What they are predicting for Penn State

They don't mean a thing, nearly any coach will say.

They're merely for the fans.

Nonetheless, all of the big-time football universities will use them as promotional pieces, both in press releases and guides, and in recruiting pitches. Obviously, someone is paying attention to them.

The polls, rating services, magazine predictions. At best, their validity is suspect. A third-ranked team would be stronger than a 63rd-ranked team, certainly. But would a 12th-ranked team be tougher than one ranked 13th, or even 23rd?

Penn State coach Joe Paterno puts so little value in the polls that he refuses to vote in the one organized by United Press International, though many other major college coaches do. It is not worth his time.

But for those who have nothing better to do than read where Joe's team is supposed to wind up, days or hours could be spent thumbing through magazines, newspapers and tip sheets. A summary of some of the more interesting follows:

Sports Illustrated — This could be the shocker of all the pre-season ratings. SI, out on a couple of limbs, picked Texas to edge out Southern Cal for the national championship and picked Penn State to finish just one notch back of the Trojans. The explanation of the third-place prediction: "At the very least, Penn State should continue to fulfill its well-nigh solitary mission of keeping big-time college football alive east of the Alleghenies. Given
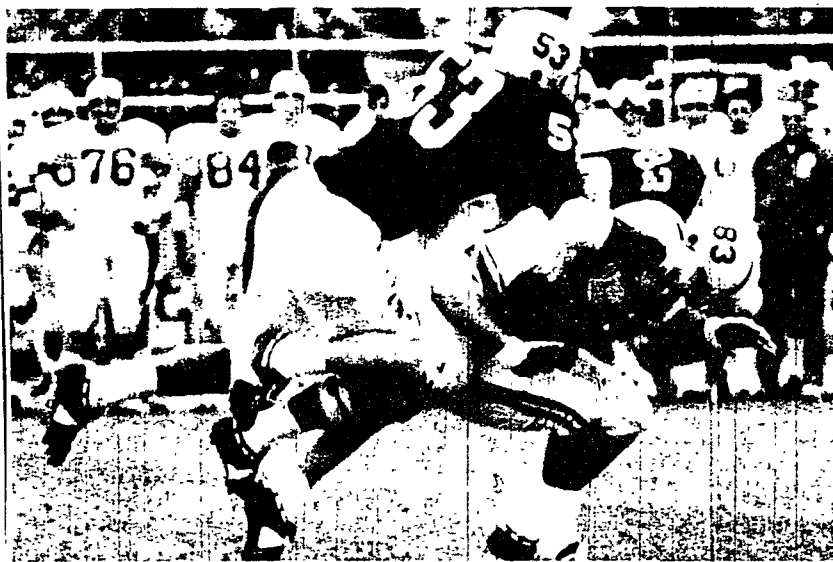

Photo by Randy J. Woodbury

Randy Crowder: All-America candidate to most

its schedule — oh, so easy with the Marylands and Navys — 10-1 is the worst it can be."

Popular Sports Kick-Off — "Tougher-than-usual schedule features early games at Stanford and Air Force but Lions should make another major bowl trip." The predicted finish was seventh; defensive tackle Randy Crowder was named an All-America candidate.

Street and Smith's College Football Yearbook—". . . Coach Joe does have an "Achilles Heel" at quarterback, where the celebrated John Hufnagel has graduated.

Inexperience could cause problems, especially early in the campaign. . . " Penn State was picked 10th; Crowder, tight end Dan Natale and linebacker Ed O'Neill were given All-America consideration.

College Sports Today — ". . . another 10-1 record will be hard to achieve because of the five away games, all figure tough. We feel the Lions will stumble three times." The 19th ranking included possible All-Americas in Crowder, Natale and O'Neil.

Additionally, the wire services placed the Nittany Lions seventh and 10th, while Dunkel's Index and The Sporting News both had them 10th. Other predictions fell pretty much in line with those mentioned. Running back John Cappelletti and offensive tackle Charlie Getty both gained notice elsewhere as possible All-Americas.

Not surprisingly, Penn State was a unanimous choice for the top position in the East, among those ratings surveyed.

The consensus, then? While it's not quite so diverse as that of West Virginia — which found itself picked 13th in the nation in one ranking and projected to go 2-8-1 in another — there is substantial area for debate. Penn State could well finish third; it will finish 19th. "10-1 is the worst it can be;" "another 10-1 record will be hard to achieve." The schedule is "oh, so easy," "tougher-than-usual," and has "five away games (which) all figure tough."

The choice is yours, at least until the season has been completed. Maybe Paterno has the right idea.

—Ray McAllister