

# PSU football from pink & black to blue & white

By MICKEY EDWARDS  
Daily Collegian Staff Writer

Penn State football grew up with the game itself. Harvard and McGill played something like football in 1873, at a time when the state's land grant institution "near Bellefonte" was scarcely 10 years old.

When the school's first squad organized in 1887, the fledgling sport retained much of the free-for-all character of its rugby origin.

A 12-man squad donned pink and black uniforms and went off to play Bucknell, journeying by horse and buggy to Lemont for the train ride to Lewisburg.

A cheer composed by team supporters went like this: "Yah Yah Yah (pause) Yah Yah, Wish, Wack—Pink, Black! P! S! C!"

Penn State won, 54-0. A week later a re-match was held in front of Old Main. Bucknell held the Lions scoreless in the first half, but lost, 24-0. Penn State finished its first season with a 2-0 record.

Neither the cheer nor the uniforms lasted long, said Ridge Riley in his book "The Road to Number One."

## homecoming

"Sweat and a few washings faded the bright new pink uniforms to plain white, and not long after this helpful tragedy, dark blue and white were adopted officially as the college colors," Riley said.

During the '90s, Penn State teams were eager to face the Ivy League teams that dominated the sport. While overcoming lesser opponents Bucknell, Dickinson and Lafayette, the Lions were beaten regularly by Penn and Princeton. Ties with Navy in 1894 and Cornell in 1895 were seen as great achievements by University fans.

The 1911 squad made up for earlier shortcomings and went undefeated in nine games. The Lions beat Penn for the first time and settled scores with rivals Pitt and Cornell.

Players Shorty Miller and Pete Mauthe of the 1911 team returned in 1912 to help the Lions amass a season total of 285 points against only six opponents.

In the opener against Carnegie Tech, Miller set Penn State's single game rushing record of 250 yards.

Mauthe, the first Penn Stater elected to the Football Hall of Fame, kicked a 51-

yard field goal against Pitt, a record until Chris Bahr's 1975 efforts, who kicked one for 55 yards.

Levi Lamb, a tackle on the 1912 team, is honored by the Levi Lamb Fund, the University's athletic grant-in-aid program. Lamb, better known as a wrestler, was killed in World War I.

The Lions' undefeated 1912 season included a 37-0 rout of Ohio State. The heated game ended when the Ohio team quit the field, with Ohio Coach John R. Richards protesting "unnecessary roughness," Riley said.

Later Richards insisted that game officials were lax in assessing penalties against the Lion team.

Penn State Coach Bill Hollenback said the Ohio team was unprepared for what he called "modern football."

Whatever the reason, Ohio State did not finish the game, in which "both sides appeared more interested in personal vendettas than team play," Riley said.

After mediocre performances during the war years, Penn State football improved in 1919. Victories over strong opponents Penn, Pitt and Cornell brought the Lions a No. 1 ranking in the East from Philadelphia sportswriter Robert Maxwell.

All-Americans Charlie Way and Bob Higgins starred on the squad, three-quarters of whom were World War I veterans.

Higgins, a future Lion coach, raced 90 yards for a touchdown in the Thanksgiving Day match with Pitt. Deep in his own territory, Fullback Bill Hess took the snap in his own end zone for the kick, but instead lobbed a screen pass to Higgins, who ran for a touchdown.

Unknown to the players, it would be the last Panther loss to the Lions for 20 years.

The Lions soon began traveling for games in Iowa, Nebraska, California and Georgia in the '20s.

Beaver Field's relative remoteness encouraged the team to play road games. The reason, according to sportswriter Maxwell, was that:

"State College is located in Center (sic) County, and Center County can be located by means of a large map, a compass, and an experienced guide. . . it is a very hard place to get to and for that reason, most of the big games are played away from home."

Football came into its own at the school during the '20s. Thanks partly to new wooden stands for 5,500 at New Beaver Field, profits amounted to \$50,000 a year.

Games moved to New Beaver Field, between Osmond and Frear, in 1909. Before that time, games were played at "Old Beaver," in front of Old Main.

The 1,500 alumni who attended the first Homecoming in 1920 saw Coach Hugo Bezdek's Lions beat Dartmouth 14-7 en route to an undefeated season.

Bezdek took over after several previous Penn State coaches. George Hoskins had the job between 1892 and 1895, followed by Pop Golden, Bill Hollenback and Dick Harlow, among the more renowned.

During the early football years, few teams in the country had official coaches. A team's coach was likely an adviser-participant, who would join the game if the team was in a jam.

Bezdek was not hired as a football coach, but as an athletic director.

However, Riley said, he realized his job depended on fielding a successful football team.

Football historians credit Bezdek with developing or perfecting the screen pass, spinner plays and the "T" formation.

Riley describes him as an inspiring personality off the gridiron, a man who fought hard for student athletics. Bezdek's recommendations included a regular athletic budget for athletics at the University, and a \$525,000 plan to build Rec Hall.

For the players, however, grueling practice sessions and playing with injuries were the order of the day. Each week's practice began with a scrimmage dubbed "Bloody Tuesday" by the team.

Between 1903 and 1924, players lived in a three-story house on the current site of Whitmore Lab. Known as the Track House, it was built with alumni contributions.

Players found Track House radiators to be good shoe cleaners, banging mud from practice sessions off into piles behind the heaters.

One day, Larry Vorhis, who played for the team between 1906 and 1910, proudly exhibited three stalks of wheat growing

in the accumulated dirt pile. Admiring fellow players began cultivating their own plants behind the radiators, with varying success, Riley said.

"The Blue and White aggregation," as the Alumni News identified Bezdek's 1922 team, received a Rose Bowl invitation.

"Penn State's record of the past three seasons ranks the Nittany Lion as the king of the Eastern football machines," the News continued.

Though unbeaten for 30 games, the king had his troubles. Coaching disputes led to the resignation of several players. Before the bowl game, injuries claimed other team members, among them All-American guard Joe Bedenk.

At Pasadena, the Trojans of Southern California triumphed, downing the Lions 14-3.

As Lion stars of the early '20s graduated the team slipped in the Eastern rankings. Moreover, Bezdek's failure to beat rival Pitt irritated alumni.

The coach's overall 65-30-11 record did little to soothe the dissatisfaction. Despite his contributions to the game, some

believed football had passed him by. Early in 1930, Bezdek was asked to head a reorganized School of Physical Education, and Bob Higgins became football coach.

It was a difficult time to rebuild a football team. During the Depression, sources of financial help for athletes became scarce.

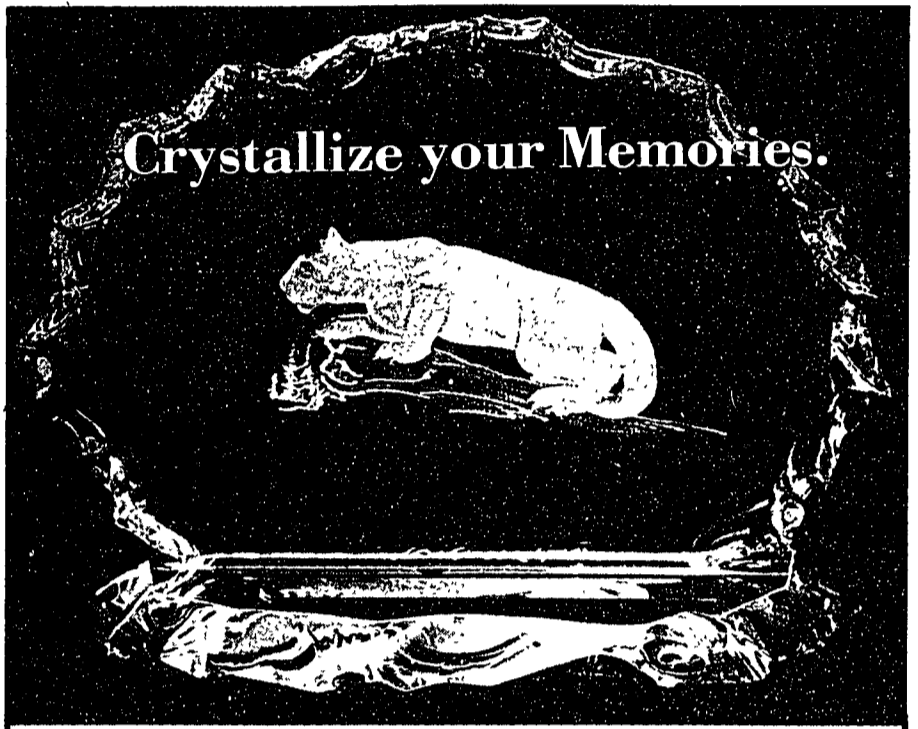
Games with Pitt were suspended for three years. After a dismal 2-8 season in 1931, the Lions slowly improved. In 1939, they finished 5-1-2 and have since gone without a losing season.

World War II thinned college squads, but competition was still intense.

A radio audience puzzled over the 1942 Cornell game. Played in a soup of rain and mud at Ithaca, the game had little action and no scoring. For "wartime security," the government prohibited any mention of weather conditions in radio broadcasts, to the consternation of announcers trying to describe the game.

The undefeated, untied 1947 team catapulted the Lions into prominence for the first time in 25 years. A powerhouse backfield tallied points while the Lions

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