

# Eagles hit the road

By **ROB MAADDI**  
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) - Even in a mediocre conference in which every team seems to have a chance at making the playoffs, the Philadelphia Eagles face a daunting task.

The Eagles are not only hitting the road for the next three weeks, they're playing against division rivals. No team has played three straight road games within its division in December or January since the New York Giants did it to finish the strike-shortened 1982 season, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

When coach Andy Reid first saw the team's schedule in the spring, he couldn't have been pleased.

"I thought you guys had something to do with it," he jokingly said to reporters Wednesday.

At 6-6, the Eagles are tied with three other teams for the final two wild-card spots in the NFC. They beat one of those teams (Carolina) on Monday night, and will play the other two (Giants and Atlanta) in the final month.

The Eagles travel to Washington (4-8) this week, followed by games against the Giants and the East-leading Dallas Cowboys on Christmas before finishing at home against the Falcons on New Year's Eve.

"I was hoping we wouldn't be in a nip-and-tuck situation, but since we are, we have to be ready," veteran safety Brian Dawkins said. "Hopefully we got some things out of our system now that this opportunity, or now that crunch time, has come."

After starting 4-1, the Eagles figured to be playing for home-field advantage down the stretch. Instead, they lost five of six and find themselves battling for a playoff spot in a tight race that likely will come down to the final week.

A 27-24 victory over the Panthers invigorated a team that suffered a major emotional

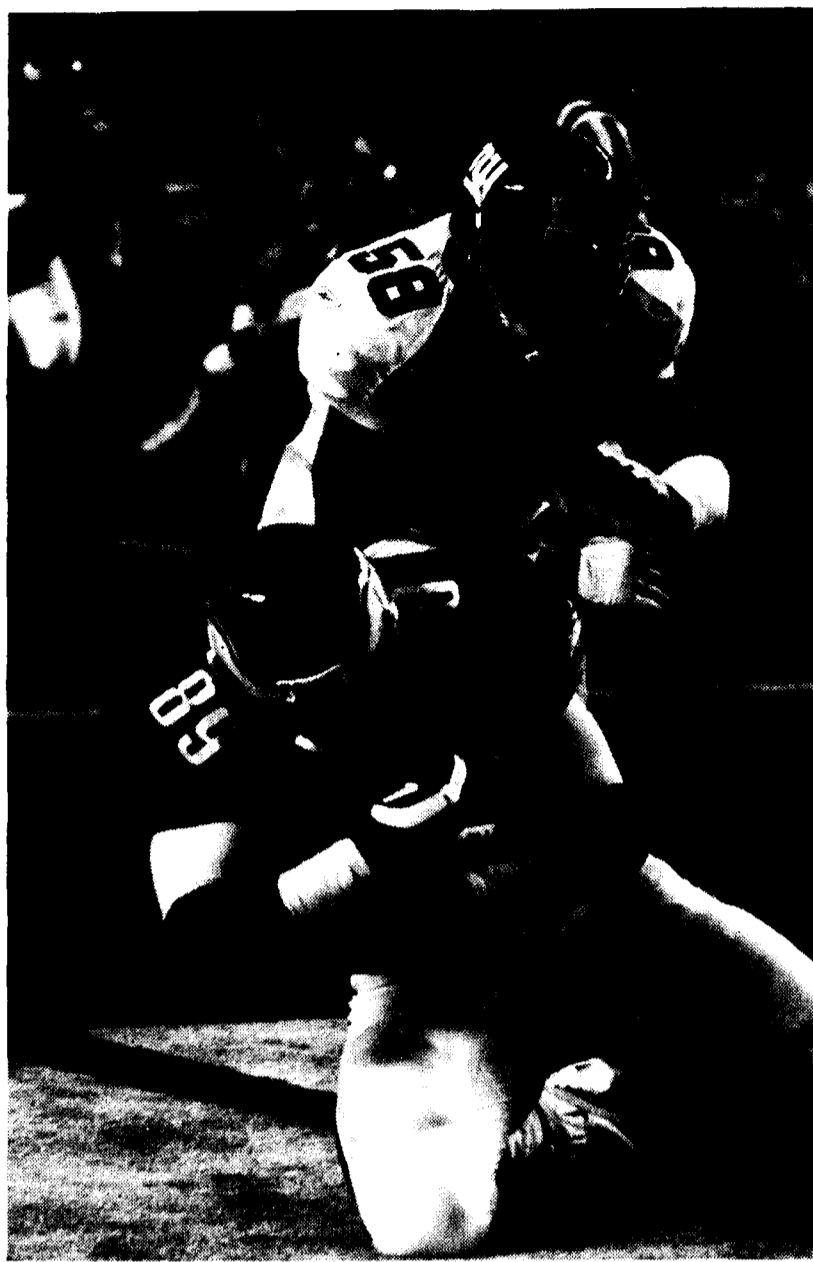


Photo courtesy of Google Images

The Philadelphia Eagles are up for a slew of tough end of the season games, but look forward to the challenge in typical Eagles' style.

letdown when quarterback Donovan McNabb sustained a season-ending knee injury two weeks earlier. Backup Jeff Garcia has filled in nicely for McNabb, throwing for 312 yards and three TDs against a tough Carolina defense.

"We just need to continue to grow off of what was established Monday night," Garcia said. "I think there has to be even more of an urgency to better ourselves, even more of a discipline-type scenario as far as studying, being in the playbook,

getting yourself healthy, doing the right things."

Though Dallas (8-4) has a two-game advantage atop the division standings, the Eagles still have a shot at finishing first. If Philadelphia wins out and the Cowboys go 2-2, the Eagles would capture the division title.

"I don't even know who we play next," receiver Donte Stallworth said. "All I know is we have the Redskins on Sunday and that's a tough challenge."

# Paterno says he has no plans to step away and will coach at Outback bowl

The resilient coach will not abandon his Nittany Lions now or ever

By **GENARO C. ARMAS**  
Associated Press

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) - Joe Paterno won't let a broken left leg slow him down or knock him out of football.

The 79-year-old Paterno said Sunday he intends to lead the Nittany Lions (8-4) from the sidelines at the Outback Bowl on Jan. 1 and coach for at least another couple years.

"I don't want to walk away from it because of this little bit of a setback," Paterno said in a teleconference. "I had not intended to walk away from it in the next couple years because I didn't have any plans, and I still don't have any plans to walk away."

Ordered to stay off his feet since undergoing surgery a month ago, JoePa hasn't been able to pace the sidelines in his rolled-up khakis and blue-and-white jacket since getting walloped by two players during a Nov. 4 game at Wisconsin.

Paterno skipped his team's next game against Temple but returned to a Beaver Stadium press box the following week to catch the Nittany Lions' tense 17-13 win over Michigan State in the regular-season finale on Nov. 18.

"It's not like being on the sidelines," said Paterno, making his first comments to reporters since fracturing the shinbone and tearing two knee ligaments in his left leg. "It never will be."

No wonder JoePa is so anxious to

get back to field level for the Outback Bowl. Paterno, who turns 80 on Dec. 21, also learned Sunday that the Nittany Lions' opponent will be No. 17 Tennessee (9-3).

Paterno doesn't know whether he will be able to lead his squad from his feet or while watching from a golf cart. That's his doctor's call.

"I'm expecting to be doing a lot of

of the 2008 season.

In his 41st year leading Penn State, Paterno will make his record 33rd trip to a bowl game. He's also the career leader in postseason victories with 21.

Getting ready for this year's bowl has been a little more difficult. First, he's got to figure in time for rehab and getting flexibility back in the left leg.

"And I'm way ahead of that. I go out there, I have as much flexibility in my left leg as my right leg. I'm getting closer all the time," he said.

Paterno was told to stay off his feet for six weeks after the surgery, but with Week 5 coming up, the anxious coach said he's trying to convince his doctors to give him a head start.

On the job, he's back at practice, and had been watching tapes of Tennessee and Auburn, another potential bowl opponent.

Now, he can just concentrate on the Volunteers.

Tennessee is headed to Tampa for the first time since the end of the 1992 season, when they beat Boston College in what was then known as the Hall of Fame Bowl.

Penn State last went to the Outback Bowl to cap the 1998

campaign, defeating Kentucky 26-14.

"The rehab has gone well," Paterno said. "I'm looking forward to getting to down Florida and running around a little bit."



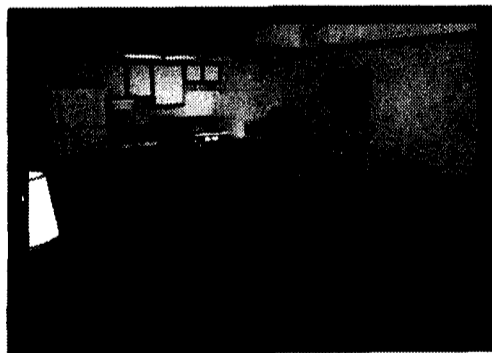
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Although JoePa may be confined to his golfcart during the Outback Bowl game, he will be on the sidelines coaching his beloved Penn State football team.

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