

# Death threats, media dampen Lion win

## Silent Joe may have to speak up

For as long as I can remember, Joe Paterno has downplayed the importance of the Associated Press and United Press International polls, attaching little significance to the rankings they submit weekly during the football season.

After Penn State crushed West Virginia, 49-28, earlier this season, an unsuspecting sportswriter asked Paterno what the big victory would mean to the Lions' ranking in the polls. The 30 or so scribes in the lockerroom braced themselves for the recorded statement they thought Paterno would issue.

Lo and behold, it came... "I don't know where we are ranked now and frankly, I don't give a darn."

There it was. Writers had witnessed something more dependable than prune juice, timex watches, Ford trucks and rainy days in Happy Valley.

Paterno once again reiterated his position on the ridiculous, meaningless college football polls. If Joe weren't such a nice guy, he would have blurted out, "Why do you guys continue to ask me about our ranking? Polls, polls, polls... What do they mean?"

What do they mean anyway? In college football, they mean quite a lot, whether Paterno likes it or not. As long as the NCAA refuses to adopt a national championship playoff format, polls will continue to be one of the most important criteria of a team's worth. They will continue to determine which teams go to which bowls, which teams receive the most money, and ultimately, which team will be proclaimed the best in college football.



Rick Weber

I don't think the polls should determine these things, but as long as they do, they will have to be regarded as an important facet of college football.

Surely Joe, of all people, must realize the role that the rankings play in big-time college football. Back in 1969, Paterno was in the center of a raging controversy over polls and ratings along with Texas coach Darrell Royal, Bud Wilkinson, President Richard Nixon (heaven forbid) and the press.

That was the season, you'll recall, when the Lions went undefeated and beat Missouri in the Orange Bowl, yet took a back seat to Texas when "Tricky Dick" unilaterally declared the Longhorns the No. 1 team in the nation. Lion fans felt in their hearts that Penn State was the best team in the nation. For some, that was enough. The heck with them — we know we're the best, they said.

But for most, that feeling wasn't enough. They wanted Penn State to be recognized by fans across the country as the best team in college football and as long as the Lions were not ranked No. 1, they knew that would never happen. You can't be the best unless the pollsters say you're the best.

In 1973, when Penn State went 12-0, the same story all over again, although on a much smaller scale. The Lions disposed of three bowl teams, Stanford (a one-point loser to USC) and a strong LSU team that year. Yet, State never advanced any further than fifth in the rankings.

Yes, the polls certainly do determine who's the best team in the nation. But maybe just as crucially, they determine bowl matchups and the all-important money that goes along with them. Enter the 1977 Penn State team.

For Penn State and its fans, the Fiesta Bowl bid was one big letdown. Nearly everyone in Happy Valley had been counting on an Orange Bowl bid or, at the very least, a Sugar Bowl bid.

There were a number of reasons why the Lions didn't receive the Orange Bowl bid — the decision to move the Penn State-Pitt game back one week, Oklahoma coach Barry Switzer's politicking, and Paterno's refusal to blow his own horn and get involved in that politicking.

But if you look beyond them, you'll see that rankings had a lot to do with it. Both Arkansas and Penn State had identical records, but the Razorbacks were ranked ahead of the Lions.

"I told the Orange Bowl officials that I wanted the highest ranked team they could get," Switzer said in an AP story. Switzer said he felt the Sooners would have a better chance at winning the national championship if they beat a higher ranked team.

Not only did the Lions lose a chance to go to Miami, but they lost nearly \$850,000 — the difference in television revenue between the Orange and Fiesta Bowls.

Is Paterno really telling the truth when he says he doesn't care about polls and the rankings? If he doesn't care, he should. The polls cost the Lions the No. 1 ranking in 1968, 1969 and 1973, and this year they played a role in their loss of an Orange Bowl bid and the \$1.1 million in revenue that goes along with it.



Pitt wide receiver Gordon Jones was held in check by the Lions, catching just two passes — one of the major reasons why Penn State shut down the Panther offense.

## Penn State-Pittsburgh: The statistics

TEAM STATISTICS		Penn State	Pittsburgh
First Downs		16	18
Rushes-Yards		53-150	41-124
Passing Yardage		146	204
Return Yardage		41	66
Passes (att.-comp.-int.)		13-27-2	14-20-3
Punts		7-40-3	9-34-6
Fumbles-Lost		1-0	4-1
Penalties-Yards		6-37	8-50
Penn State		3	0
Pittsburgh		7	0

  

FIRST QUARTER	
PS — Field goal 34 Bahr 4:38	
Pitt — Cavanaugh 1 run (Schubert kick) 10:33	

  

SECOND QUARTER	
PS — Field goal 31 Bahr 1:41	
PS — Guman 52 punt return after handoff (run failed) 12:55	

  

THIRD QUARTER	
No scoring	

  

FOURTH QUARTER	
PS — Field goal 20 Bahr 11:28	
Pitt — Jones 17 pass from Cavanaugh (run failed)	

  

INDIVIDUAL STATISTICS	
Rushing	
Penn State — M. Suhey 13 for 36 yards; Torrey 11 for 10	
Pittsburgh — Walker 12 for 66 yards; Jacobs 15 for 86; Cavanaugh 12 for minus-48; Sims 2 for 20	
Passing	
Penn State — Fusina 13 of 27 for 146 yards (two intercepted)	
Pittsburgh — Cavanaugh 14 of 29 for 204 yards (three intercepted)	
Pass Receiving	
Penn State — Suhey 7 for 40 yards; Cefalo 2 for 57; Geise 3 for 28; Fitzkee 3 for 45; Torrey 1 for minus-3; LaPointe 1 for 10; M. Suhey 1 for 3	
Pittsburgh — Gaustad 4 for 77 yards; G. Jones 2 for 38; Walker 2 for 21; Jacobs 3 for 17; Taylor 2 for 38; Reutershan 1 for 13	
Punting	
Penn State — Fitzkee 7 for 40 3 average	
Pittsburgh — Gasparovic 9 for 34 6 average	
Fumble Recoveries	
Penn State — Banks 1	
Pittsburgh — Guman 1 for 52 yards	
Penn State — G. Jones 3 for 46 yards	
Pittsburgh — Geise 1 for 14 yards; Torrey 1 for 10; Hutton 1 for 17	
Penn State — G. Jones 1 for 20 yards; Heath 1 for 16; McCray 1 for 12; Reichard 1 for 15	
Interception Returns	
Penn State — Hostetler 2 for 0 yards; Hutton 1 for 0	
Pittsburgh — Jury 1 for 0 yards; Felder 1 for 3	
Tackles	
Penn State — Banks 3 unassisted and 2 assists for 5; Clark 3 and 4 for 9; Sidler 3 and 2 for 5; Millen 5 and 2 for 7; Lally 2 and 4 for 7; Donaldson 2 and 2 for 4; DePaso 3 and 3 for 6; R. Hostetler 3 and 5 for 8; Guman 3 and 0 for 3; Petercusk 0 and 5 for 5; Hutton 4 and 2 for 6; Hettinger 1 and 0 for 1; D. Hostetler 0 and 2 for 2; Coder 0 and 1 for 1; Bradley 0 and 3 for 3; Kubin 1 and 1 for 2; Urquart 1 and 0 for 1	
Pittsburgh — DiCiccio 5 unassisted and 9 assists for 14; Silvestri 3 and 5 for 8; Boyarsky 6 and 7 for 13; Holloway 4 and 5 for 9; Green 5 and 7 for 12; Pelusi 2 and 5 for 7; Chesley 3 and 8 for 11; Delaney 0 and 3 for 3; Wilson 3 and 3 for 6; Felder 3 and 0 for 3; Jury 5 and 1 for 6; Messner 1 and 0 for 1; Reutershan 1 and 0 for 1; Meyer 0 and 1 for 1; Thomas 1 and 0 for 1	
Tackles for Losses	
Penn State — Banks 1 for 8 yards; Clark 1 for 11; Lally 2 for 16; Hostetler 2 for 6; Petercusk 1 for 3	
Pittsburgh — DiCiccio 1 for 3 yards; Silvestri 1 for 10; Green 3 for 16; Wilson 1 for 2	
Passes Broken Up	
Penn State — Guman 1; Urquart 1	
Pittsburgh — Green 1; Delaney 1; Felder 1	

PITTSBURGH — The sicker they come, the harder they fall.

Case in point: the foul mind who, for the second straight year, sent to Lion quarterback Chuck Fusina letters which threatened the life of his mother as he tried to lead the Lions to victory in the Pitt-Penn State game.

"I really don't like to talk about it," Fusina said in reference to the series of hate letters that started arriving three weeks prior to the game each year.

"I imagine it was a really devoted Pitt fan or a gambler that really wanted them to win," Fusina said.

Last year the plot worked, to a certain extent, according to the junior from McKees Rocks.

"It affected me a little last year, but this year it just didn't work," Fusina said. "I hope nothing more comes out of it."

"What can you say? I just hope he found it's not worth all the stamps and time he spent trying to get to me."

Plus the time spent getting to his mother.

It's bad enough when some sickie tries to threaten a football player; but when he tries to go through that person's mother, things are really getting perverted.



Jerry Lucci

Sometimes it's hard to remember when the Pitt-Penn State contest was a game just like any other. Two teams playing football and a bunch of fans watching. In recent years it has rapidly developed into a grudge match of sorts.

The "Catch-22" is that the grudge is more between the fans than the players. The sad point of it all is that my friends in the media have largely been at fault in fueling the fire between the two sides.

"This was a good, clean game and I'm quite upset about all the bitterness talk perpetrated by the media," Lion coach Joe Paterno said in a serious tone after his charges had hung on to win last Saturday.

"I'll get out of coaching if I must get bitter. Football is too good a game to have it ruined by browbeating, bad press, and bitterness."

All three points Paterno mentioned were integral parts of the build-up to the game. Integral, but unnecessary.

"It wasn't a bitter thing between us," Paterno stressed vehemently when one scribe continually pressed him on the idea that there was bad blood between the Pitt and Penn State teams because of

the bowl situation. "It was just a good game between two good teams," he said.

"We have to get this away from this bitterness thing... all this crap you guys are writing..." Paterno said in reference to the media's continuance build-up of the game, some putting Pitt in a good light, some Penn State, and many making their own guesses about the bowl situation.

Personally, I was sick to the very pit of my stomach of reading inflammatory articles in both the regular Pittsburgh papers and The Daily Collegian's counterpart on the Panther campus, The Pitt News.

Many of the writers tried to lay the blame of the Orange Bowl fiasco directly on Paterno's shoulders, implying that he personally mixed the deal to put the winner of the Pitt-Penn State game in the Orange Bowl, a charge he denied.

It seemed that straight news reporting was out, and the search for the big scoop was on, fanning the flames between the respective teams' fans — flames that had been too hot for too long even without the build-up.

Listening to a popular radio call-in sports show a couple of days before the game, I heard a few irate Pitt fans call in and voice remarks that were full of hate for Paterno and his team. It was becoming much more than a ball game.

After the contest, Paterno seemed to be quite fed up with the media situation.

"Pitt fans start to ride Penn State fans and Penn State fans start to browbeat Pitt fans... but that's their problem, not ours. We just wanted to play football."

Unfortunately, there probably won't be any end to the problem. Sure, the letters will probably stop and the hate between the people will simmer for a while, but next year it will more than likely be more of the same thing.

"It's no good when you try to browbeat, then you draw bitterness..." Paterno said. "If it comes down to bitterness, then that's the day I get out of coaching."

"There wasn't any problem between the players," Lion guard Eric Cunningham said. "We got along pretty good."

Perhaps it's time fans on both sides started to realize the gravity of the situation and put the energy from their hate and bitterness into something more constructive.

A good start would be to put some pressure on the NCAA to come up with some sort of national playoff system, or at least put the bowl selection process into a more orderly system with bids waiting until the end of the regular season.

Let's forget about hate and just play ball. And to that sickie out there, I hope you lost a bundle.

## 'We've had a good season anyway'

# For Pitt, cliffhanger not end of the world

By NEIL RUDEL  
Daily Collegian Sports Writer

PITTSBURGH — In a morgue-like Pitt locker room, the general consensus was that, despite the heartbreaking loss to Penn State, this was a good season, one to be proud of.

After all, if the Panthers hadn't lost All-America quarterback Matt Cavanaugh early in the season, most believed they would have been on the inside looking out instead of vice versa.

"I'm not going to let this loss take away from our year," Cavanaugh, who the Tampa Bay Buccaneers have expressed interest in as making the NFL's first draft pick, said.

"I'm sure it would have been a lot nicer if we would have won today but we've had a good season," he said. "At the beginning of the season we had a lot of holes to plug. I didn't know how good we would be."

Cavanaugh, whose size, passing and running ability was apparent even in defeat, shouldered the blame for the loss.

"I don't think I threw a good pass all day," he

said, obviously recalling the two he completed to Penn State's Ron Hostetler at most inopportune moments for the Panthers.

"I think the turning point came with that first interception," he said. "That would have made it 14-3."

Cavanaugh then showed he has a little Joe Paterno in him.

"I thought they (Penn State) played well," he said. "Especially their front five, they put on a good pass rush."

Pitt coach Jackie Sherrill, who posted an 8-2-1 record in his first season as Panther head coach, said the double reverse punt return was the straw that broke the Panthers' backs.

"It was a game of big plays," he said. "Theirs was the punt return."

But he wasn't surprised to see it.

"You expect anything, anytime," he said. "And they called it at the right time. We had the people there but missed the tackles."

There were positive signs, he said, even though the outcome was a negative one.

"I was pleased with the way we came back to score again," he said. "That's a sign of a good football team."

Sherrill, like his quarterback, looked at the bright side.

"We turned into a better football team than I expected," he said. "We had a very good year and were pleased with our players. We've got a lot of young players coming back."

Not among those, however, are Cavanaugh and senior tailback Elthot Walker.

Walker, whose 66 yards left him 18 shy of 1,000 yards for his career, insisted that his crucial two point conversion attempt, that would have deadecked the game, was good.

"I thought I had made it," he said. "I guess one of Penn State's players stood up and indicated I didn't. Freddy (Jacobs) and Matt (Cavanaugh) talked to the ref but he said I was short. I thought I made it."

Walker was held to zero net yards in the first half. He praised Penn State's defense for its effort vs. the run and Pitt's vaulted offense, the No. 1 scoring team in the country.

"In the second half we moved the ball a lot better than we did in the first two quarters," he said.

"Their defense is the type that strings out the running options. They had good lateral movement."

Sherrill credited his defense for a top notch output.

"Defensively, I thought we played well," he said. "Take away seven points on the punt return and look what you've got, three field goals."

The Pitt coach attributed the fact that the game wasn't as high-scoring as anticipated to a mild offense.

"I guess we kept everybody in their seats," he said. "We got ourselves into too many second and third and long plays. We weren't as consistent on first downs as we should have been."

Talk of the wet field and how a date change might have ruined the Panthers came up.

"Footing was not that bad. It slowed down our cuts a little bit," Sherrill said, denying a writer's implication that the date change cost his team.

"I would have preferred to play them on a dry field but that's no excuse," he said. "I don't think the snow was a factor in the outcome of the game. We just came up short."

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With Joe Lally (84) and Matt Millen (60) leading the way, Mike Guman looks downfield on his punt return in the second quarter of Penn State's 15-13 win over Pitt last

Saturday. After taking a handoff from Jimmy Cefalo, Guman ran for 52 yards and a touchdown, the play that put the Lions ahead to stay.