

Sugar Bowl turns sour for Penn State

By JOYCE TOMANA

Daily Collegian Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS, La. — "It just wasn't meant to be," Lion defensive back Mike Gilsenan said. "You could see by the way things went out there."

The Crimson Tide came in on the Nittany Lions at the Sugar Bowl Monday afternoon, swamping them 14-7, and shattering all hopes for a national championship.

"I have never been associated with a group that did a greater job than our defense did today against Penn State," coach Bear Bryant said. "I think we could have beaten any team in America today."

"I told our squad, 'Forget about the score, play all day like you are two points behind and you can win.'"

Nothing seemed to go right for Penn State, except for a third quarter drive topped off by Chuck Fusina's 17-yard touchdown connection to Scott Fitzkee that tied the score at seven. Penn State found itself trapped in poor field position most of the game, struggled with its kicking game and was plagued by penalties.

The Lion defense circled the wagons as best they could, but they met their match in the Alabama wishbone. The Crimson Tide rolled up 208 yards rushing and 91 yards passing.

"I thought our defense played a great football game," Paterno said. "Our offense didn't do enough in the first half and on punt returns."

"I'm disappointed, but I'm pleased our kids hung in there and played, gave it everything they had."

"It was the first wishbone we played against," senior linebacker Rich Milot said. "They did a lot of things with it. We weren't expecting a lot of it. We were prepared for it, but they just hit it right."

There was no scoring in the first quarter, but Alabama was in control with four first downs to Penn State's one, 98 offensive yards to 36, three for six third down conversions and possession time of 10:36 to Penn State's 4:24.

"We had a lot of penalties which hurt us badly," Paterno said. "We started off with a holding penalty that put us right back in the hole the first play of the ballgame."

In the second quarter, it looked like Penn State might turn the momentum around when Milot snatched a Jeff Rutledge pass on the Penn State eight-yard line, and returned it 55 yards.

"He just threw it out to the fullback and I could tell he was throwing it high," Milot said. "He just tipped it right to me, and I waited for the blockers."

But the Lions were forced to punt four plays later after Fusina was sacked by tackle Byron Braggs for a 15-yard loss.

Quarterback Jeff Rutledge then brought the Tide 80 yards in six plays and connected with safety Bruce Bolton for the day's first touchdown.

"Alabama played a good game and outwitted us," Paterno said. "We were not ready for them offensively the first half. They used some blitzes we had not seen before."

"At the end of the first half we were trying to stop the clock because we thought we could get a pass and then

maybe a 50-yard field goal. It just didn't work out."

Midway through the third quarter, Pete Harris intercepted a Rutledge pass intended for safety Tim Clark on the Alabama 48-yard line which set up Penn State's only score of the afternoon.

On the next Penn State drive, Fitzkee kicked his best punt of the day, 50 yards. But it was returned 62 yards to the Penn State 11 by Lou Ikner. Rutledge pitched right to Major Ogilvie for the touchdown. The extra point brought the score to 14-7.

Penn State had its chance to tie the score in the fourth quarter, but Don McNeal intercepted a Fusina pass intended for Brad Scovill in the end zone.

But the Lions refused to give up. Joe Lally recovered an Alabama fumble and the Lions took over on the Alabama 19-yard line. A pitch to Mike Guman, a pass to Fitzkee and a foiled run up the middle by Matt Suhey brought the Lions for fourth down on the one-foot line. The call was Guman up the middle and over the heap. But linebacker Barry Krauss, voted the Most Valuable Player of the Game, stopped him cold.

"We expected them to dive over or run off tackle like they did against Pittsburgh," Bryant said.

"I wish we would have done something else on the goal-line," Paterno said. "But it was the only play to go with. If you've got less than a foot to go you've got to figure you can take the ball and go up over the pile."

"Alabama just beat us at the line of scrimmage. We should have been able to bang it in from there."

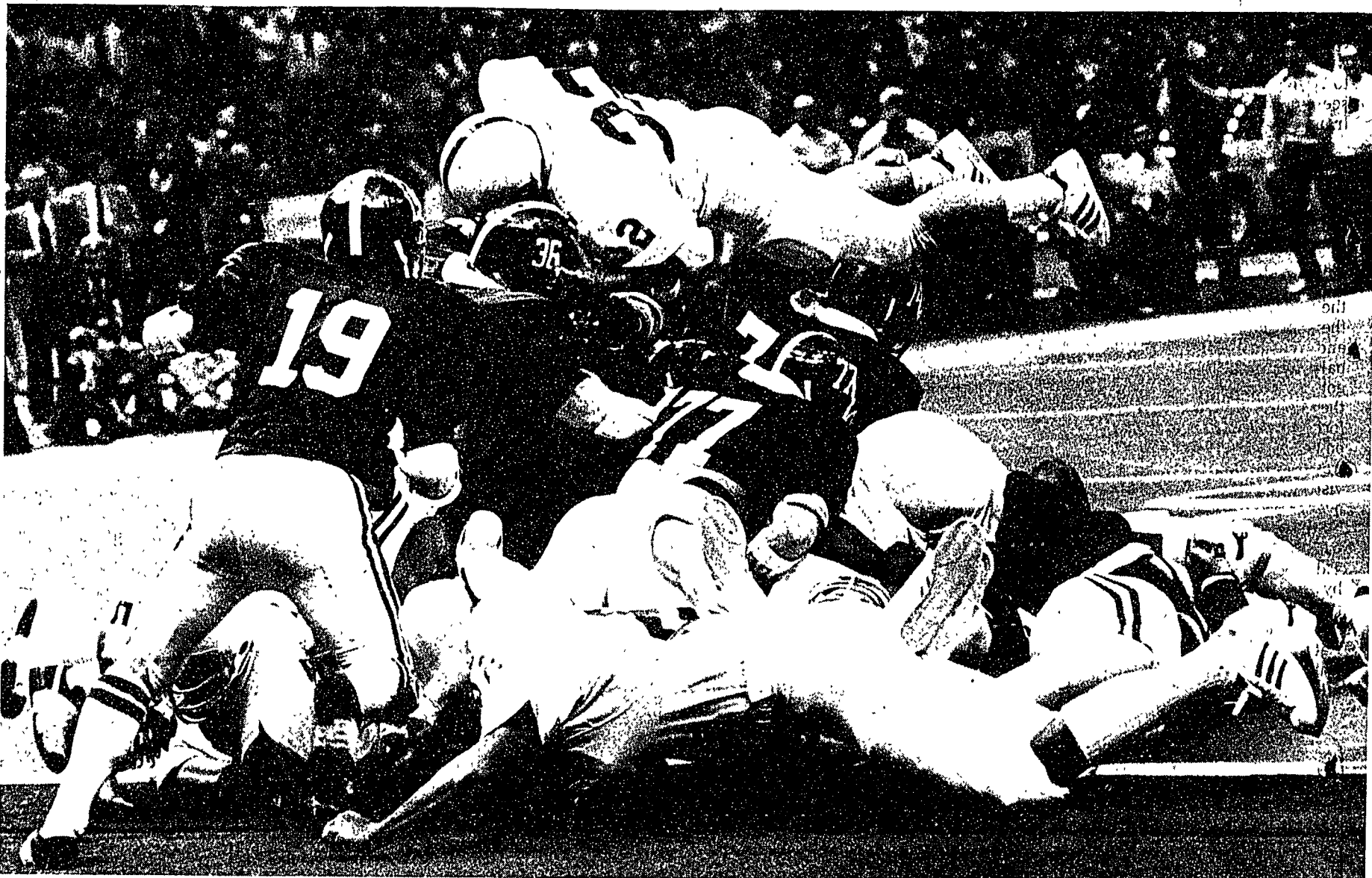
Penn State was then penalized on a punt return for having 12 men on the field, an ironic situation for Paterno. In the 1969 Orange Bowl, a game-winning drive was kept intact for the Lions when Kansas had one too many players on the field.

"The kid just didn't come out," Paterno said. "We won that way in a bowl game, and now we blew one the same way. That's the first time we've had 12 men on the field probably in five years."

It was the most agonizing performance for Penn State in a long time. With the loss went the national championship. It would have been the first ever for Penn State.

"My biggest disappointment is for our seniors," Paterno said. "They worked hard, and it is unfortunate they lost it without playing their best game. But Alabama played well and I don't intend to take anything away from their performance. Alabama was the best defensive team we have played. I told our seniors not to go into hibernation because they had an 11-1 record. They accomplished a lot."

GAME NOTES: The Miller-Digby Memorial Trophy that Krauss received as the MVP is the first one since 1951 to be given to a lineman. . . The 76,824 attendance set a new Sugar Bowl record. That figure does not include two birds that were trapped inside the Superdome during the construction and continue to live there. . . 165 publications covered the game from the press box. . . The Lions are 0-3 in Sugar Bowl appearances.



Matt Suhey (32) had only a yard to go to tie the score, but the Alabama defense held strong, which was the story of the day. The Tide limited the Lions to 19 yards rushing in its 14-7 Sugar Bowl win Monday.

Crimson Tide: Blitzing defense had Lions singing the blues

By JERRY MICCO
Daily Collegian Sports Writer

NEW ORLEANS, La. — If anticipation is an integral part of a football game then the Alabama Crimson Tide more than deserved their Sugar Bowl win Monday.

"I expected them to dive off-tackle over the top," Alabama coach Paul "Bear" Bryant said when asked how he defended the Lion's fourth and one touchdown try from the Alabama one-foot line in the fourth quarter.

Although Bryant never takes credit for any of his players' victories, the Tide's strategy to blitz and pressure Lion quarterback Chuck Fusina was definitely a major factor thrown in by Bryant to stop the Lion offense — which it effectively did all day.

"Our game plan was to get to Fusina, give him pressure and make him scramble. Our defensive front got back there quite a bit with the blitz," Alabama's All-American defensive tackle Marty Lyons said.

"I just looked up at the scoreboard and saw the time and how far they had to go, and I was scared," Tide nose guard Byron Braggs said about the play.

The blitzing which bothered Fusina all day might have been a new wrinkle affecting the Tide linebackers, but at least one Bama defensive lineman said the line play of the team was no different from any other game.

"We really did nothing different all year, we just

wanted it, we didn't change anything," defensive end Wayne Hamilton said.

Bryant had nothing but praise for his team's defensive effort throughout the game, and handed it a very highly deserved compliment.

"I don't believe I've ever been associated with a team that did such a great job defensively," Bryant said.

Not to be outdone, Tide linebacker and the game's Most Valuable Player, Barry Krauss attributed the team's play and attitude squarely to Bryant.

"Coach Bryant is the secret because he kept us loose throughout the game and that includes during halftime. He is the difference," Krauss said.

Although the defense played the major role in the game for Alabama, the Tide's crunching ground attack did more than its share to keep the Tide offense moving and the Lion defense off-balance.

The Tide's wishbone offense rolled up 208 yards on the ground and accounted for one touchdown, that an eight yard run by sophomore running back Major Ogilvie in the third quarter.

"The wideouts (what Alabama calls their wide receivers) made great blocks as well as the fullback and Tony Nathan too. They (the Lion's) are great tacklers and we realized there was nothing we could do about it. On the play, I saw the safety coming up and I

was ready to get killed, but I just kept my legs inbound and ran," Ogilvie said about the score.

The man who runs Alabama's wishbone offense, quarterback Jeff Rutledge, said that the play which accounted for Ogilvie's touchdown was sent in from the bench.

"All I know is that in the huddle someone brought the play in," Rutledge said.

Rutledge said that beside the Lion defense, the crowd noise in the Superdome bothered the Alabama offense.

"The crowd noise bothered us a lot. The fullback right behind me never heard me. Everyone in the crowd was fired up, but that's great," Rutledge said.

The new formation Bama put in at the start of the second half was very much affected by the noise in the Superdome and thus was ineffective against the Lions.

"I put it in (that spread formation) the other day. It's a damn good formation, but our wideouts couldn't hear the calls. The formation is called 'Group right/Group left,'" Bryant said.

As far as Alabama's first touchdown goes, Rutledge just wanted to keep the Lions from getting the ball one more time.

"On the first TD, we were just trying to get a first down and run out the clock. But Bruce (Bolton) had his man one-on-one and I led him a little low, but he made a great catch," Rutledge said.

Lions frustrated, disappointed ... but not ashamed

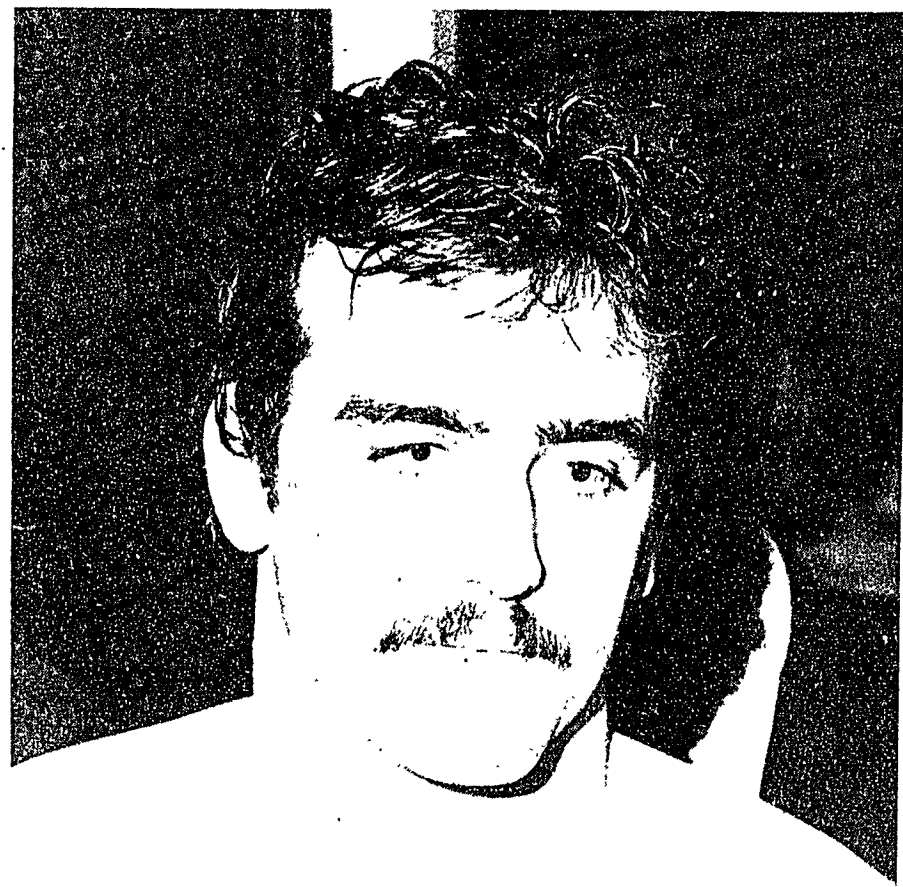


Photo by Joe Torti

Scott Fitzkee gazes down toward the floor in the Penn State lockerroom after the Lions lost to Alabama in the Sugar Bowl. His expression tells the story of the heartbreaking defeat that prevented Penn State from capturing its first national title. Fitzkee and most of the players stayed around, despite their disappointment, to answer questions.

NEW ORLEANS, La. — Paul Suhey sat slumped in a seat at the front of his locker, his head resting in his hands. As a group of sportswriters filed into Penn State's nearly silent lockerroom, he looked up, then gazed wearily toward the floor.

Penn State's 14-7 loss to Alabama in the Sugar Bowl was more than just a loss. It was total devastation. The 19 consecutive wins the Lions had rolled up previously didn't seem to matter now. Nothing did. The only thing Suhey could think about was the national title dream that had been shattered so quickly and rudely.

Just four hours earlier, that dream had seemed so alive. Everything had gone so right for the Lions. They had gone undefeated, and had overcome every challenge and obstacle with remarkable poise. But something went wrong during the most important 60 minutes in Penn State football history. And Suhey hardly knew how to cope with the disappointment, the despair, the frustration, and the utter dejection.

"You just sit here and you look around at all these guys," Suhey said quietly. As he spoke, his eyes watered up and the words became even more difficult to utter. But he continued, trying to overcome the emotion. "We've been working so hard for so long. It's just a very empty feeling. Right now it feels like the whole world just fell in on us."

"We all sat here right after the game. We looked around at each other and just thought to ourselves. We realize we gave it all we had. We've had some fond memories of the

whole season and, for the other seniors, our four years here. These guys are gonna be my best buddies 10 years from now. This was the first time this year we lost together."

"All we wanted this year was an opportunity like we had today. That's all we wanted. And we didn't take advantage of it. We're more than disappointed. But we've got some great guys around here. It's gonna keep us down for a day or two, but not very long. I just hope the younger guys learn from it."



Rick Weber

Four or five lockers away, senior flanker Bob Bassett stood, fully dressed. He was somewhat more composed, but it was still very hard for him to deal with the defeat.

"Right now, I just can't believe we lost," Bassett said, speaking slowly and weighing his words carefully. "I was standing on the sideline. I think there was a minute to go and Alabama had the ball. I was saying, 'This isn't real. This isn't supposed to happen. It's not the way it should go.'"

Joe Paterno had told the players a few minutes earlier that he hoped the crushing defeat wouldn't be the thing

they would remember most about their careers at Penn State. And for Bassett, it wouldn't be.

"It was a great opportunity to play for No. 1," Bassett said, "and that will be the thing that sticks out most about my career. That will be what I remember."

A few feet away, center Chuck Correal was buttoning up his vest. Correal was another one of the seniors Paterno had felt so much sympathy for. The battles with Alabama's strong defensive line had drained Correal physically. And the loss left him emotionally drained.

"It's hard to describe my feelings," he said. "I just feel bad for the whole team. . . it's frustrating to know we came so close. These things usually set in a couple of hours after the game. Right now, I'm just kind of bummed out. . . and a little stunned, really."

"I don't think it would be hard for me if I was left alone to just think about it myself. But I think everybody will talk about it for a long time and keep bringing it up. I don't feel ashamed at all. I feel real happy with what we accomplished at Penn State. I'm gonna try to look at it on the positive side."

Over in the corner, about 30 writers crowded around Chuck Fusina. The scene was incredibly similar to one that occurred 15 months ago, when Penn State had last lost a football game. That was the day Kentucky intercepted three Fusina passes and beat the Lions 24-20. That was the day Chuck Fusina faced a swarm of writers with honesty and candor

when he could have easily hid in the trainer's room.

Fusina didn't hide then, and he didn't hide Monday in the lockerroom far below the Superdome's massive roof. And he was much more disappointed about this loss than any previous one. He had said many times before that he cared more about winning the national title than he cared about gathering any individual honors, including the Heisman Trophy.

But there he stood answering the same questions over and over again without a trace of anger or resentment. His team had lost, but he kept it in perspective just like he kept the many victories in perspective.

"When I think about this game, which I probably will, I'll know could have done better," he said grimly. "But I'll also realize it's still just a game. Life will still go on and I'm not about to stop anything else. I'm disappointed but not disappointed enough to say it's all over."

"All I'm thinking about is that our senior class has been winners. We never went to a game where we didn't do our best. I still think we're one of the best teams in the country and on any given day, we could beat any team in the country. I'll just remember it as not being our or my day."

Fusina started to answer another question, but somebody yelled to him that the team bus was leaving. "Sorry, but I gotta go," he said.

Fusina picked up his things and walked away. But he wasn't the last one to leave. Paul Suhey was.