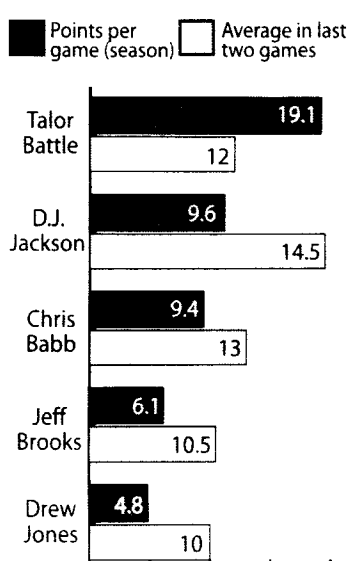


Lions share scoring responsibility in wins

Balancing act

Talor Battle has gotten more scoring help from his teammates.



Source: gopsusports.com
Tiffanie Liaw, Collegian

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Talor Battle has been making the same passes all season long. The junior point guard said his trust in his teammates and his willingness to distribute the ball never changed while the Nittany Lions were in the midst of a 12-game losing streak.

The only difference during the last two contests, Battle said, is when he gave up the ball, his teammates converted their opportunities.

The result: a snapped losing streak and a pair of road wins.

With so much focus on the Penn State men's basketball team's offense falling squarely on Battle, the conference's second-leading scorer, the point guard said the recent balanced attack has been the key to the two victories.

"They're the same passes I've been making all year long," Battle

said. "Credit the guys. They've been hitting shots, and that's great. Whenever I'm playing the game, I'm always looking."

For much of the season, however, Battle hasn't received support. He is averaging 19 points per game, and the next highest scorer, D.J. Jackson, is averaging 9.6.

But the Lions' biggest struggle has been finding support after Battle, Jackson and sophomore guard Chris Babb. They are the only three Lions averaging more than seven points per contest.

That imbalance has virtually disappeared in the last two games. For Babb, the even scoring is the way he has expected his team to perform all season long, and the way he expects his team to play at 6:30 tonight when the Lions host Ohio State.

"We're just scoring how we're supposed to," Babb said.

"Jeff [Brooks] is attacking the basket. Talor is finding me on the perimeter. D.J. is getting rebounds and getting jumpers and Drew [Jones] is attacking the bas-

ket and getting offensive rebounds."

Brooks and Jones have been two of the Lions' biggest question marks on offense this season, after each played an important role in the Lions' National Invitation Tournament title run last season.

The last two games have been two of the best all year for the struggling starters.

After recording only one double-digit scoring performance in the first 12 conference games, Jones has strung together back-to-back 10-point contests. And Brooks' two highest offensive outputs this conference season came last week when he scored 12 and nine points, respectively.

The confidence the players have in each other on the floor, Brooks said, stemmed directly from the losing streak.

"I think we all trust each other even more," Brooks said. "I think the losing streak has made us become closer as a team — to try to fight through adversity."

In an early December contest against UMBC, Brooks earned the No. 1 play on SportsCenter's Top Plays with a reverse dunk. Those were the only two points he scored the whole game.

After that game, and as he has done all season, head coach Ed DeChellis called for more consistency from Brooks, given Brooks' natural talent displayed on plays like those. In Saturday's win at Michigan, Brooks had nine points, and it was his corner jumpshot that sealed the win.

Battle praised his teammates, saying with newfound confidence like Brooks' extending to the whole team, opposing defenses will have to stop focusing so much of their attention on him.

"If my teammates continue to play like that and other teams continue that pressure they have to put on me, they'll continue to get beaten," Battle said. "And that's fine."

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MEN'S BASKETBALL

Players: DeChellis' mentality helps snap skid

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Ed DeChellis gives all the credit to his players for the Penn State men's basketball team's last two wins.

But those players, who recorded road wins last week at Michigan and Northwestern to snap a 12-game losing streak, each quickly deflected that credit back to their head coach.

Dutifully or not, the Nittany Lions said it was DeChellis' even demeanor during the team's worst-ever losing streak to begin Big Ten play that sparked their recent success.

"Coach D, to his credit, he never showed any panic. He never stopped believing in us," junior forward D.J. Jackson said. "It just gave us confidence to go out there and play well because our coach believes in us. I think that played a big part in these last couple of games."

Jackson said DeChellis did his best during practice to set aside the losses even as they piled up — without a win — into the sec-

ond month of conference play.

DeChellis reiterated to the players, Jackson said, that they were more talented than their record indicated while at the same time pointing out their underachievement. Jackson said the underachievement was used as a building tool instead of a dwelling place during practice.

Junior forward Jeff Brooks, whose turnaround in the last two contests has typified the team's, said DeChellis hasn't changed his attitude now that the Lions have won consecutive games for the first time since Dec. 19 and 21.

"It's very important because he's our leader," Brooks said. "We need to hear from our head man that it's going to be all right. Just keep playing, keep pushing and keep fighting."

Junior point guard Talor Battle, the team's leading scorer this season, noted how easy it could have been for the Lions to collapse given their rough start. But he said the tone DeChellis established in practice wouldn't allow it.

"We won our first game, and we felt like it was not our first win, and we were 0-12, it never felt like we were 0-12," Battle said. "We just keep working hard."

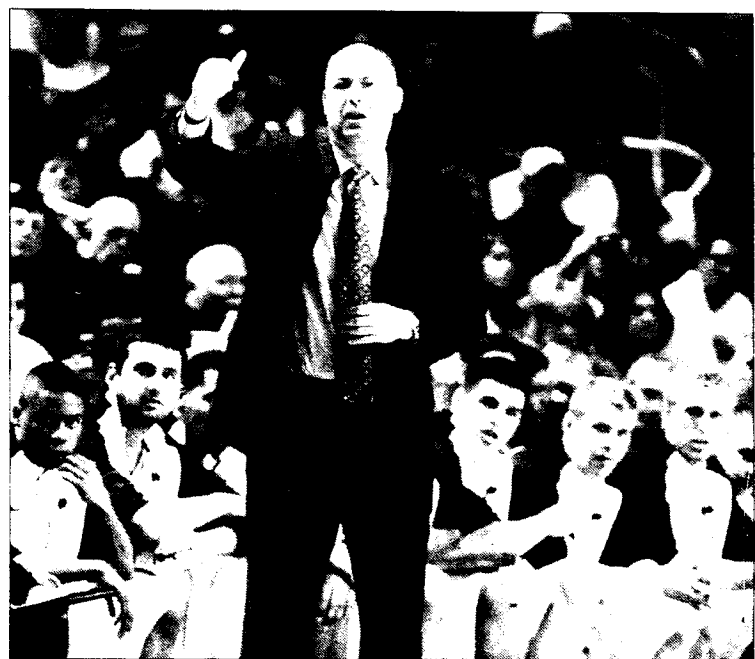
DeChellis laughed at the notion that it was easier to coach an 0-12 team than a 2-12 team, saying his next-play-only style didn't allow it.

But sophomore guard Chris Babb, who agreed with his teammates on DeChellis' constant even-keel demeanor, said he has noticed a change in his coach in the huddle.

"He's still the same coach, he still says the same things, but I think you can tell he's just a little more relaxed," Babb said.

Babb said he thinks DeChellis had a little more fun during the last two contests, and he has noticed his coach smiling more in huddle.

But to Babb, it is nothing out of the ordinary. The lighter attitude simply comes with having the weight of a winless conference season removed from the Lions' shoulders.



Abbey Drey, Collegian

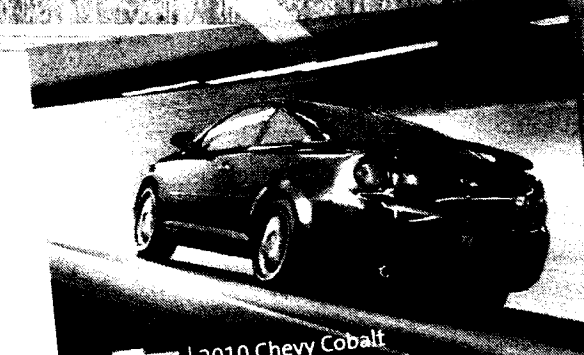
Ed DeChellis yells from the bench against Michigan State Feb. 13.

"It's just a little more relaxed among all the coaches," Babb said. "Now that we've got the first win, I think everybody's more relaxed, and we're just playing our game now."


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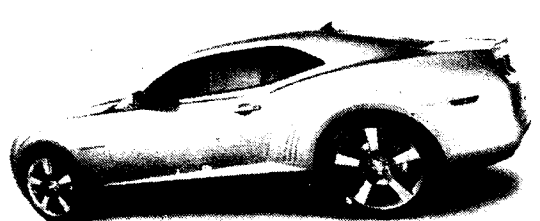
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