

Kendra likes his running backs

by Gordon Blain

This week Penn State plays a lot of the players who never made it to University Park to be on Joe Paterno's side.

That's the way West Virginia quarterback Dan Kendra sees it.

"Down here we're calling this game, Penn State against the Penn State rejects," says the sophomore from Allentown. "We want to make this one, West Virginia against the West Virginia rejects. To me this game is a big rivalry and we're up for it."

Kendra directs an offense that has rushed for 1,316 yards and has averaged 35 points in each of its first four wins this season. The Mountaineers are undefeated with two sets of running backs that don't give the opposition's defense a break.

Senior tailback Artie Owens, who is from Stroudsburg and played in the Pennsylvania Big 33 with the Lions' Woody Petchel, is West Virginia's offering to Penn State in the same mold of Ohio State's Archie Griffin and Kentucky's Sonny Collins. Penn State's defense hasn't had a break and they won't get one this week—even when Owens sits down.

Owens' stand-in is Heywood Smith, who has gained 251 yards while Owens has 463 yards and is only 127 yards shy of a West Virginia career rushing record. The two fullbacks that team with the tailbacks are Dwayne Woods and Ron Lee.

But what about the back that starts the Mountaineers' offense? Dan Kendra is nestled in the middle of the running backs. He's the one who gives the ball to



Dan Kendra

the backs and he's the one who tries to keep the defenses honest so the ball carriers have somewhere to run.

"It's really secure back there. It takes a lot of pressure off me and it opens up for me to throw the ball," Kendra says of the signal calling chores in the Mountaineers' explosive backfield. "Artie gets to the line of scrimmage so quick it's unbelievable. He makes the big play on his own."

"I haven't really had to depend on my passing game but I think we probably have an average or a little above average passing game," he says. "I feel confident in myself that we can throw the ball. With such a good running attack all I have to do in passing is keep the defense honest."

"We haven't had to come out in a position where we've had to wing play af-

ter play. I don't know what will happen when we have to do that."

Kendra says West Virginia has played teams this year "that will stand up against anybody. It's not like years in the past. We have an offensive line this year. They are not going to let Penn State manhandle us by hammering and hammering at us," he says.

"Before we couldn't control the line of scrimmage. Now we'll hold our own on the line. We'll get to running and mix in the pass."

Kendra played the last three games last year for the Mountaineers as quarterback. He took the offense 48 yards in four plays for a touchdown in his first varsity competition, against Syracuse.

"It was like a strange experience where you really don't know what it's all about until you get popped by somebody. Then you wake up and say to yourself, 'You better do something.'" Kendra explains of the first time on the field as a freshman. "You just try to fit in."

The second year quarterback fitted in. He took the starting job from another sophomore, Danny Williams. Kendra has passed for 328 yards connecting on 24 of 46 passes while running for 76 yards.

Kendra directed a 50-7 thrashing of Temple the week after Penn State narrowly escaped the Owls in the Philadelphia opener 26-25. He says West Virginia has been behind only once this year. That was last week against Southern Methodist University, a game in which he was intercepted twice.

"We were behind 7-0 and the very next time we scored and the time after that we scored. We reacted pretty good to being behind," he says.

"It's great when the offense scores first and especially a touchdown. The first touchdown is very important. It picks the defense up as well as the offense."

Kendra, who says he calls most of his own plays but does get help from coach Bobby Bowden, adds West Virginia's defense is looking to stay away from allowing Penn State the "real big play." The Mountaineer defense has allowed an average of 14 points per game.

"They run the ball again and again and then they hit a big pass play," he says. "We have to have good specialty teams to match Penn State. They always seem to block a kick or recover a fumble all of the time."

Kendra and the Mountaineers run out of a pro-set I formation but will mix in option plays that he says "run like a veer."

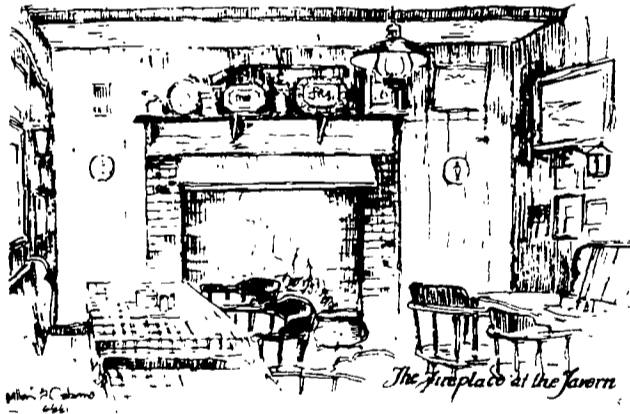
"We'll just keep trying to hold the defense honest with fakes and passing. I think the passing game makes our running game go. The defense just can't stack up the inside. They have to be conscious of our passing all the time."

West Virginia changed its attack against Boston College and beat the Eagles 35-18. Kendra came out passing and says he "caught them off balance. The running game just took over after that," he adds.

Kendra, who says he was recruited "not really hard" by Penn State, adds the Mountaineers have stayed healthy.

"We're pretty healthy and that's the key to our whole season. We have to stay away from getting key people hurt," he says. "You really see the difference with one or two starters out."

Dan Kendra may make the big difference if Penn State "rejects" West Virginia's running game.



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