

FOOTBALL RECAP: Penn State season 2008

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Rubin. In a play now known as "The Fumble", Rubin poked the ball out with his left hand. A mad scramble ensued when star linebacker Navarrow Bowman recovered.

With starting QB Daryl Clark sidelined with a concussion, back up Pat Devlin led Penn State to the game winning touchdown drive. They went on to add a field goal and win 13-6. Penn State appeared to be bound for the National Championship. Then the unthinkable happened.

November 8, 2008 in Iowa's Kinnich Stadium, the unranked

Hawkeyes stunned the nation's number three ranked team on a last second field goal 24-23. Daniel Murray's 31 yard attempt sailed through the uprights leaving many Nittany Lion fans somberly remembering 1999, a season where Penn State also started 9-0 and lost on a last second field goal to an unranked team, 24-23.

With their National Title hopes dashed, the Blue and White still had the conference crown to claim. A home game against overmatched Indiana provided the right medicine for an emotionally ailing squad as Penn State won 38-7. In this game, four-year starter Deon Butler broke the school record for

career receptions on a textbook 12 yard out right in front of the Nittany Lion bench. Now with a 6-1 record, there was just one game between Penn State and a Big Ten championship and a trip to Pasadena and the Rose Bowl. The Michigan State Spartans.

Snow and merciless cold couldn't freeze Penn State from accomplishing their goal on Senior Day in Happy Valley. Deon Butler had 3 receptions for 133 yards and all three went for scores as Penn State clubbed Michigan State 49-18.

Although Ohio State finished with the same conference record, Penn State won the automatic bid to the Rose Bowl by way of the victory over them earlier in

the season. The date would be the Southern California Trojans, the hottest team in the country.

USC had dominated Big Ten teams three straight seasons in this bowl, but with the scored tied at 7-7 after the first quarter, it looked as though the Lions could pull the upset.

Then they forgot to play the second quarter. USC outscored Penn State 24-0 in the frame before halftime and never looked back. Joe Paterno's squad managed to claw back within 14 but got no closer in a 38-24 loss that was not as close as the score indicated.

As if the loss didn't sting enough, the Penn State Nation learned that standout defensive

ends Aaron Maybin and Maurice Evans would forego the remainder of their careers and enter the NFL draft. This coupled with the transfer of backup quarterback Pat Devlin leaves the Lions in a bit of a hole for 2009, but with 1,000+ and 500+ yard rushers Royster and Green returning and nearly 2,600 yard passer Clark back, the Lions offense doesn't seem to be ready to lose a step from this year's "Spread HD" offense. The complete revamping of the defensive secondary could lead to some growing pains, however.

An 11-2 season and a Big Ten title for 2008. Not bad for a team that was still "a year away".

Bettis in new role at Super Bowl

By FRED GOODALL
AP SPORTS WRITER

Pittsburgh is back at the Super Bowl, and so is retired Steelers running back Jerome Bettis.

The Bus broke out his NFL championship ring from three years ago for interviews Tuesday as part of NBC's broadcast team for Sunday's title game. He said it feels a little strange to be here as a pregame analyst rather than playing for his former team.

"It's kind of weird because you know the experience and you're familiar with it, and you're familiar with the guys. But now you're kind of on the outside looking in, instead of on the inside looking out," Bettis said.

"But it's fun because for me there's no pressure. I get a chance to interact with the guys. ... I can still get access without the other pressures. A little part of me says: 'Man, you possibly could be in that game.' But the other side of me says: 'Naw, I wouldn't have been able to make it to this point.' Bettis, who rushed for 10,571 yards and 78 touchdowns for the Steelers from 1996-2005, retired after Pittsburgh won its fifth Super Bowl by beating Seattle 21-10 in his hometown of Detroit.

He's made a smooth transition from the playing field to life after football and said he rarely wears his championship ring.

"The first couple of months I wouldn't take it off," he said. "Now, it's just media situations."

Bettis has spoken with several of his former teammates, but hasn't offered any advice for Sunday's game against the Arizona Cardinals.

"I really haven't told them anything. I've just talked to them as a friend, as a confidant, not really as 'hey, do this, do that,' because they've all been here before. ... They know what needs to be done. So it was really just congratulating them and letting them know this is a great opportunity for them and don't lose sight of it."

Bettis rushed for 43 yards on 14 carries in his only Super Bowl appearance, and the Steelers won despite a poor performance by Ben Roethlisberger, who threw for just 123 yards, no touchdowns and two interceptions.

He expects to see a different Roethlisberger in this title game.

"If he doesn't play well, they don't win. It's not like a couple of years ago when we didn't need him to play his best game," Bettis said.

"It's definitely a different situation, and the pressure is on him a little bit more now. But I think he's better prepared for it, having gone through the last Super Bowl. ... He'll be the first to say he didn't play well. But this game, you're going to see a different Ben because he's a more confident player."

A man of few words who rarely grants interviews, Cardinals owner Bill Bidwill shed some light during media day on what he did to celebrate Arizona's victory

over the Philadelphia Eagles in the NFC championship game.

"I went home, finished off the morning coffee in the microwave, went to bed and got a good night's sleep," said the 77-year-old, known for his thrifty ways in operating a franchise his family has owned since 1932. "Then I woke up with a smile."

The Cardinals are in the Super Bowl for the first time and haven't appeared in the NFL title game since 1948, when the team was located in Chicago. Asked if his perseverance has paid off, Bidwill quipped: "We'll we're here," adding that he never considered selling the team during lean years.

"I love the business. I'm accustomed to it," he said. "I don't let it get to me if we have a bad game or a bad year. I just go back into it and try to get better."

When he became the NFL's youngest head coach earlier this month, Tampa Bay's Raheem Morris not only predicted the Steelers would wind up in the Super Bowl, but said he expected to glean some knowledge from close friend and Pittsburgh coach Mike Tomlin when the team arrived in town.

The 32-year-old Morris and Tomlin worked together for four seasons, helping the Bucs win the NFL title six years ago.

"He's not going to get much of an opportunity to pick my brain this week, I can promise you that," said Tomlin, who was 34 when the Steelers hired him two years ago.

Not that the Pittsburgh coach believes he needs to give Morris a lot of tips.

"Raheem is a great natural leader, great communicator and a great student of the game. He is going to very well here," Tomlin said.

"The guys that he works with understand what he brings to the table from an ability standpoint. ... He is a very unselfish guy. He is going to put those he leads in front of him, making sure that they get what they need to be successful. It's not surprising to me in the least bit that he is where he is today. It's an opportunity that is well-earned and well-deserved."

Arizona receiver Anquan Boldin says the well-publicized blowup he had with offensive coordinator Todd Haley during the NFC championship game is a "non-issue" that the Cardinals put to rest before arriving in Tampa.

In fact, the four-time Pro Bowl selection has had nothing but complimentary things to say about Haley this week, including thoughts on how the Cardinals assistant would be as a head coach.

"He would be a good head coach. Like I said, he challenges players and he has a lot of insight about the game," Boldin said. "He has been in coaching now for a while, it kind of runs through his family. His dad has been a coach at a very high level for some time. He knows what he is doing."

As soon as it became clear the Arizona Cardinals had beaten the Philadelphia Eagles for the NFC championship, Wayne Leonard

didn't waste any time celebrating.

Instead, he searched for a quiet spot in University of Phoenix Stadium and made a call to Delta Air Lines.

"I was afraid of airline tickets going up bigtime. Airlines kind of have a reputation of when they find out something like this, they might jack up the prices," Leonard said.

The Chandler, Ariz., resident is one of many die-hard Cardinals fans who have spent the last month lying in wait to chart a course to Tampa for the Super Bowl. Some will actually attend the game, while others are settling for just being in Florida.

Leonard, a season-ticket holder since 1990, said he still can't believe how his strategic planning has paid off. The \$400 redeye flight he booked for Sunday is now going for \$1,500. He isn't worried about flying at such a late hour.

"I'll be too pumped up. I probably won't be able to sleep the night before anyway."

While watching the Cardinals seemed priceless, Leonard still wanted to do it all without breaking the bank. Figuring Eagles fans would be canceling reservations, he waited a couple of days after the NFC championship to find lodging. He managed to find a hotel room for \$300 a night five miles from the stadium.

"I'm thinking my total expense for this trip will be close to \$2,000 with ticket, airfare, rental car and the hotel. I think that's pretty good," Leonard said.