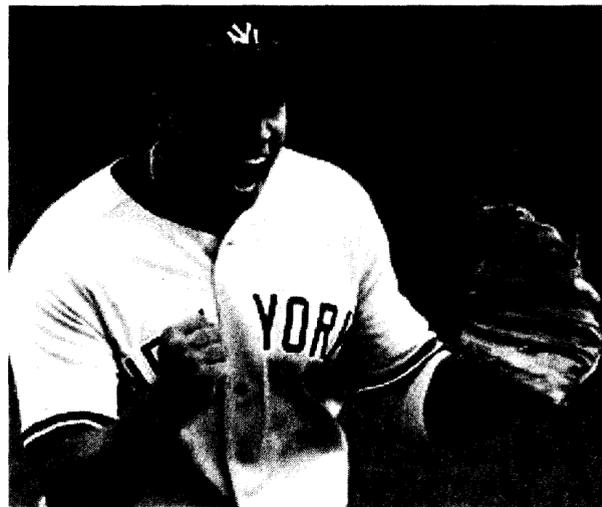
The tournament will include 39 games total, with two rounds of pool play and a four-team single-elimination round that finally culminates with a winner-take-all title game March 20th. ESPN and ESPN2 will televise 16 games live, including the semifinals on March 8th and the finals on March 20th.

Additionally, for all the advanced Spanish speaking students or any one else who actually gets this channel, ESPN Deportes will show all 39 games of the tournament.

For all the serious baseball fans out there, I'm sure you're asking yourself, "why didn't anyone think of this before?" Trust me, this idea had been floating around for nearly a decade, but with so many obstacles and drawbacks from so many sides, a tournament like this was just never feasible.

The major roadblocks had been when and where a tournament could take place and the issue of injury risk to players.

Major League Baseball and the Major League Baseball Players' Association (MLBPA) had little options in determining when a tournament could take place. The baseball season itself lasts from April to October.



Alex Rodriguez of the New York Yankees will be joining fellow teammate Derek Jeter for the World Baseball Classic in March, unlike other big name baseball stars such as Barry Bonds.

Photos courtesy of worldbaseballclassic.com

The tournament wouldn't be able to work if it began directly after the 70 season, because after a long and grueling season, pitchers' arms are tired and they are most susceptible to injuries. November through January is dominated by football, so there would never be enough interest to host a baseball event then.

February is often the coldest month in the year, so baseball just wouldn't seem right then as well. So March was set as the date basically by default, and even March is not at all ideal because it interferes with the most captivating three weeks in all of sports, March Madness.

Where the tournament could be held was another major obstacle. The United States obviously has the best facilities but, to prevent a U.S. bias and to increase worldwide popularity of the event, it was decided that tournament games would be held in other countries as well. For the first round, Pool A's games will be held

in Tokyo, Japan, Pool B in Phoenix, Arizona, Pool C in San Juan, Puerto Rico, and Pool D in Orlando, Florida. The second round games will be split between ballparks in Anaheim, California and San Juan, Puerto Rico and the final will be held in PETCO Park in San Diego, California.

Without a doubt, the biggest concern of having an international tournament is player injuries before the season starts. In the eyes of team owners, who have millions of dollars riding on the health of their star players, an international tournament can only spell disaster for their team's aspirations if one of their players gets hurt.

However, insurance to cover player contracts in the event of injuries during the tournament has been addressed to MLB's satisfaction. Additionally, MLB teams can not block any of their players from playing in the tournament, so the World Baseball Classic has no

limitations on players being allowed to play in the tournament.

There is still one major problem with this tournament, however: having all the superstar players actually agree to play in the event. Many big-name players have decided not to play in the tournament, most notably Barry Bonds. The World Baseball Classic will not have its full potential of star power (at least this year).

Having less than all of the best players play is certainly disappointing, but also expected. After all, no one knows how successful this tournament will be.

However, I do believe the future of this event is very bright. There is a lot of pride between countries and eventually rivalries will form that will make this tournament special.

World Classic Facts

- * Pool A includes: Japan, Korea, Taiwan, and China
- Pool B: Puerto Rico, Cuba, Panama, and Italy
- Pool C: United States, Canada, Mexico, and South Africa
- Pool D: Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Australia, and the Netherlands
- * Team Roster size: up to 30 players
- * All players will be subject to Olympic-style drug testing in accordance with an Anti-Doping Agreement signed by MLB, the MLBPA and the International Baseball Federation (IBAF)



Dave Nilsson retired in 1999, but returned to play for Australia in the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece. He will be participating in this year's Inaugural World Baseball Classic in March 2006.