

Sports

Paterno talks turnovers

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Don't talk BCS with Joe Paterno.

Penn State's Hall of Fame coach says speculation about a lucrative Bowl Championship Series spot will be moot if the No. 13 Nittany Lions don't beat Michigan State this weekend.

"Don't make a darn bit of difference. You guys speculate all you want," Paterno said. "If we don't beat Michigan State, none of that makes any — none of it's important. So I don't waste time with it."

There are a multitude of potential postseason destinations for Penn State (9-2, 5-2 Big Ten), with the BCS a best-case scenario. They're No. 14 in the BCS standings, the cutoff to qualify for an at-large berth.

It's a great spot given Penn State hasn't beaten their two toughest opponents (Ohio State and Iowa at home) on its otherwise manageable schedule. Four first-half turnovers, including two fumbles on punt returns, nearly cost them a win last week over Big Ten cellar-dweller Indiana.

A field-goal attempt bounced off the right upright, too. Penn State shored up its punt coverage and blocking only to have mistakes pop up in other areas.

His voice tinged with a touch of sarcasm, Paterno revealed his plan to fix return problems. After all, he was once a standout punt returner when he played football at Brown — in the late 1940s.

"We're not going to let them punt," Paterno said with a straight face, drawing chuckles.

No seriously, Joe, how does the team get better?

"We got to try to catch the ball,"

he added before noting that the two fumbled punt returns last week came while the returners were trying to spark the struggling team.

The turnover problems against Indiana came after Penn State had lost just three turnovers over its previous six games, including a stretch of four games without a turnover.

Ball protection may be a point of emphasis once again this week. Defensively, Penn State has had slow starts on the road this year, as well as last week home against Indiana.

Linebacker Sean Lee believes there's a sense of urgency with the regular-season finale looming.

"Sure, with the games we've lost, the way we lost ... we should have put ourselves in better position to win those games," Lee said.

Elsewhere on the field, receiver Chaz Powell will likely miss

Saturday's game because of a right shoulder injury, meaning special teams will be down two key players given that tailback Brandon Beachum (right knee) is out for the year.

Powell's place on offense might be taken by freshman receiver Curtis Drake, a speedster who impressed last week with a 26-yard gain on a reverse and two catches for 34 yards.

Why didn't Drake play more earlier in the year?

"Because Powell is better," Paterno told a curious reporter. "Don't you go to games?"

Paterno said cornerback A.J. Wallace should be OK for Saturday after an apparent head injury last week, and that DeOn'tae Pannell will stay at guard after filling in on the left side last week for Johnnie Troutman (left calf).

Even if Penn State does beat Michigan State and remains in the

BCS top 14, there's no guarantee they would go to the BCS — though the popular Nittany Lions could be attractive to bowl organizers looking to draw TV ratings.

Iowa sits one spot ahead of Penn State in the BCS rankings and defeated the Nittany Lions in Happy Valley this season. Only two teams from each conference can make a BCS bowl. Ohio State already has one bid locked up as the Big Ten representative to the Rose Bowl.

With so many personnel issues to deal with on top of the media questions about special teams, Paterno doesn't want to talk bowl.

"I'm going to try to go out there and show those guys how I used to catch punts, ran for touchdowns every time I got my hands on the ball," he said. "See if we can beat Michigan State on a punt return so we can keep some of you guys happy."

Colts clinch tight victory

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New England coach Bill Belichick goes for it on fourth and two on the Colts 30-yard line. Fans for both teams certainly had their hearts lodged in their throats. If they make it, they win. If they do not give Peyton Manning, one of the greatest Quarter Back's to ever play the game a short field to convert the game winning touchdown; which is exactly what happened.

It was a brilliant game living up to the hype with 38-points scored in the first half alone and a total of 69-points scored in the game. There is a reason Colts vs. Pats has been dubbed the rivalry of the decade. Year after year these two teams are in top contention for the AFC championship and every time they meet its playoff caliber football. But as great of a rivalry as this is and as great of a game they both played Sunday

night all we will hear about for the ten years is Belichicks "horrible" call.

Was it really such a horrible call though? Peyton Manning had already engineered two eighty-yard drives in under two minutes this quarter. The only chance New England had to win this game was not to give Manning the ball and that is exactly what Belichich tried to do. When Manning and the Colts are hot there is no defense that can stop them and Belichich knows it. NFL analysts can say what they want about odds, but the fact is that nine times out of ten when the Colts are hot they score from anywhere on the field in two minutes, and nine times out of ten Tom Brady and the Patriots pick up two-yards when they need them. As fate had it, the Patriots came up just inches short and Manning ran out the clock before throwing the game-winning touchdown to Reggie Wayne, giving the Colts an apocalyptic 35-34 victory.

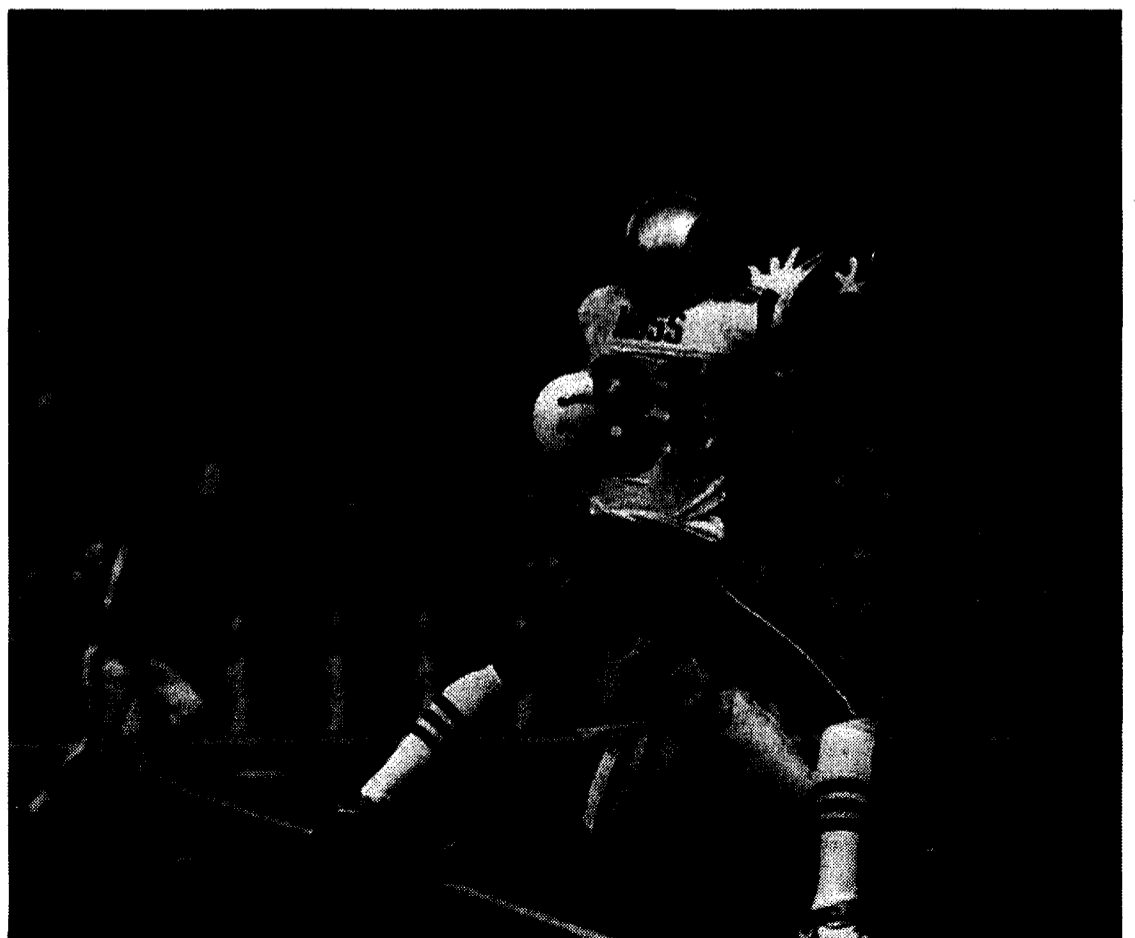


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