

# Lions looking to correct takeaway woes

By Andrew J. Cassavell  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Stephon Morris wasn't aware of the exact numbers. He just knew they were bad.

So during the sophomore cornerback's Tuesday teleconference, when he was asked what he thought of opposing teams' 76 percent completion percentage and the defense's zero takeaways through two games, he couldn't put his frustration into words.

"I wish you could see my face right now," Morris said. "That's not a good sign."

Morris set the lofty goal this off-season to have an interception in every game and said he expected the defense to pride itself on takeaways. He said the unit's slow start in that department isn't typical of the Penn State defense he has seen in practice.

"We need to make plays badly," Morris said. "Being last in turnovers is not a good sign, and like you said, 76 percent completion rate against our defense is just not good at all. At practice we need a little more intensity. We need to go about our business just a little bit better."

Penn State's offense has actually forced more turnovers than its defense, when wide receiver Derek Moye stripped the ball from Alabama defensive back Robert Lester on a fumble return.

Morris said the Lions will focus this week on getting those take-

aways, noting fumble drills, tip drills, and hands drills.

"This week you're going to see a totally different secondary."

But Joe Paterno wasn't sure the lack of takeaways was something correctable by drills alone.

"I don't think we're aggressive enough in the secondary in reacting to the ball because we're nervous about getting licked," Paterno said.

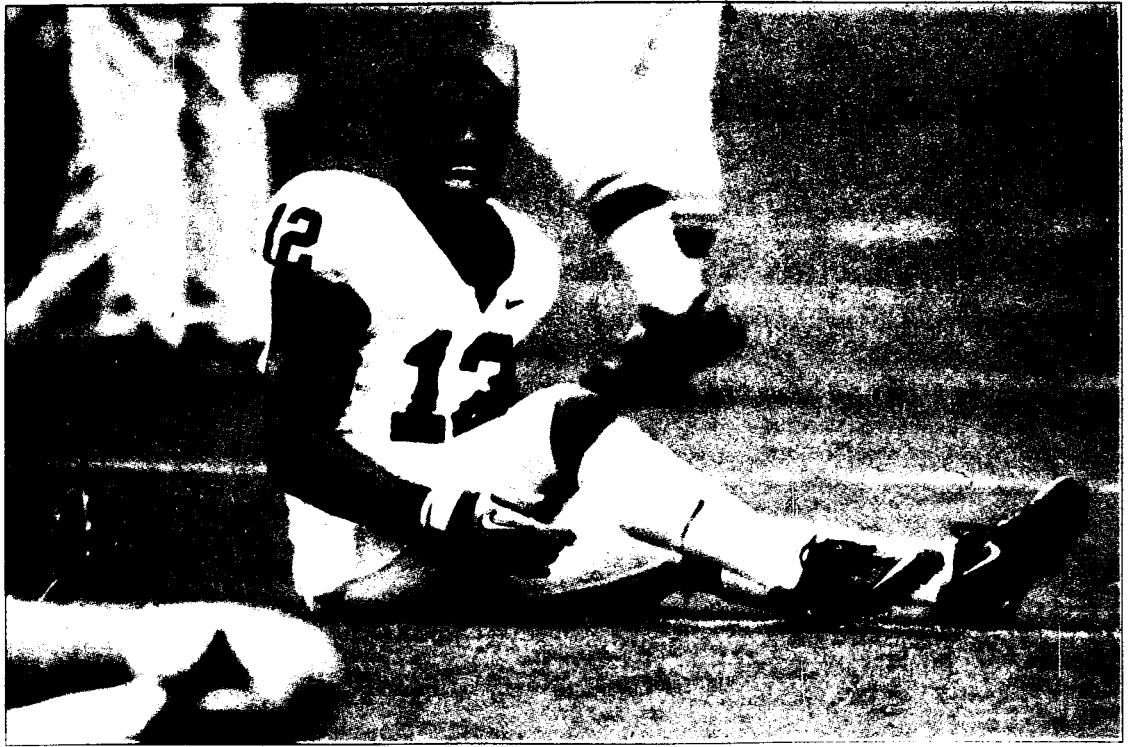
In terms of forcing interceptions, Morris said the biggest thing defensive coordinator Tom Bradley stressed was movement before the snap to disguise the coverage for the opposing quarterback.

The Lions, however, have only recorded three sacks this season, meaning those quarterbacks have had time to sit in the pocket and figure out the coverage before throwing.

"We haven't had that much pressure, but that hasn't put any pressure on the secondary," Morris said. "The assignments we miss, pressure or not, those are assignments we could have taken the ball away. The corners and safeties, we need to play better."

Joe Paterno refused to blame either the secondary or the defensive line for the lack of an interception, calling it, "A combination of those things."

But defensive end Jack Crawford said if the defensive line can do its job hurrying the quarterback, the stress on the defen-



Stephon Morris stretches before the Alabama game. Morris is frustrated over the team's lack of takeaways.

sive backfield will be significantly less.

"We have to force those big-time plays and those big-time turnovers," Crawford said. "It's more about urgency and getting to the ball — forcing bad plays."

In terms of that first strip, Crawford said proper tackling form is the most important thing,

and it's something he said the Lions have lacked so far this season.

"If we get to the point of attack correctly, then we need to attack the ball and not just bring down the man," Crawford said. "If we attack the ball, attack it properly, then it's more likely to cause a fumble."

For Paterno, all of it comes down to defensive intensity and a willingness to take chances.

"When you play two games without a takeaway, you've gotta start being a little bit more aggressive," Paterno said. "You gotta get some people that go after things."

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## Defensive emphasis on improving intensity, tackling

By Brendan Monahan  
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Intensity defines football, and the Penn State defense has lacked it thus far.

"How you practice is how you play," safety Nick Sukay said. "So, we just have to pick it up in practice and really work on technique as far as tackling."

For Joe Paterno, Penn State's tackling is a case of uncertainty and lack of confidence.

He said players get into position but don't know whether their spots are correct. Because of this, they lack the aggressiveness to make the play.

"You can't stand around and let the other guy make the move all the time," Paterno said. "You have

to go after them and establish something before they get too much steam."

Tackling was Penn State's biggest defensive mishap the past two games, and the Nittany Lions have made it their goal to correct it this week in practice. The defense, typically regarded as the cornerstone of the team, has yet to live up to that billing, causing concern for Saturday's game against Kent State and the Big Ten schedule.

Sukay said the defense didn't take Penn State's reputation for granted. Instead, he thought the mentality just wasn't there.

Part of the problem is inexperience. Linebackers Nate Stupar, Michael Mauti and Chris Colasanti, along with defensive

tackle Devon Still and cornerback Stephon Morris, all started two games or less last season.

"Some of those kids have been around a little bit, Paterno said, "but none of them have played an awful lot."

The next two games against Kent State and Temple will act as valuable experience before the team travels to Iowa. If the Lions weren't prepared to tackle against the Crimson Tide after an entire offseason of preparation, questions remain whether the same fate will await the Lions when they play the No. 9 Hawkeyes in less than three weeks.

"You can't come out flat like that again and expect to win," Sukay said. "So, we know going forward that we have to come out and play

well and concentrate on techniques, concentrate on the little things, stick to our game plan."

Foot movement and concentration are fundamentals and techniques that need improvement, Morris said. Gang tackling needs to be better as well, though, this week against Kent State, the emphasis may be placed more on one-on-one tackling because Penn State's defense faces players that are easier to contain. Sukay said there will be more one-on-one tackling but only because he expects Kent State to use four and five wide receivers often.

No matter the type of tackling, the defense's hesitancy has also affected other facets on the field, such as the team's inability to create turnovers.

Watch videos of Joe Paterno and Jack Crawford at yesterday's press conference on the Footblog: [psucollegian.com](http://psucollegian.com)

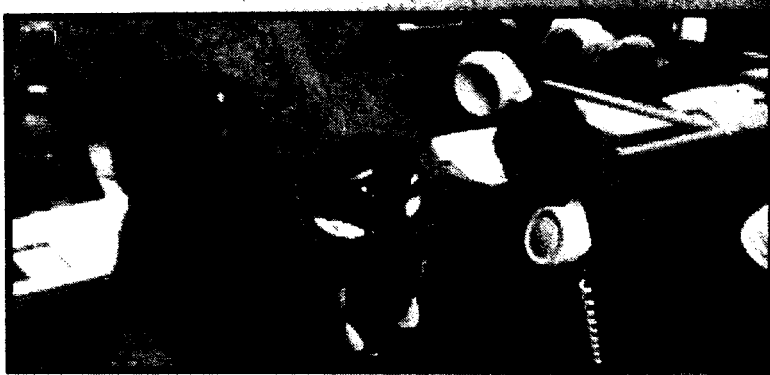
Defensive end Jack Crawford said the two areas go together. Once defensive players put themselves into better tackling positions, they'll have the ability to create fumbles when bringing down opponents, something Sukay agreed with.

"Instead of waiting on the ball carrier, we have to attack the ball carrier," Sukay said. "We have to run our feet through tackles."

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