

Battle, Lucas matchup pivotal to final outcome

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

In the eyes of Penn State assistant coach Dan Earl, the game within-a-game between Penn State and Michigan State's point guards features two dynamic and very similar players. But for every way they're the

MEN'S BASKETBALL

same, Kalin Lucas and Talar Battle are completely different in Battle's eyes.

"I don't think I'm similar [to Lucas] at all. He does what he does for his team, and I do what I do for mine," Battle said. "I see him as another opponent when we hit the court. I'm out here to help my team win a game, and I'm sure he's out there the same way."

Lucas, the reigning Big Ten Player of the Year, leads the

Spartans with 15.4 points per game and 3.8 assists per contest. Aside from his numbers, Lucas holds the keys to Michigan State's up-tempo and balanced offense, using his quickness to slash through defenses and create for his teammates.

Opposing Lucas is Penn State's leading scorer in Battle at 19.1 points per game. Aside from scoring, Battle also leads the Nittany Lions in rebounding, assists and steals and is the only major-conference player to lead his team in each of these categories.

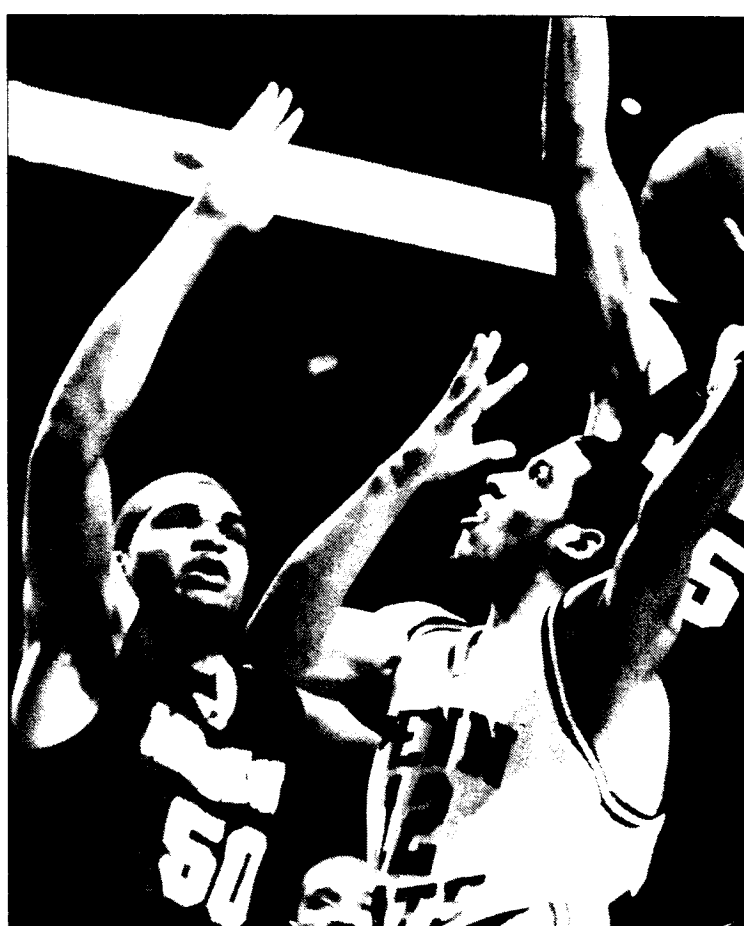
Earl said the comparison starts with the two juniors' stature and their quickness. Lucas is listed at 6-foot-1 and 190 pounds, while Battle is listed at six-foot and 170 pounds. Both have full court and lateral speed and can create one-man fast breaks once the ball is in their hands.

"They're very similar. They can both drive the ball well to the hole. They can both shoot 3s as well, so their very similar in that respect," Earl said. "To take it one step forward, they both kind of have a swagger and confidence about them. They're willing to take the ball and either make the big shot or make the big play to try to involve somebody else or free somebody else."

Lucas sprained his ankle against Wisconsin and missed the Spartans' 78-73 loss at Illinois on Feb. 6 before returning Tuesday night in a 76-64 loss to Purdue. Penn State coach Ed DeChellis said Michigan State is a different team without Lucas, and with the junior still banged up, the No. 10 Spartans come into State College mired in a three-game skid.

"[Lucas] has the ball in his hands so much he makes other guys better. When he's not out there, they're not as fast up the floor," DeChellis said.

"He's a special player, a candidate for player of the year in our league, so it tells you what kind of player he is. When he's not on the



Penn State guard Talar Battle (12) attempts a hook shot over two Minnesota defenders in the Nittany Lions' 66-64 loss last Saturday.



Spartans guard Kalin Lucas (1) drives against Minnesota's Colton Iverson Jan. 23. Lucas leads MSU in minutes played and points

floor it affects everybody else's game."

Earl echoed DeChellis in saying Michigan State is radically different without Lucas and said it was a testament to the Spartans junior's leadership. The assistant coach and former Lion guard also backed Battle's leadership this year and said the three years both Lucas and Battle have played in the Big Ten have given them plenty of experience.

Having gone through the "battles of the Big Ten," Earl said, both Lucas and Battle know what their opponent on the floor is going to do to try to win. And with two teams looking to end losing streaks ready to meet, two of col-

lege basketball's most electric stars will look to continue their individual war.

The last time Battle and Lucas met, Feb. 1, 2009, they went back-and-forth, scoring 29 and 23 points respectively in Penn State's 72-68 upset over the then No. 9 Spartans in East Lansing.

Despite the arrival of a player with a Final Four appearance and a skill-set and speed comparable to his own, Battle said he is going to take on Lucas like he would any other foe.

"When I step on the court I play with a certain confidence and swagger, and I feel like I'm the best player out there," Battle said. "Just because he's the reigning Big Ten Player of the Year, I'm not gonna treat him any different than any other opponent. I'll be ready to play and try to win the battle and help my team win the game."

Penn State assistant coach Dan Earl lays out the keys to defending reigning Big Ten P.O.Y. Kalin Lucas: psucollegian.com

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Lions desperate for win before tourney

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Jeff Brooks knows how important getting a first conference win will be. He says his team is "desperate" for one.

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But for Brooks and the Penn State men's basketball team (8-15), which has gotten off to its worst start (0-11) to conference play since joining the Big Ten, a victory means more than just snapping a skid.

Instead, Brooks said it could ignite a different kind of streak — one he believes could begin this Saturday when the Nittany Lions host Michigan State.

"If we get this win Saturday, which I think we will if we come out, play hard, play great defense and score the ball," Brooks said, "if we get that win, I think the Big

Ten — the rest of the opponents we have — better watch out, because we're gonna get hot pretty quick."

Brooks said the Lions didn't have any specific goals for the rest of the conference season aside from gaining some momentum at the right time.

"Right now we're kind of desperate for our first win," Brooks said. "We want to get something going before we get into the Big Ten tournament."

As the season has progressed, however, those wins appear more and more difficult to come by. Of the Lions' final seven regular-season games, four are against top-25 teams — with two of the three others on the road.

Nonetheless, as he has done all season long, coach Ed DeChellis talked about his team's potential, saying it may become clear once the Lions earn their initial conference win.

"Once you get the first one other things will come," DeChellis said. "If we were getting blown out of every game, I'd say we just have a hard time winning. But we're not."

Of the 11 conference losses the Lions have this season, they have dropped six by six points or fewer or in overtime. Only Illinois has played in more close Big Ten contests.

Brooks said Saturday's buzzer-beating loss to Minnesota was one of the toughest the Lions have experienced all season. As the referee gave the final indication that Lawrence Westbrook's jumper was good, Brooks just squatted motionless at midcourt with his head in his hands.

Junior forward D.J. Jackson

said because of close losses like that one, he will take a win no matter how it comes. Only after the Lions earn that victory, Jackson said, will he worry about using it to gain momentum.

"We have to focus on Michigan State and getting a win," Jackson said. "If we do that, then we'll use that as momentum to carry us the rest of the conference season. We have a team that can compete with anybody on any given night, and I think we're a lot better of a team than our record has shown."

One triumph, DeChellis said, and the Lions' ability to compete in the Big Ten may become apparent soon after.

"When you win a game, hopefully another one follows and another one follows that," DeChellis said. "But we haven't been able to get that first one, which adds to the frustration."

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Penn State forward Jeff Brooks tries to reject Indiana's Bobby Capobianco's layup in the Hoosiers' 67-61 win Jan. 21.

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