

Offensive linemen aiming for consistency

By Audrey Snyder
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Left tackle Quinn Barham always knew Joe Paterno was a hard guy to please.

The 83-year-old coach demands many things out of his players, one of them being toughness.

Paterno wants his players tough enough to withstand the grind of the season and in Barham's case, tough enough to protect the quarterback's blindside.

But, there is one other thing near and dear to Paterno that Barham said the entire offensive line hasn't mastered yet: consistency.

Though none of the offensive linemen changed positions since the spring, making sure they can perform at a high level on a consistent basis remains the focus.

"We're not very good right now, our offensive line," Paterno said. "We've got two or three guys, three anyway that I think can play right now. The others, we're gonna have to work hard and they're gonna have to work hard in order to be good enough to handle some of the people we have to play."

With Stefen Wisniewski and Lou Eliades occupying the right side, Doug Klopacz at center and De'Ontae Pannell and Barham on the left side, the Nittany Lions

worked through the summer in hopes of fielding a strong line.

But, the one spot the Lions have yet to find consistency at is left guard.

Pannell's spot is anything but secure as senior Johnnie Troutman continues to challenge for the position.

Throw in Matt Stankiewitch, who said he's taken first-team repetitions at left guard throughout the summer, and the Lions have a decision to make in the coming weeks.

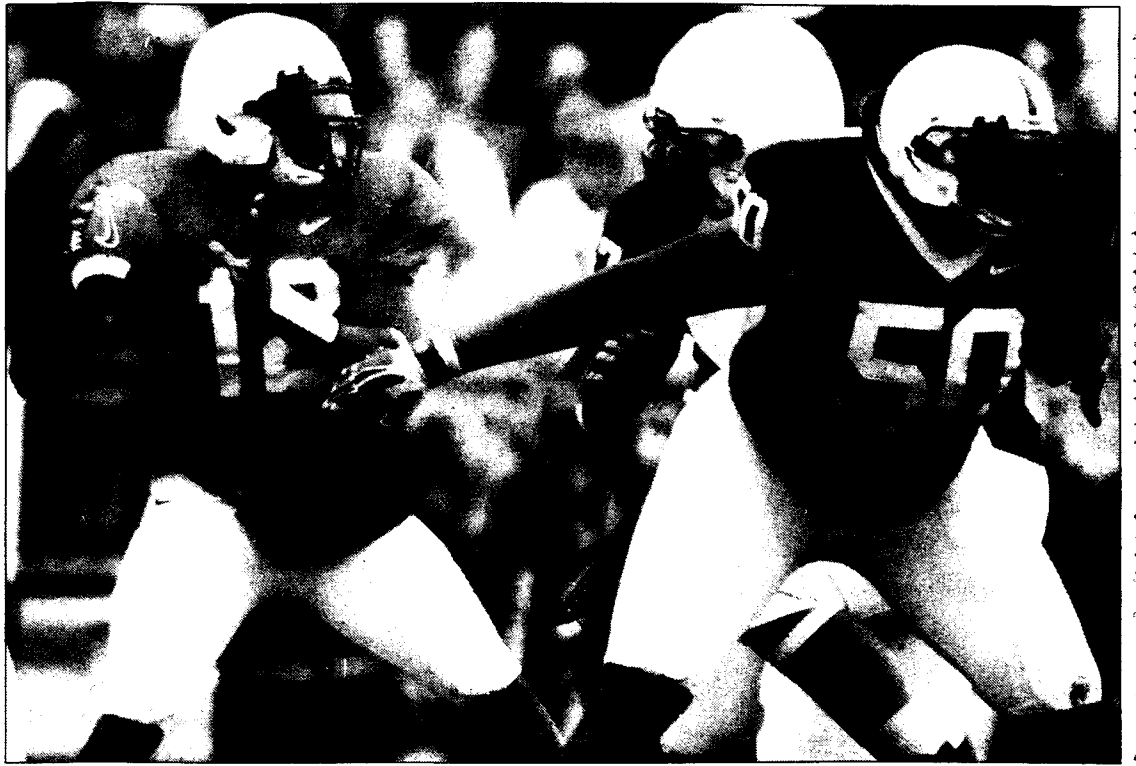
"There's nothing really set," Stankiewitch said of his time spent at guard.

"I didn't even know I was going to be at left guard, but if that's the position they feel I'm best at they're going to put you there."

With Barham fielding questions about how his 6-foot-3, 298 pound frame doesn't make him a stereotypical left tackle and Wisniewski moving back to a position he played in 2008, the Lions understand they have their fair share of question marks.

Watching film all the time and relying on their position mates to share their experience has been helpful to the entire line, Barham said.

But the finer details that come with being an offensive lineman are what the players believe will help them become a top-notch group.



DeOn'tae Pannell (50) on the field during April's Blue-White game. Pannell is looking to secure a spot on the Lions' starting line in 2010 despite an uncertain lineup as it currently stands.

"Offensive line is not easy," Barham said. "People think we just push people around. It's calculating, taking right angles, stuff like that. I think it's just overall working on everything because it all counts."

Making sure the line will be

strong enough in pass protection and good enough to open holes for running back Evan Royster is why Paterno and his staff continue to stay hard on their offensive linemen.

"That's why we gotta coach," Paterno said.

"We've gotta go to work. We've gotta get a bunch of guys and get them to come together and feel good about themselves and look forward to being a tough bunch of kids."

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Athletic Klopacz silently captures starting spot

By Brendan Monahan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The hill stood at a 50-degree incline, awaiting the St. Joseph Regional High School football players after practices.

St. Joseph football coach Tony Karcich made it a ritual for his players to run up the hill — located behind the scoreboard of the school's football field in Montvale, N.J. — eight times after every practice for conditioning purposes.

The climb was bad enough, but even tougher was the hump, the last part of the hill after an enticing plateau that teased the players into thinking the climb was over.

The offensive linemen led the way. One of them, Doug Klopacz,

would run up the hill as well as any skill-position player. The athletic Klopacz played left tackle, had good footwork and was skilled enough to get a look at tight end.



Klopacz

Always the strong, silent type, Klopacz never shied away from the hill or the weight room.

Five years later, Klopacz isn't backing down from his newest challenge: holding onto the starting center spot on Penn State's offensive line.

Klopacz, who has now waited four years for the opportunity, suffered an anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) tear in his right knee

his redshirt sophomore year, a setback that forced Penn State to move Stefen Wisniewski to center last season.

But his ability to quietly do his job has impressed Penn State football coach Joe Paterno and kept the coaching staff from reshuffling the line.

"There's three or four kids on that offensive line that are pretty good, and he's one of them," Paterno said of Klopacz. "Right now I think we could play with him and do all right."

Klopacz's stability in the spring and throughout the summer has allowed right guard Wisniewski and right tackle Lou Eliades to shift back to more comfortable positions.

Karcich said his former player

understands it's his senior year, his last shot, and he's exhausting everything he has to make the best of it.

Listed at 6-foot-3 and 286 pounds, Klopacz may be on the smaller side of linemen, but he's quick and exhibits finesse, where the majority of his skill set lies. And earlier in the offseason, the redshirt senior said quarterback-center exchanges, his fundamental job, were going smoothly.

"It's never really been a problem for me," Klopacz said. "It's just like secondhand. It's just automatic. It has to be at this level."

Though solid on those fronts, Klopacz isn't all the way there yet, according to his former and current coaches.

Paterno and Karcich both said

Klopacz needs to be more aggressive and willing to drive defensive tackles to the ground. Once in a while Klopacz will push people down, but Paterno still needs more consistency in that area.

"They expect more from him because physically, he has the skills," Karcich said.

That athleticism is why he was able to climb the hill at St. Joseph as easily as a skill-position player, tirelessly going up and down, putting in the time and keeping quiet.

"There wasn't too many times he said things," Karcich said, "but when he said something, [his teammates] knew he was serious about it."

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