

PIGSKIN PREVIEW

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Photo Illustration: Kimberly Bartner/Colegian

WHAT THE HOOT?

Upset possible with growth of Owls' program

By Audrey Snyder
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Temple coach Al Golden doesn't even want to think about his program's game is a measuring stick for his program.

For Golden, whose program hasn't beaten Penn State since 1941, the trip to State College is about keeping his team competitive and having them simply try and survive against the No. 23 Nittany Lions.

As history would suggest, Penn State's all-time record of 35-3-1 against Temple would give the Owls little hope heading into the hostile environment of Beaver Stadium.

But Joe Paterno and several of the Lions said this is the most talented Temple team they've seen in quite some time.

How close this Temple team is to closing the talent gap against the Lions is something the fifth-year head coach and former Penn State tight end said won't be figured out until 3:30 p.m. Saturday.

"The gap is 154 points to nine over the last four years," Golden said. "That's the issue. We've been out gained by 1,076 yards over the last four years. We've punted 17 more times, I mean I can go on and on."

While the Owls haven't scored a touchdown against the Lions and were shut out twice since Golden took over the program in 2005, this isn't the typical Temple team. For the first time in 20 years the Owls ended last season with an appearance in a bowl game, and the momentum carried over to this year, where the team enters Beaver Stadium at 3-0.

"Looking at some tapes, this is not the same Temple team that we've played," Joe Paterno said. "You know, last year they played well. We had some things happen to us that made it a little bit, made the score look a little more impressive."

Certainly Penn State's 31-6 win last year didn't leave Golden and his team with a lot to be pleased about, but with each year and each opportunity to recruit better players, Golden is building his program.

Temple's running back, Bernard Pierce is quickly gaining national attention after rushing for 1,361 yards and 16 touchdowns last season. While the thought of an elite player coming out of Temple would've been a distant idea a few years ago, quarterback Chester Stewart attributes the program's turnaround to Golden.

"He teaches you how to be a man on and off the field," Stewart said. "He gives you some core values that you can carry that you can use in football as well as in the real world. . . Obviously he turned around the program, and we know that he loves us as players and we stick with him because of that."

But the Owls are going to need to have more than faith in their coach if they want to put points on the board against Penn State, which enters the game at 2-1.

Stewart said he expects the crowd to be just as loud as he remembers and anticipates the noise affecting his cadence, but he doesn't want his teammates walking on the field thinking about how they were

Game Information

Time: 3:30 p.m., Saturday
Place: Beaver Stadium
TV: Big Ten Network

"whooped" last year. Though he said he could already see the nerves in some of his teammates during practices early in the week, the Owls are trying to forget about the past.

"Some people, it's their first time playing last year and they beat on us pretty bad," Stewart said. "Just thinking about going back up there to that stadium, I know it's in the back of their minds."

While the Owls hoping to clear their minds and Golden refusing to share the "deflating" statistics with his team, Temple didn't even want to think about the possibility of pulling an upset.

Golden said in four years his team hasn't even survived playing against the Lions, so he's focused on improving his team's play before he thinks about the opposition.

But even the thought of Temple being a legitimate football school is something red-shirt junior Devon Still said didn't enter his mind even when he went to a high school football camp at Temple.

The defensive tackle from Wilmington, Del., said he was familiar with Temple basketball in college, but the Owls having a serious football program didn't cross his mind at the time.

However, Golden has been able to recruit better than previous coaches during his time at Temple, and that's something Temple play-by-play announcer Harry Donahue said has helped the program.

"The biggest change in Temple since then has been Al's ability to recruit solid Division I players," Donahue said. "Kids who turned down scholarships from other programs to come to Temple. His depth, therefore, is so much greater. Is it at a level where they can go out and, like maybe some people think now, this is the year against Penn State?"

While Donahue said he wouldn't go as far as saying the Owls would pull off the upset, Golden said his depth won't be able to keep pace with Penn State's.

"Their players are better than our players, and they play more players than we play," Golden said. "If we had any advantage maybe against some of the other opponents we don't have it this week. They have better players and they have more."

But junior cornerback D'Anton Lynn said the Lions aren't underestimating the Owls. The in-state rivalry, coupled with a legitimate game, have kept Penn State's practices intense this week, he said.

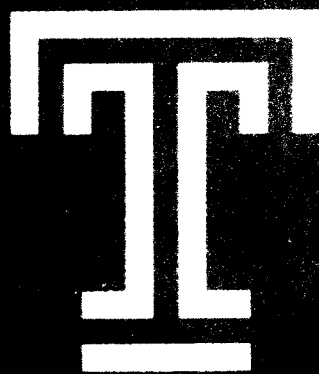
Whether this means the Owls score their first touchdown against the Lions since Golden took over the program in 2005, or that Temple keeps pace for at least a half, won't be known until the final whistle.

But Golden's just hoping his team can keep it competitive as long as possible.

"The biggest thing is to try and hang in there and hang in the game with them," Golden said.

"And try to keep it close just because they're so powerful, they're so deep and obviously they got the crowd behind them."

To e-mail reporter: aas5220@psu.edu



Daily Collegian Predictions

Andrew J. Cassavell

Score: PSU 26, Temple 17

What's good: Running game finds a groove.

What's bad: Temple actually scores a touchdown or two this year.

What to look for: A restless student section when the game is close at halftime.



Brendan Monahan

Score: PSU 27, Temple 13

What's good: Rob Bolden breaks out.

What's bad: Big day for Bernard Pierce.

What to look for: Bigger running holes for Evan Royster.



Audrey Snyder

Score: PSU 28, Temple 14

What's good: It's the last game before Big Ten play begins.

What's bad: Temple's depth in the second half.

What to look for: Improved tackling by the Lions' defense.



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