

PIGSKIN PREVIEW

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THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

FLASH FORWARD

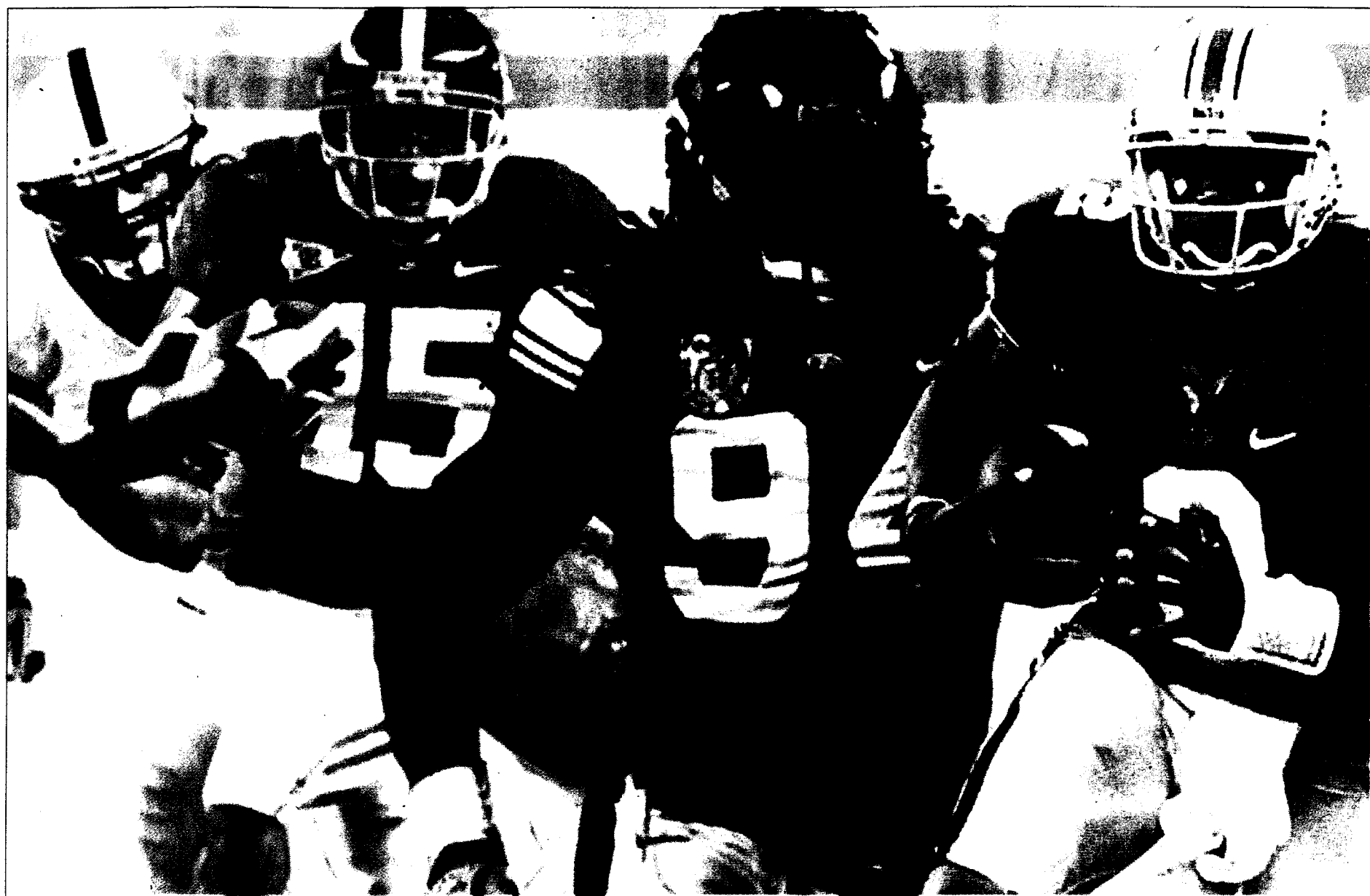


Photo Illustration/Ashley Buck

Penn State must quickly forget about the 24-3 loss at Alabama and refocus for the rest of its season, which includes two road hurdles at Kinnick Stadium and the Horseshoe.

PSU moves past 'Bama, looks to future

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Thirty minutes after Saturday's loss to Alabama, Stephfon Green sat for interviews with sweat dripping down his face onto his blue blazer.

The Penn State running back was exhausted, he was unsatisfied, but he certainly hadn't started looking ahead. So soon after nine months of mental preparation for Alabama, how could he? In fact, Green couldn't even put his finger on this week's opponent.

"We're gonna have a tough week of practice no matter who we play next," Green said. "I couldn't even tell you who we play next."

Such is the nature of Saturday's contest, a noon kickoff against Kent State (1-1) at Beaver Stadium. Since last season ended, the No. 22 Nittany Lions (1-1) had been looking forward to their showdown with the defending national champion Crimson Tide. They've spent all of one week shoving aside the Tuscaloosa hangover and preparing for the Golden Flashes.

The disappointment of the Alabama loss may still linger, but during a captains-led meeting

Monday, defensive tackle Ollie Ogbu said he reiterated to the team how much is still left to play for.

"We let them know we still have the Big Ten championship at stake," Ogbu said. "Going back to the Rose Bowl isn't something that's a negative. That's a positive."

Getting there won't be easy. Later this season the Lions will head to Columbus to face the defending Big Ten champions and current No. 2 Ohio State, and they travel to Iowa City where they haven't won since 1999, to face Iowa.

Defensive end Jack Crawford said he had a tough time reminding himself just how much there is left to play for immediately after the game, but as the week progressed, the Lions are getting more excited at the challenges still ahead.

"It was hard to take in because we'd been looking forward to it for so long," Crawford said. "All summer we'd been focusing on that game and to come out and lose like that, it was pretty disappointing. You just have to move on. We still have a lot to play for. We have the Big Ten championship, we have Ohio State, Iowa, top-10

teams so we still have a lot to prove."

While many are looking at the Kent State game as a typical non-conference cupcake, the Lions have a lot to prove this week—but likely nothing will be proved by a positive final score.

The run game has struggled in the first two weeks and this week, the Lions face the No. 1 rushing defense in Kent State—although it's early and the numbers are skewed by the Flashes' Week 1 opponent, Murray State.

The Penn State defense has had problems with tackling and forcing turnovers, two things essential to the unit's success. Kent State's struggling offense provides an opportunity to answer some of those questions.

Senior linebacker Chris Colasanti said he's glad the next game is finally here, noting, "you can't control what you just did, you can only learn from it." The most important thing Colasanti said he would take from Alabama is increased mental preparation leading up to the game.

"Every team is going to field something new at you, and you got to think about it," he said. "Go through each and every check and

to be mentally prepared just as much as physically prepared."

Defensively, Kent State uses stunts and mixes up blitzes, using its quickness to make up for its size disadvantage. Colasanti expects a similar style of offense from the Flashes this week—one predicated on pre-snap movement and confusion.

"They're going to motion guys out, they're going to have crossers, they're going to have high lows," Colasanti said. "They're gonna try to influence linebackers jumping up on the crossers and doing things behind us, and I feel like that's going to be something that we're really going to have to stop."

To Crawford, who hasn't recorded a sack this season despite high preseason expectations, the Kent State game is simply an opportunity to take out the frustration of a difficult week.

"It leaves a bad taste in your mouth," the junior said. "It leaves a feeling that you want to get out on the field and take it out on somebody."

Ultimately, the lessons Penn State took from losing in Tuscaloosa will be more valuable as the season progresses and the

Lions face tough road opponents, coach Joe Paterno said.

An early game against the No. 1 team gave Paterno a good idea of where his team is and what it needs to improve upon.


"How they played away from home and before that crowd against a team with that much talent, you've got to take all of those things into consideration when you evaluate where you can go," Paterno said. "And I think I've made it quite clear. I think we can be a pretty good football team, but we've got a ways to go."

Even with the loss last week, Crawford said he preferred an early brutal awakening as opposed to starting the season with four unranked home games, as the Lions did in 2009.

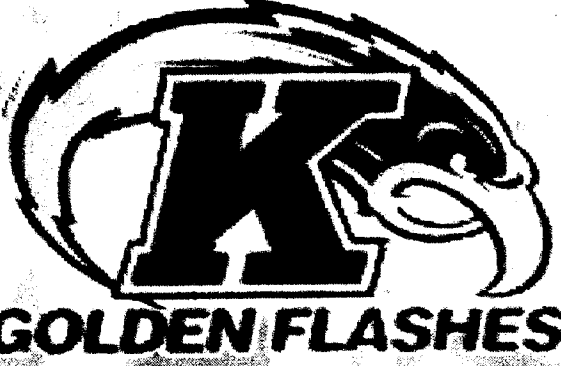
"We didn't have that level of competition going into the Big Ten season," Crawford said of last year.

"But to play a team in the SEC and taking a loss early like this, we get beat against the best team in the country, and we have things to improve on. It exposes our weaknesses early, so now we can improve."

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Game Information
Time: Noon, Saturday
Place: Beaver Stadium
TV: ESPN2


GOLDEN FLASHES

Daily Collegian Predictions

Andrew J. Cassavell

Score: PSU 23, Kent State 6

What's good: Defense finally gets a takeaway.

What's bad: 'Bama hangover lingers for a quarter or two.

What to look for: The young guns: Kersey, Redd and Fortt.

Brendan Monahan

Score: PSU 28, Kent State 7

What's good: Running game kicks into gear.

What's bad: Wideouts get less catches.

What to look for: Royster gets to 3,000 yards for his career.



Audrey Snyder

Score: PSU 27, Kent State 13



What's good: Bolden rebounds with a big game.

What's bad: A few missed tackles are reminiscent of Alabama.

What to look for: Zug's first catch of the season.


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