



Photo by Eric Felack

Neil Hutton blocks and Duane Taylor attacks. Together, they got the chance to attack a Penn State tradition.

The truth on Penn State youth

DALLAS—"A-what about-a this Italian-a boy, hah?" the writer joked. He must have thought that a big Cotton Bowl win left room for jokes with Joe Paterno. But the subject was no joke to Paterno. He let an unintelligible phrase slip by. Then, "Hey come on, will ya let me enjoy this one?"

The "Italian-a boy" was freshman wingback Jim Cefalo, and since he accounted for one-third of Penn State's total yardage in the Cotton Bowl, it was understandable that the writer might want to talk about him. But Paterno's anguish discouraged such conversation.

Even as happy as he appeared on his dripping wet stroll from the showers where he'd been thrown, Paterno must have just ended a long season. His team had scratched and clawed just as he'd foreseen in August. But besides that, he had to do something he never really wanted to do.

Joe Paterno, who'd always spoken for the virtues of freshman teams and against the pressures of freshmen in varsity athletics, had to develop his game-breaking threat in a freshman. And Joe Paterno had to look to other freshman and sophomores to fill positions that in other years were easily manned by juniors and seniors.

Cefalo was obviously the leader, if such terminology may be used loosely, of the movement. But review the Lions' season and their lineup changes. Senior Walt Addie was the starting tailback in September. But it was Soph



Jeff Young
Sports Editor

Neil Hutton who gained 79 yards in 12 carries before the Cotton Bowl audience. Senior Dan Natale caught three passes in the Cotton Bowl, but freshman Randy Sidler's 10 receptions from the tight end spot during the season helped make Natale's Bowl efforts a reality. Senior fullback Tom Donchez led the Lion rushers, but soph backup Duane Taylor was right there all the time, picking up nearly half Donchez' total yards in less than half the attempts. And sophomores George Reihner and Brad Benson found jobs on the offensive line.

Now right away one may point to injuries that forced Paterno into substitutions. But the injuries cannot resolve an entire season of experimentation. Seniority has always weighed heavily with Paterno. Where were the seniors

who didn't play in the Cotton Bowl, who didn't play in the late games of their final college season, after the team had performed well enough to receive a bowl bid?

They were on the sidelines. And the reason they were there is that perhaps there was someone stronger, someone quicker or more agile. Someone who could in any way bring Penn State closer to a win. And by no means was that person necessarily a senior.

Last year's Nittany Lions started no. 6 in the entire 22 positions of younger than junior class. The team finished with a 12-0 record and an Orange Bowl victory. This year's team for whatever reasons played freshman and sophomores in key positions and finished 10-2 with a Cotton Bowl victory. Last year's post-Orange Bowl quotes were dotted with "No. 1" claims. This year's post-Cotton Bowl quotes had none of the same, but the players talked and acted as though they had accomplished just as much.

Paterno has ballyhooed this team as having played to its potential more than any he can remember, but what would that potential have been had the youngsters not had their chance? Care to speculate on the NC State game without the rushing of Taylor, Hutton, Cefalo? How about the Syracuse or Pitt contests?

One memo: No matter what a coach professes to believe in, and whatever he says he wants to do, what he really wants is to have more points than the other team when it's all over, and to have that situation as often as possible. Happy New Year.

'74 Nits had something to prove

DALLAS—Somehow the Penn State locker room at the Cotton Bowl seemed much different than the one in Miami just a year earlier. Then again last year's Lions were 12-0 and this year's were 10-2.

Perhaps the heart of the matter lies there. Last season, Paterno had a team that did everything it was supposed to do. It was expected to go undefeated and to trounce some people. It was expected to have a running back lead the east and make All-America, then the pros. It was expected to place a fair number of players in the pro draft and it did just that and more with 11 Nittany Lions being selected.

So much happened last year that was forecasted in the pre-season outlook, that no one was really surprised.

However, this season has been just the opposite. People expected some things, but not all things like last year. People knew that an unblemished record was not in Joe Paterno's cards this fall. He had some trump but no meld.

SPORTS EDITOR: Jeff Young ASSISTANT
SPORTS EDITORS: Tim Panaccio, Dave
Morris. SPORTS WRITERS: Rick Starr, Barb
Parmer

What people didn't know was that Penn State would pull together in the end. What they didn't foresee was a Cotton Bowl bid. What they didn't expect was some strong play by a lot of young players.

Guys like Jimmy Cefalo, Neil Hutton, Duane Taylor, Tom Giotto and Tom Odell.

There was a gap in the offensive line which lost two All-America's. A defensive secondary which was inexperienced and untested. Within time, everyone pulled together, much closer than last season's Orange Bowl victors.

"I think it's an outstanding football team," lauded Paterno. "It took time for those young kids to get better. I think it'll be a better football team next year."

Last year's team didn't have much to prove. This year's squad had more of the same than it probably wanted. The result was a successful cohesion of talent that earned its ink without relying week in and week out on explosive offensive performances by John Cappelletti.

Maybe that's why the Penn State locker room was so much more vibrant this year. Maybe that helps explain Joe and the rest of the coaching staff getting tossed about in a shower, along with Gov. Milton J. Shapp. Maybe that's why everyone enjoyed themselves more this year and in particular, this Cotton Bowl.



Tim Panaccio
Ass't Sports Editor

"We had a great time, I mean that," said Paterno in his locker room cubbyhole in Dallas. "You can say what you want about a lot of places, but you couldn't have had a better time anywhere but here, especially in the player's cases."

It was more relaxed this time around. There wasn't any needless pressure about remaining undefeated or whether or not Penn State would ever finish number one in the nation.

The mystical spell of 1973 had been broken in a driving rainstorm against Navy. After that, it all boiled down to one thing: Proving to yourself you could do what others thought you weren't capable of doing.