

# Offensive line young but ready

**Editor's Note:** This is the fourth story in an eight-part series previewing Penn State's football team. This story previews the offensive line.

By **ANDREW KREBS**  
Collegian Sports Writer

A relatively young Penn State offensive line led the way for tailback Curtis Enis and fullback Aaron Harris last season with impressive results.

Both Enis and Harris are expected to be even better this season, but they will have to do it without three key members of last year's offensive line.

Short tackle Jason Henderson, center Barry Tielsch and long guard Pete Marczyk are gone.

Henderson, a 6-foot-5, 270-pounder will likely be replaced by 6-foot-7, 289-pound Ryan Fagan. Fagan, a redshirt junior, was No. 2 on the depth chart at long tackle last season behind John Blick, but he successfully moved to short tackle in the spring.

It was a spring so successful, he was presented the Red Worrell Award as the offense's most improved player.

But he had to share the honor with his competition for the starting short tackle role, Floyd Wedderburn.

Wedderburn, a 6-foot-5, 330-pound redshirt junior, made his Penn State debut against Ohio State last season and played in six games before the campaign was through. Then the coaches decided he would be better suited for the offensive line due to a knee injury he suffered two years ago.

"Because of his knee, I think, it's been a plus for him," Penn State coach Joe Paterno said. "He had trouble with people around his legs on defense, but on offense he can smother people easily."

Tielsch, who started every game at center last season, will likely be replaced by Kevin Conlin.

Conlin, a 6-foot-3, 275-pound fifth-year senior, is nearly 20 pounds lighter than Tielsch, but has starting experience.

Last season, when starting short guard Brad Jones was diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism, Conlin started five games at that position.

This year, he will be one of the leaders on the offensive line from his natural center position.

Rich Stankewicz, a 6-foot-3, 282-pound redshirt sophomore, will probably serve as Conlin's backup.

Marczyk, who started the last six games of the regular season at long guard will likely be replaced by Phil Ostrowski, the most experienced member of the offensive line.

Ostrowski, a 6-foot-4, 278-pound fifth-year senior, started the first six regular-season games at long guard last season before moving to short guard for the remainder of the campaign.

Now, he's moving back to long guard.

"Phil should be the leader of the offensive line," Paterno said. "He's had the most experience."

He has a chance to be somebody that should get a lot of attention. He's one of the keys to this football team."

Chance Bright, a 6-foot-7, 308-pound sophomore, will probably backup Ostrowski.

Filling the void left by Ostrowski's migration from short guard to long guard will likely be Eric Cole.

A 6-foot-5, 300-pound redshirt sophomore, Cole is making a migration of his own. In the spring, he switched from short tackle to short guard.

Last season, as a short tackle, Cole played in 10 regular season games, seeing a season-high 42 snaps in two of those games.

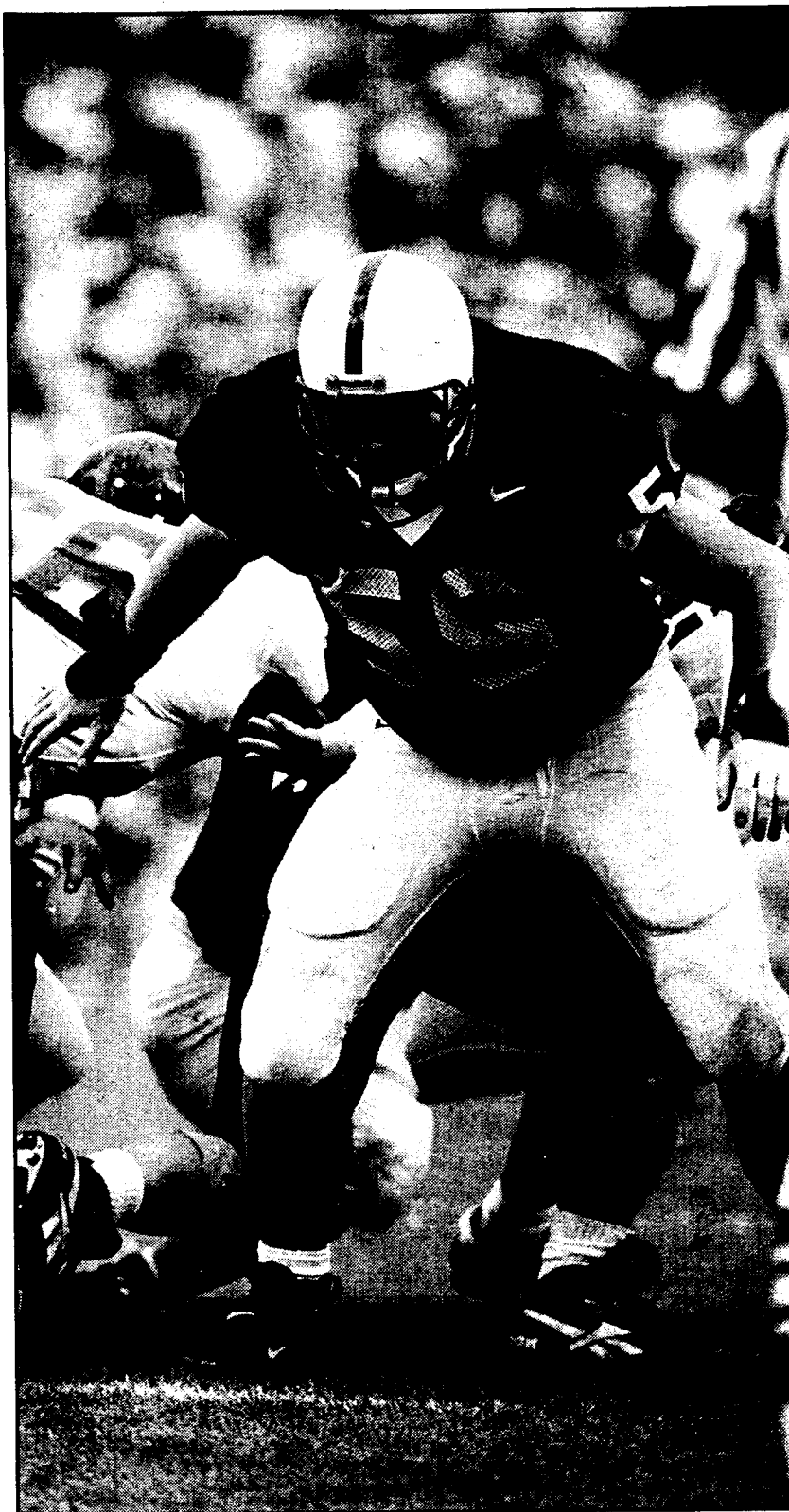
The 6-foot-2, 298-pound Gabe Tincer, a redshirt sophomore, will likely backup Cole.

The only offensive lineman starting 1997 in the same position he finished 1996, is Blick at long tackle.

Last season, the 6-foot-6, 310-pounder became the first true freshman to start on the offensive line during Paterno's tenure.

"One of the things about John, he's got a very, very stable mental state," said Penn State offensive line coach Bill Kenney. "Put that in combination with his size and his strength for a young kid, and that's the advantage he has over most."

Basim Grant, a 6-foot-3, 293-pound redshirt sophomore, will likely backup Blick.



Collegian Photo/Michael L. Palmieri

Kevin Conlin leads the charge for Penn State's offensive line in a game against Northern Illinois last season. Conlin played short guard for the Lions last season but will be the starting center on this year's squad.

As a unit, the offensive line is larger than last year's squad. It remains to be seen if they can be more successful.

"I think their willingness to work and to develop and mature as a

group, will really be tell-tale of how well they do this year," Kenney said.

"The most important thing is, we've got to watch the ball and stay on blocks."

# Winning: a custom in the Conlin family

*Kevin Conlin follows in his brothers' footsteps this season as the starting center for Penn State.*

By **ANDREW KREBS**  
Collegian Sports Writer

Eleven years ago, defensive tackle Bucky Conlin was a crucial link in the Penn State defensive line — the same defensive line that propelled the Nittany Lions to their second national championship in the 1980's.

And he had a brother named Kevin.

Three years ago, defensive tackle Keith Conlin was a crucial link in the Penn State defensive line — the same defensive line that propelled the Lions to their first undefeated season since 1986.

And he had a brother named Kevin.

Kevin Conlin was 11-years-old when Bucky Conlin earned a national championship ring and was selected as an All-American by the football writers.

By the time Keith Conlin went to the Rose Bowl in 1994, with national championship hopes swirling around the team, Kevin Conlin was a member of the team as well.

But he saw limited action that season. His time to shine and carry on the Conlin family's winning tradition at Penn State had not yet arrived.

Now it has.

For the first time in his Penn State career, Kevin Conlin, a 6-foot-3, 275-pound fifth-year senior, is No. 1 on the preseason depth chart at his position — center.

"Kevin's done a very good job this off-season," said Penn State offensive line coach Bill Kenney. "We're excited about where he's at and what the future holds for him."

Last season, Kevin Conlin started five early-season games at short guard when starting guard Brad Jones was diagnosed with a pulmonary embolism prior to the Louisville game.

"We're excited about where he's at and what the future holds for him."

— **Bill Kenney**  
Offensive line coach

Following a 38-7 thumping at the hands of Ohio State in early October, though, Kevin Conlin lost his starting position to Phil Ostrowski.

He took steps this summer to prevent that from happening again, but he knows nothing is guaranteed.

"No jerseys are pinned on here," Kevin Conlin said. "I guess I'll have to work hard and try to get better every day. I hope I can do that."

As he does continue to improve and work his way into the consciousness of Penn State fans, the comparisons to his successful brothers will likely increase.

In fact, they have already begun.

"He's not anywhere near as big as his brothers," said Penn State coach Joe Paterno. "Kevin doesn't have as much physical ability as either Bucky or Keith, but he's actually a more determined kid because he's not a big kid."

"I mean, both those kids were 300 pounders, and he's a 270 pounder. He's got to be more concerned about techniques and going after people on every down."

Kevin Conlin, the determined kid, said last year's offensive line was good, but he also said this year's unit, with a little effort, could be better.

"I figure, if we work hard and don't take anybody too lightly — I know the coaches won't allow us to do that — we'll be all right," he said. "Hopefully we'll put a couple wins together."

A couple wins?

Shouldn't Kevin Conlin expect so much more?

After all, undefeated seasons and national championships are in his blood.

He's a Conlin.

# Who could ask for anything more???

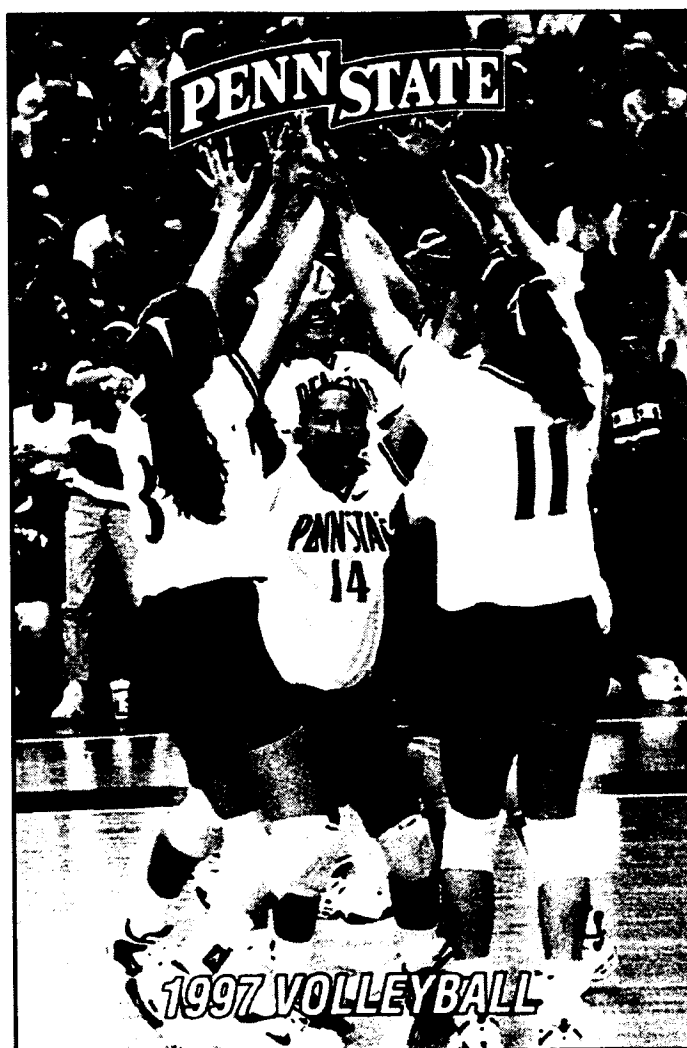
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