

# For pros, football isn't just a game

By RICH SCARCELLA

Daily Collegian Sports Writer  
It's the same procedure for any other Penn State graduate. Three and one-half years of career preparation in the classroom is followed by job interviews in March, a job offer in April, graduation in May and, hopefully, employment in July. But in this case, the classroom is the football field, the interviews are physical examinations, the job offer is the National Football League draft and employment is a National Football League training camp.

Some former Nittany Lion standouts who are playing in the NFL said that the transition from college football to professional football is a mental adjustment more than a physical one.

"Professional football is a lot more complex," Los Angeles Ram running back Mike Guman said. "I would say it's a bigger, adjustment mentally. It's more confusing. The physical aspect of the game is pretty much the same."

Guman's teammate in college, and in the pros, offensive tackle Irv Pankey, agreed with that assessment of the transition.

"You have to get attuned to the system," Pankey said. "Physically, it's the same. It's a mental adjustment. You also have to be a lot quicker here."

"It's not college. It's a job. There's too much intensity or pressure put on. I like it a lot, though. It's a good time."

Even though the NFL may be mentally demanding, New York Jet linebacker Lance Mehl said that the professional player has fewer diversions off the field.

"You can concentrate more on things like defensive coverages," Mehl said. "There's no studying for classes. It still is a lot of mental work."

It may sound like Psychology 2, but the Lions' all-time second-leading ground gainer, Chicago Bear running back Matt Suhey, also said the mental transition was the most difficult.

"Mentally, the NFL is more overwhelming," Suhey said. "There are more defenses to read. The offense is more wide open, which allows it to do more things."

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—Irv Pankey



Tight end Mickey Shuler, also of the Jets, said the NFL could be as impersonal as the bureaucracy of the federal government.

"It's not as personable here as it was at Penn State," Shuler said. "You're here on your own. It's real cold, and not as friendly until you're here a while."

"You're always on edge," he said. "You don't know if or when you're going to get traded. It's a difficult experience."

One ex-Penn Stater said, however, that stepping into the NFL was no different than stepping out of bed in the morning.

"It was the same as going from high school to college," said Oakland Raider

linebacker Matt Millen, who played defensive tackle for the Lions. "There's nothing different about it. It was no big deal."

"It's being in the right place at the right time. A lot of guys just don't have the opportunity."

Detroit Lion offensive tackle Keith Dorney, who was named to the NFL All-

NFL wasn't a drastic one.

"The Penn State football program is a lot further ahead in fundamental teaching," he said. "You're already geared for the pros when you come out of there. The coaching at Penn State is excellent. My success is attributable to (offensive line coach) Dick Anderson."

Professional scouts are able to detect that quality in Penn State athletes. It may be the reason why 23 Lions have been drafted by NFL teams in the last three years, and why about 35 Penn Staters remain on NFL rosters.

"We were well-coached at Penn State," Shuler said. "We were taught the proper techniques, the fundamentals. It was a little advantage over other places. You're where the pro coaches want you to be."

Pittsburgh Steeler kicker Matt Bahr said that NFL teams admire the attitude the coaches teach at Penn State.

"The coaching staff stresses team play instead of individual play," Bahr said. "NFL teams tend to like that."

Millen, who has recovered from a back injury that kept him out most of his senior year as a Lion, said recruiting talented ballplayers is also a key to Penn State's success in the NFL.

"The players have the ability to play," he said. "They have the talent. You get players there now like (Larry) Kubin, (Booker) Moore and (Curt) Warner who have outstanding ability."

Dorney said both coaching and recruiting have put the Nittany Lions up with USC, Alabama and Ohio State as fertile grounds for potential professional athletes.

"The reason is basically that Penn State recruits outstanding talent," he said. "The

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# Former Lions credit coaches for success

Regard for academics plays key role

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coaching is also excellent. It's a great staff and it has great organization."

Bahr, who graduated with a degree in electrical engineering, credited the coaching staff for its stand regarding education.

"I think Penn State's major reason for success is that coaching goes hand in hand with education," he said.

Lion coach Joe Paterno, the man directly responsible for the academic standards associated with Penn State athletics, has left his mark on some of his former players.

Tight end Ron LaPointe, who is on the injured reserve list of the Baltimore Colts with torn rib cartilage, said he remembers one Paterno quote well.

"Joe always told us, 'Take care of the little things and the big things will take care of themselves,'" LaPointe said. "I think Joe's a thorough coach. He's really dedicated and a hard worker. It rubs off on the players. You listen to some of his stuff, then after a while, you see the truth in it."

Although Paterno's "Grand Experiment" with athletics and academics has drawn criticism lately, LaPointe said that it has been and will continue to be necessary for Penn State football players.

"Over 90 percent of Joe's football players graduate," LaPointe said. "That's important, especially when you see around the league that only two percent of college football players make it to the pros."

"He's pushed people to get their education. Players have to realize that you just can't play the rest of your lives."

Some of the former Lions said they have learned many qualities through the teachings of Paterno that could be used in everyday life.

"I learned how to keep things in perspective," Millen said. "Don't look back. Don't look ahead."

Paterno gives his players self-confidence and independence and also, at the same time, preaches a team-oriented attitude.

"He teaches how to stand up on your own," Shuler said. "And to do what's right for you and the team."

The contrasts between the worlds of college and professional football could be severe. But, at least in Bahr's case, the coaching methods aren't that far apart.

"Both Joe and Chuck (Noll) try to be educators," he said. "They educate their players. They like to play as a team here as they do at Penn State. They also like to win."

"It was a great thrill for me just to play for the Steelers," said Bahr, echoing the sentiment of other former Nittany Lions. "And the biggest thrill of all was playing in the Super Bowl."

But it still was just another day at the office for a Penn State graduate.

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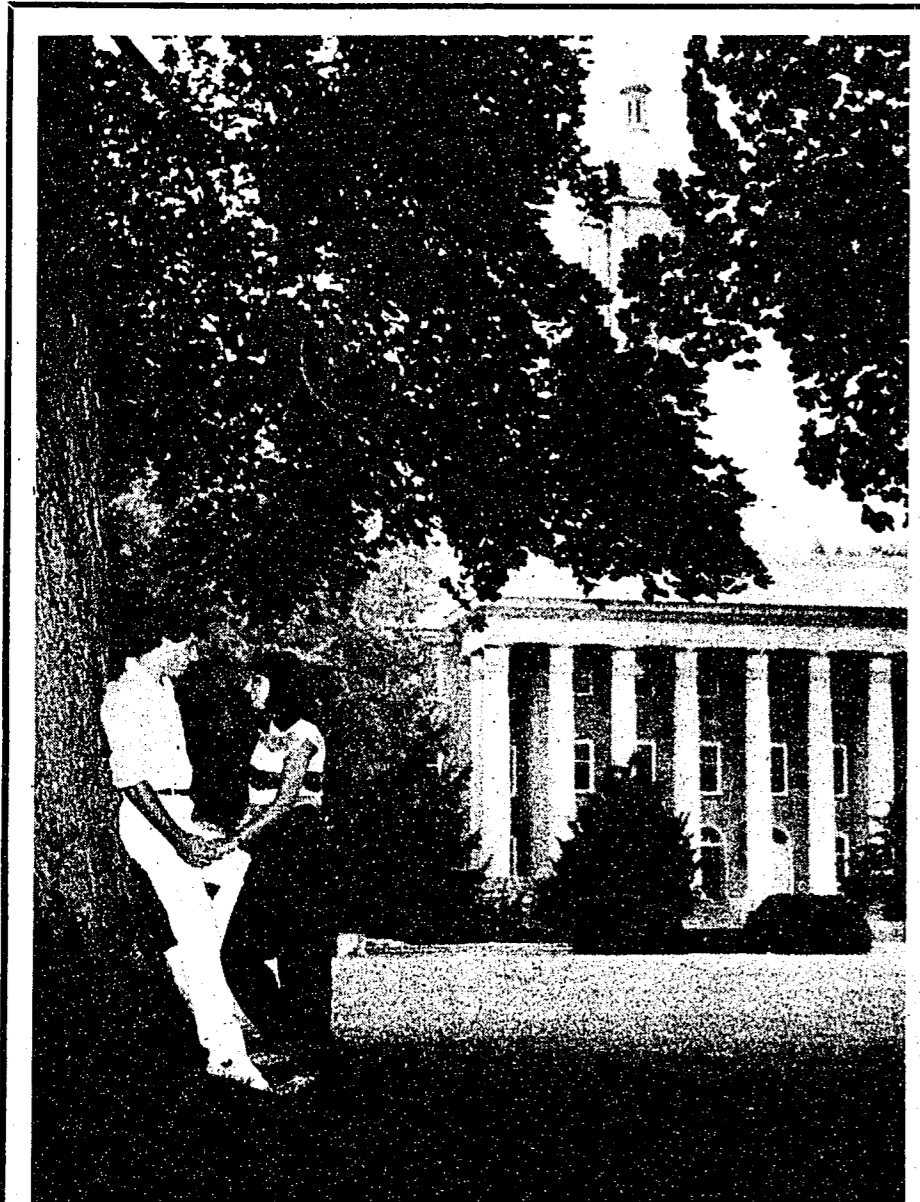
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