

Roethlisberger reminisces about career

By **ALAN ROBINSON**
AP Sports Writer

Ben Roethlisberger looks at what has occurred in his life since winning the AFC championship game in Denver and almost can't believe it's been less than 10 months.

Becoming the youngest quarterback to win the Super Bowl. The motorcycle accident that left him with a surgically repaired face. The two concussions. The emergency appendectomy that kept him out of the Pittsburgh Steelers' opener. His five losses in six starts this season, or one more loss than in his first two NFL seasons combined.

"It's tough because you set the bar so high the first two years that you'll forget you won the Super Bowl last season," Roethlisberger said as he looked to Sunday's rematch in Pittsburgh with the Broncos. "But, hey, that's the way it goes. You've got to start playing better. I've got to start playing better."

He also needs to stay healthy, and he knows it. Maybe that's why he disclosed Wednesday for the first time that he's not riding a motorcycle any longer. Previously, he said only that he would put on a helmet when doing so.

Roethlisberger's motorcycle crash June 12 left him with the first of two concussions he has had this year, a battered face that required seven hours of surgery and other more minor injuries. He returned for training camp, but his season has been disrupted by the appendicitis attack and a second concussion, this one on the field, Oct. 22 in Atlanta.

Asked if he wishes he hadn't gotten on a motorcycle, especially without

a helmet, the 24-year-old said, "Not at all. I'm not going to sit there and regret things that I've done. That was a decision I made and I'm not going to look back and regret it."

Roethlisberger was cleared to play last weekend in Oakland, but responded by throwing four interceptions — two for touchdowns — in a 20-13 loss to a team widely considered the AFC's worst. It also was the worst game of his three-season career, and coach Bill Cowher said Tuesday that three interceptions were preventable.

Roethlisberger agreed he must make better decisions, but does not sound like someone who regrets taking some risks on the field, either.

"You just go out there and play the game the way you know how to play it," he said. "That's how I play and I'm not going to change. That's how I play football. It's worked for me and hopefully we'll turn it around."

Roethlisberger is going against a Denver defense that allowed only two touchdowns in six games before giving up three, all by Colts receiver Reggie Wayne, in a 34-31 loss Sunday to Indianapolis.

That Denver defense has undergone some schematic adjustments since losing 34-17 in the AFC championship game, when Roethlisberger threw two touchdowns passes while leading Pittsburgh to a 24-3 halftime lead. He was 21-of-29 for 275 yards, the kind of accuracy and production a quarterback needs to win a big game.

The Steelers (2-5) might need

a similar game Sunday by Roethlisberger to turn around a season that couldn't have gone much worse so far, either for the team or the quarterback.

"Teams are kind of gunning for you a little harder because you are the champs," Roethlisberger said. "And so we are definitely getting everybody's best shot, and I think that we definitely need to step up and start playing better football."

Following his eventful offseason, Roethlisberger looked rusty in losing his first three starts.

But he was 32-of-41 for 476 yards, five touchdowns and no interceptions in seven quarters against the Chiefs and Falcons until receiving his latest concussion.

Since then, Roethlisberger has talked to several former quarterbacks who offered advice on how to deal with his uneven play. He didn't reveal any names, though he has spoken frequently in the past with NFL career passing leader Dan Marino.

"You're always going to go through these stretches," Roethlisberger said. "I've talked to so many great quarterbacks the last couple of weeks, and they say you're going to have these stretches, and it isn't going to be the last time you have a stretch like this."

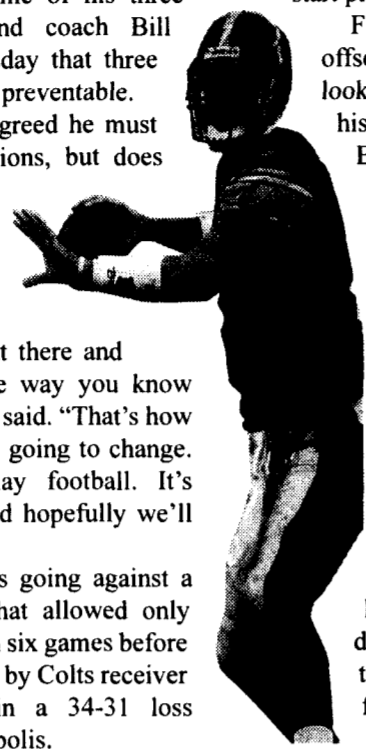


Photo courtesy of Google Images
Ben Roethlisberger, the youngest quarterback to win the Super Bowl, promises to give the Steelers a much needed win.

Posluszny poised for greatness

By **GENARO C. ARMAS**
Associated Press

Paul Posluszny's trophies from the 2005 season have been collecting dust in his parents' basement. Mom and Dad may soon need to clear space for some new hardware.

The hard-nosed senior is again making big stops for Penn State, though 2006 didn't start quite as smoothly as last year's star-turning campaign, when Posluszny earned awards as the nation's best defensive player and linebacker.

Posluszny suffered a serious right knee injury during the Orange Bowl in January that limited him in the offseason. After going through rehabilitation, Posluszny was moved from outside to inside at the start of the season as coach Joe Paterno switched to a four-linebacker scheme. It took a while for Posluszny

to get comfortable with the defense and his rehabbed knee.

Not that Purdue coach Joe Tiller noticed a difference.

"He looks like he came from the womb playing linebacker," said Tiller, whose Boilermakers (5-3, 2-2 Big Ten) host the Nittany Lions (5-3, 3-2) on Saturday. "The great ones are that way."

Posluszny is a semifinalist again to be the nation's top defender and linebacker. And he might soon be able to add this to his resume — he's 17 tackles shy of tying Greg Buttle's career record of 343 at Linebacker U.

"It's always good to hear. Anytime something comes up, it's not just for any particular player, it's for the defense in general," Posluszny said about the accolades. "But the most important thing right now is Purdue. The most important thing is winning."

Reserved off the field, "Pos" is a fiery competitor on gameday, so renowned for his leadership that teammates elected him the first two-time captain at Penn State since 1968-69.

He's a bookworm, too, having been the seventh Nittany Lion to earn All-America and Academic All-America honors in the same season. Posluszny has talked in the past of joining the military, though undoubtedly an NFL career awaits.

"Paul is one of the best linebackers that we've ever had," said Paterno, in his 41st year as head coach.

Still, there were questions about his knee to start the season. Posluszny was carted off the field during the Orange Bowl with two partially torn ligaments in his right knee.

He was held back from full contact at spring practice, but pronounced himself 100 percent to start the preseason. Team doctors have insisted

Paterno promises better offense for the Lions

By **GENARO C. ARMAS**
Associated Press

His son's birthday party provided just a brief respite. By the time Joe Paterno returned home, he got back to business.

A top priority this week was fixing what ails the Penn State offense, and in particular, the offensive line.

"I went over there for a couple of hours, we came home and I started to try to figure out what we might be able to do to make us a better football team against Purdue," Paterno said about the short trip to his son Jay's house for his 38th birthday party on Saturday. The shindig followed the team's less-than-inspiring offensive performance in a 26-12 win over Illinois.

Actually, father and son, who is the Nittany Lions' quarterbacks coach, both have some work to do for this week's critical game against the Boilermakers (5-3, 2-2 Big Ten). The outcome could go a long way toward determining whether Penn State (5-3, 3-2) can stay on target for a New Year's Day bowl game.

But before the Lions start dreaming about spending the holidays somewhere warm, there's a matter of fixing the offensive line, which has struggled the last two weeks.

The running game behind Tony Hunt has sputtered and quarterback Anthony Morelli who returned from a concussion last week often hasn't a lot of time to throw.

Paterno was so upset last week that he called the offense "lousy" about a half-dozen times. His tune changed slightly after watching film the last couple of days.

"There were some aspects of it that were better than I thought they were. Overall, I didn't think it was a particularly good performance by us," he said.

Paterno had a couple of possible explanations for the line's play against the Illini.

First, their legs may not have been as fresh after the unit had to put extra time in during the previous week to accommodate more practice for third- and fourth-string quarterbacks, the coach said. Morelli and backup Daryll Clark (concussion) weren't cleared to play until two days before the Illini game.

Second, Paterno has had to mix-and-match on the line due to injuries or ineffectiveness. More shuffling could come this week, too.

"We are not doing anything different from week to week, but we are doing it with different people," Paterno said. "That has hurt them. I am

hopeful that we will get better."

Questions about the line have also limited what plays Penn State can call, Paterno said. Throwing over the middle isn't as much of an option because it takes longer for those plays to develop, and that means more time needed to protect the quarterback.

The tight ends and running backs haven't had many looks either.

Receiver Deon Butler suggested that perhaps some players need to get more vocal on the field.

"Halfway through the season, it just seems our offense doesn't have a lot of spunk out there," Butler said. "It doesn't seem that we have the same fire as last season."

"Us being the older guys, the wideouts having played in big games before and having had last season under our belt, we have to be able to adjust and be able to lead a team," he said.

"We have to step out of our shell a little bit, be more vocal. ... Maybe that's what we have to do to get this offense rolling."

Paterno wouldn't mind more success running the ball, too.

"Our problem is the running game. It is hard to throw the football when you can't run any better than we have been able to run," he said. "We are pecking away. I don't know how else to tell you."

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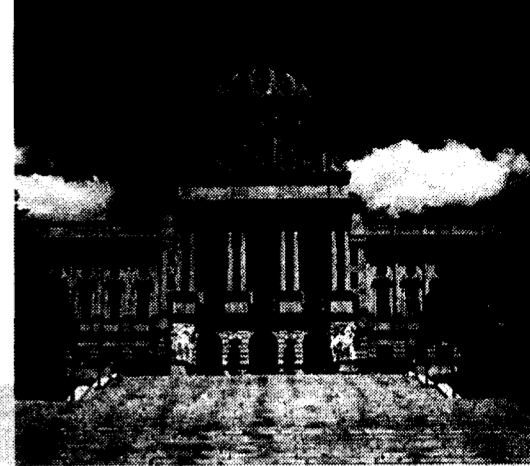
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that Posluszny wear a knee brace as a precaution, an order that the senior begrudgingly accepts.

Then coaches threw him another curve and asked him to play inside linebacker. With a lack of experienced linemen, the switch allowed Paterno to move Tim Shaw from middle linebacker to a hybrid defensive end/outside linebacker position and get young, talented Sean Lee into the starting lineup outside.

Posluszny didn't complain, though there were some early question marks.

He looked out of position at times and missed tackles on plays that appeared to be automatic hits last year. Some wondered if Posluszny was a step slower because of the knee.

"It seemed like at the beginning of

the year with the first game, I didn't have double-digit tackles, and for some, they said, 'This kid is terrible now.' That was interesting, to say the least," Posluszny said.

Coaches dismissed questions about his knee, though Posluszny did say he felt more limited earlier in the season wearing a heavier brace. These days, he sports a smaller, less obtrusive contraption on the knee.

The biggest challenge was mental. "I feel so much more comfortable now," he said. "I'm starting to finally feel at home at the position."

Not good news for opponents.

"Mentally, he's running the whole show," defensive coordinator Tom Bradley said.

The highlight-reel plays such as his takedown of Ohio State quarterback

Troy Smith from behind during a night game last year at Beaver Stadium aren't as frequent. Freewheeling outside linebackers often get more chances to make those kinds of plays.

He still made the highlights last week, bringing Illinois' Isaiah Williams down from behind and reaching for the quarterback's right arm just enough to cause a fumble that led to Tony Davis' 6-yard touchdown return. The score gave the Nittany Lions' struggling offense some breathing room in a 26-12 win.

Posluszny went to Shaw for advice earlier in the year about playing inside, counsel that isn't needed as much anymore.

"He's got it pretty much down pat," Shaw said. "I knew it wouldn't take him that long."

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