

Brooks shows consistency

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Jeff Brooks' talent has never been a question.

The junior forward's highlight-reel dunks — one of which topped SportsCenter's top plays in December — and emphatic blocks

MEN'S BASKETBALL

— including a swat Sunday that ended up in the second row — have proved his natural ability.

But what changed from Brooks' performance in early December until now is his consistency throughout games. Penn State head coach Ed DeChellis said.

In the Nittany Lions' early season loss to Virginia Tech, an athletic reverse jam was Brooks' only bucket of the game. On Sunday, he posted 11 points and seven rebounds to go with several electrifying plays.

That consistency, DeChellis said, stems from a newfound con-

fidence and aggressiveness Brooks found in helping the Lions (11-17, 3-13 Big Ten) win three of their last four games.

In the first minute of Sunday's game, Brooks had an assist, the emphatic block and a rebound in which he flung two defenders off him. Those plays, DeChellis said, typify the difference between the old Brooks and the new one.

"Jeff had a loose ball there — I loved how he dived, and he got on the loose ball," DeChellis said after the game Sunday. "I thought he made a strong move around the post. We've been trying to get him to do that, and tonight it was fun to see him have success."

DeChellis said Brooks has made progress on offense because of a new "north-south" style of play. As a result, DeChellis said, Brooks has spent less time dribbling on the perimeter and more time attacking the basket.

Brooks is averaging 10 points and 5.5 rebounds in the last four games compared to the 5.4 points

he averaged during the Lions' 12-game losing streak to begin conference play.

"I've just been trying to kick my aggressiveness back into play," Brooks said. "Our team really needs for me to play aggressive and not tentative and timid out there."

As long as the Lions continue to succeed with Brooks' assertive play, he said he won't have to change anything about his mentality.

"I just tried to attack the basket as much as I could and grab some rebounds and make some plays for us," Brooks said Sunday. "We came out on the winning end because of it, so I think my job was done."

Assistant coach Lewis Preston noted the increased scoring role Brooks has played during the Lions' stretch of wins.

He said Brooks' scoring has given him the confidence to perform well in other phases of the game.

"Getting on the floor for the



Steph Witt/Collegian

Penn State's Jeff Brooks drives against an Ohio State player during the Nittany Lions' loss to the Buckeyes Feb. 24.

loose balls, grabbing the rebound and wiping the Northwestern guy off the ball — those are signs in my book of a guy who's playing more confidently right now."

Preston said. "We're hoping that continues into Michigan State on Thursday."

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Players believe in coach, so should everyone else

By Stephen Hennessey

CONSIDER this a public address announcement to Penn State basketball fans.

Believe in the Penn State athletic department's decision-making.

It's been mostly spot-on in coaching decisions in the past three years — see Cael

Sanderson replacing Troy Sunderland as wrestling coach.

The bottom line: Ed DeChellis is Penn State's guy — and he should be.

After watching the Nittany Lions' recent streak of wins — three out of four games including Sunday's 79-60 beatdown on Northwestern — it's clear the players have rallied behind their coach.

They believe in DeChellis because he has committed his coaching life to this class of juniors.

Even through 12-straight

losses, players did not publicly question the coaching staff.

"We're a team. We're one family," junior forward D.J. Jackson said after the Lions' 77-67 loss to Illinois on Jan. 27.

"You can't put it on just one person or a group of people. We win as a team, and we lose as a team and we dug ourselves in this hole, and we're all going to dig ourselves out."

That quote came from a press conference following the loss that ensured a winless month of January for the Lions (11-17, 3-13 Big Ten).

It would only be human to question your coaches after such a losing streak. But that hasn't been the case.

"They've continued to fight it exactly how I'd put it," assistant coach Dan Earl said. "It's been a trying season for all of us, to be honest with you. But we kept continuing to preach to the guys, continue to work and continue to get better, and we'll get through this."

"It's a tribute to Coach for staying on them and a tribute to the guys to following Coach's instructions."

As the "Fire DeChellis" chants screamed louder, it seemed like the players played with more passion. In Wednesday's loss to Ohio State, junior forward Jeff Brooks flew out of bounds to save a ball in the late stages of the game. In Sunday's game, Brooks slid for a loose ball at halfcourt and grabbed it from a Northwestern player.

These hustle plays are the sort of key moments the Lions lacked during their losing streak.

DeChellis' work ethic has not changed either, his assistants said.

Assistant coach Lewis Preston was an assistant to Billy Donovan at Florida for two years and to Mike Brey at Notre Dame for six years.

Preston ranks DeChellis, along with Donovan, as one of the best coaches in terms of preparation.

"I don't think anybody I've been around," Preston said, "has stressed the details in preparation for scouting and different things we want to run offensively and defensively and

getting input from their staff. From that standpoint,

[DeChellis] hasn't changed."

One of the biggest knocks on DeChellis has been recruiting. Still, people forget he recruited Jamelle Cornley out of Ohio and Talor Battle out of New York.

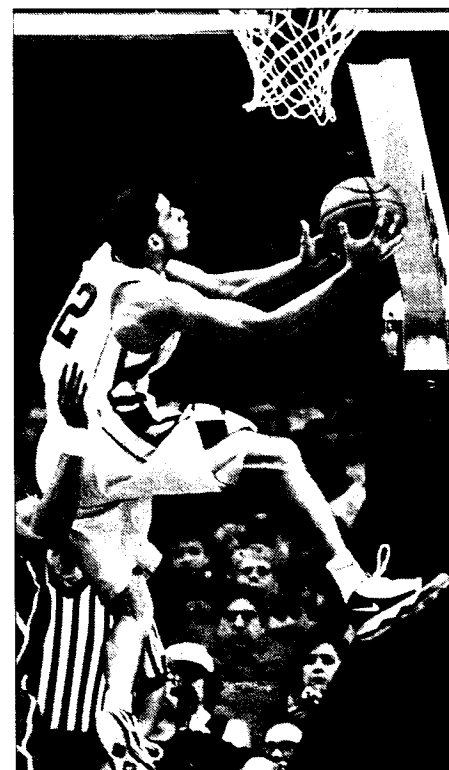
At the end of Sunday's post-game press conference, Brooks waved toward the back of the room as he walked away. The move confused the befuddled reporters who could not interpret his gesture.

But athletic director Tim Curley stood at the back of the room.

He listened to the press conference as Brooks and Battle talked about their win. Curley then clapped as those players exited the media room.

The message was clearly sent to Curley and the athletic department: We're not giving up on this season, so don't give up on us.

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Ryan Ullsh/Collegian

Penn State guard Talor Battle goes up for a layup during the Nittany Lions' win against Northwestern on Sunday at the Bryce Jordan Center.

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