

Police on lookout for glasses from JoePa statue

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. (AP) — Penn State police are looking out for Joe Paterno's Coke bottle-thick glasses — the bronzed ones that were perched on the statue of the iconic football coach that stands outside Beaver Stadium.

Vandals apparently cut the glasses off just above the base of the ears of the 7-foot sculpture between 11 a.m. Friday and 11 a.m. Saturday, when a police officer noticed the damage.

An officer "observed someone had removed the glasses from the Joe Paterno statue located on the east side of Beaver Stadium," said a university police log.

Deputy Chief Tyrone Parham said Wednesday that the statue was vandalized once before several years ago. The extent of the damage then was not known.

"We're hopeful that someone contacts us if they have any information on who may be involved," Parham said.

The school plans to replace the glasses, though assistant athletic

director Jeff Nelson said it is unclear how much that might cost.

The statue, which weighs more than 900 pounds, was unveiled in Nov. 2001.

It depicts a smiling Paterno with one hand in the air, index finger raised, running as if he's leading his team out of the tunnel in the stadium.

Besides the glasses, it's trademark JoePa, complete with a tie blown to one side and his pant legs rolled up just above his Nike sneakers.

The sculpture was commissioned by friends of the Paternos and the university, and created by Angelo DiMaria of Bush Designs in Reading.

A message left at Bush Designs' office was not immediately returned.

Paterno, 82, is major college football's winningest coach. He's led the Nittany Lions for a record 43 seasons, and recently signed a three-year extension.

Cheerleading is a contact sport, Wis. court rules

By RYAN J. FOLEY
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MADISON, Wis. (AP) — High school cheerleading is a contact sport and therefore its participants cannot be sued for accidentally causing injuries, the Wisconsin Supreme Court ruled Tuesday in a case being closely watched in the cheerleading world.

The court ruled that a former high school cheerleader cannot sue a teammate who failed to stop her fall while she was practicing a stunt. The court also said the injured cheerleader cannot sue her school district.

The National Cheer Safety Foundation said the decision is the first of its kind in the nation.

At issue in the case was whether cheerleaders qualify for immunity under a Wisconsin law that prevents participants in contact sports from suing each other for unintentional injuries.

It does not spell out which sports are contact sports. The District 4 Court of Appeals ruled last year cheerleading didn't qualify because there's no contact between opposing teams.

But all seven members of the Supreme Court agreed Tuesday to overturn that decision. In the opinion, Justice Annette Ziegler said cheerleading involves "a significant amount of physical

contact between the cheerleaders." As an example, she cited stunts in which cheerleaders are tossed in the air.

The lawsuit was brought by Brittany Noffke, who was a varsity cheerleader at Holmen High School in western Wisconsin. While practicing a stunt in 2004, Noffke fell backward off the shoulders of another cheerleader and suffered a serious head injury.

She sued a 16-year-old male teammate who was supposed to be her spotter but failed to catch her; the school district; and the district's insurer.

Ziegler rejected Noffke's argument that "contact sports" should mean only aggressive sports such as football and hockey. She wrote they should include any sport that includes "physical contact between persons."

"I think it's groundbreaking, but I'm disappointed in the result," said attorney Tracy Tool, who represented Noffke.

Tool would not elaborate on Noffke's injuries or say if she has fully recovered.

The decision means cheerleaders can be sued only for acting recklessly. The court said Noffke's teammate only made a mistake or showed a lack of skill. As for the school district, Ziegler said it cannot be sued for the coach's

behavior under a Wisconsin law that shields government agencies from lawsuits for the actions of employees.

Many observers had warned that families of cheerleaders would be forced to take out big insurance policies if the lower court decision stood.

Because of the increasingly difficult stunts, injuries among high school cheerleaders are a problem. Researchers at the University of North Carolina have found that two-thirds of the roughly 100 cases of "catastrophic" sports injuries among high school girls since 1982 have involved cheerleading.

More than 95,000 female students and 2,100 male students take part in high school cheerleading every year, according to the North Carolina researchers.

Most state athletic governing bodies do not regulate cheerleading. Those that do make a distinction between "competitive spirit squads" and sideline cheerleading, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations. The group writes voluntary rules for cheerleading that do not have the force of law.

"There's a lot of gray area about whether it's a sport or an activity," said spokesman Bruce Howard.



Photo courtesy of KATECAV on Flickr.com

Penn State DE Maybin declares for NFL draft

ELLCOTT CITY, Md. (AP) — All-American defensive end Aaron Maybin will skip his final two seasons at Penn State and declare for the NFL draft.

The 6-foot-4, 245-pound sophomore led the Big Ten with 12 sacks and finished with 49 tackles — 20 for loss — as the Nittany Lions went 11-1 before losing 38-24 to Southern California in the Rose Bowl.

Maybin will be one of the top defensive ends available and is a likely first-round pick.

"Leaving Penn State was one of the most difficult decisions I've faced," the third-year sophomore said in a statement. "In the end, I've decided this is an opportunity I would like to pursue."

Maybin announced his decision after speaking to students at his former high school, Mt. Hebron,

in Ellicott City.

A year after recording four sacks in spot duty, Maybin emerged as a defensive leader and helped Penn State rebound from a series of off-the-field distractions.

Fellow defensive end Maurice Evans — who had led Penn State with 12.5 sacks the previous season — and Abe Koroma were suspended for three games for marijuana possession. A pair of defensive tackles, Chris Baker and Phil Taylor, were kicked off the team over the summer for undisclosed reasons.

Maybin led a Nittany Lions defense that allowed just over 12 points per game during the regular season and would likely have played for the national championship if not for a last-second field goal in a 24-23 loss to Iowa.

Also Tuesday, Penn State an-

nounced that backup tailback Stephon Green had successful surgery on his right ankle, which the redshirt freshman dislocated during a fourth-quarter carry at the Rose Bowl.

Green will need three to four months of rehabilitation, which will keep him out of spring practice. He had a similar injury to the same ankle while in high school.

Green played much of the Rose Bowl in relief of starter Evan Royster, who injured his left knee in the first quarter.

Right tackle Dennis Landolt also departed the bowl game early because of a left knee injury. Team doctor Wayne Sebastianelli said in a statement that Landolt and Royster should be OK for spring practice, which begins in late March.