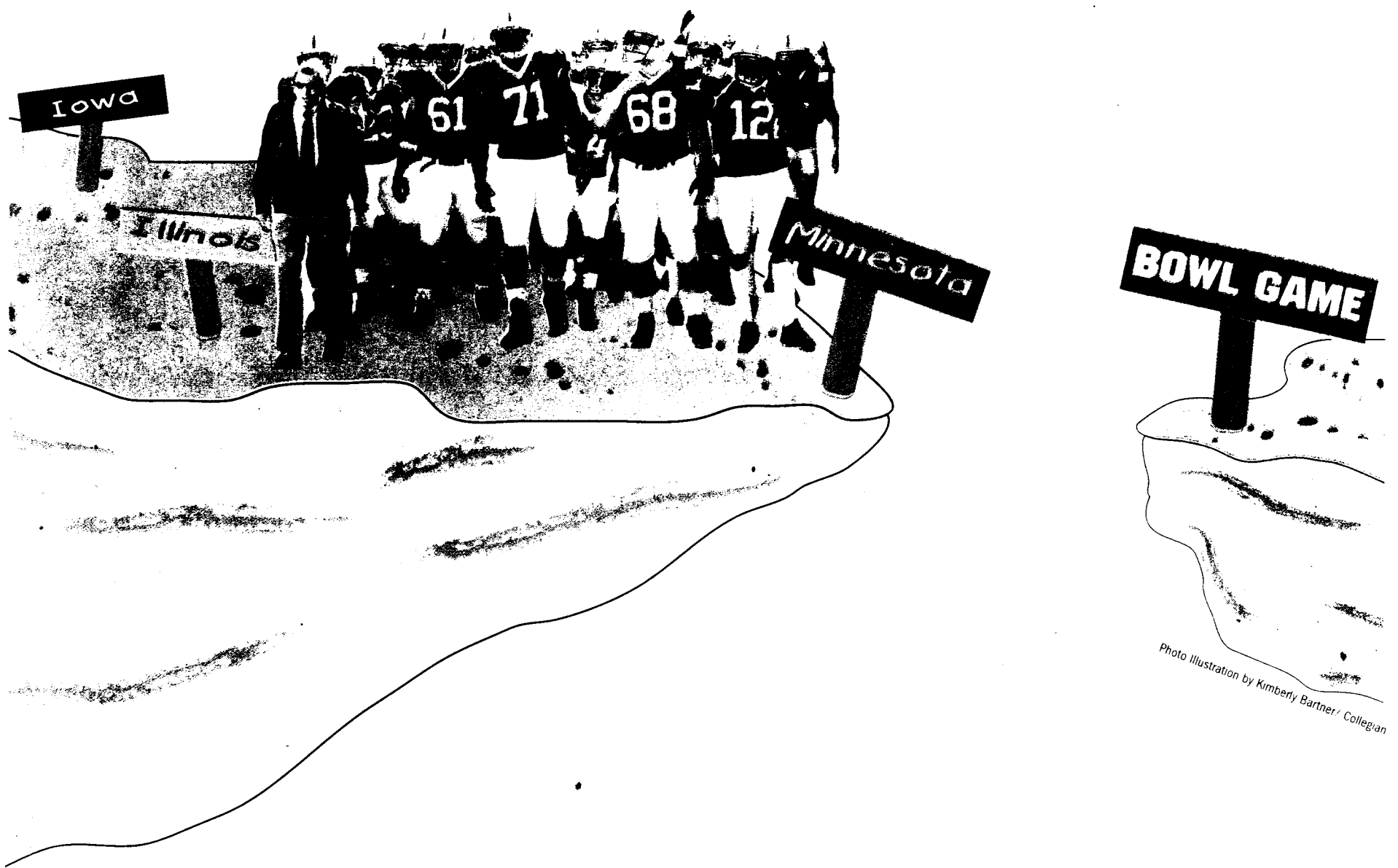


# PIGSKIN PREVIEW

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THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

## CLIFFHANGER



## Lions fighting to save season

By Brendan Monahan  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

History is bound to repeat itself.

Different players and circumstances separate this Penn State team from previous ones under Joe Paterno, but this year's 3-3 Nittany Lions share similarities with other previous Penn State teams.

Splitting the first six games has happened four times under Paterno.

The first occurred in 1966. Paterno's opening year as head coach. In the first six games, two top-10 teams — one being No. 1 Michigan State — dominated Penn State on the road. The Lions couldn't turn the season around, went 2-2 in the next four games and finished the season .500.

The last time Penn State went 3-3 to start the season came in 1983.

In the first six games, the Lions lost to No. 1 Nebraska and Iowa. That year, Penn State finished the regular season 4-1-1 and earned a trip to the Aloha Bowl in which it beat No. 22 Washington and finished No. 17

in the United Press International (UPI) poll.

The 2010 Lions have to decide which path to take — one that follows in the downtrodden footsteps of 1966 or the turnaround run of 1983. This Saturday's game at Minnesota is the key to determining which way Penn State will go, down a road of irrelevancy or to a bowl game.

"It's absolutely a must-win game," fullback Mike Zordich said. "We have to win this game because right now we're .500, and we need to get things rolling."

The Golden Gophers will host the Lions noon Saturday at TCF Bank Stadium.

Salvaging the season couldn't come against a more suitable opponent. Minnesota is 1-6 with losses to

South Dakota and Northern Illinois.

The Gophers have also yet to win at home, with their only victory coming against Middle Tennessee.

Minnesota is last in scoring defense and run defense in addition to second to last in total defense. Penn State's next two games versus Minnesota and Michigan pit the Lions against the Big Ten's two least effective

### If you go

**Place:** TCF Bank Stadium  
**Time:** Noon  
**TV:** ESPNU

defenses — if there is ever a time for the Penn State offense to get going, it's now.

"The only way you get things rolling is by winning," Zordich said.

"We need to win this game to get things going, get things moving, so we can get ready for next week and then the week after and the week after."

To get the team going, Paterno is looking for a better effort than the one shown against Illinois. Paterno said practice intensity was suitable before the Illinois game, but the Lions still came out flat. Enthusiasm in practice has been a focal point since the homecoming loss.

The coaching staff stripped the players of their designated practice jerseys and replaced them with traditional blue-and-white colored jerseys, signifying open tryouts last week. No jobs were lost, and Paterno said gauging the team's emotion is hard.

"We don't have a laugh meter or an enthusiasm meter on the field," Paterno quipped with reporters.

"Enthusiasm level is point this

or is that. You just don't know."

Emotion is something easily found on Minnesota's side since the firing of Tim Brewster on Sunday. Jeff Horton, previously Minnesota's offensive coordinator, is serving as the interim head coach.

The firing could have several effects.

The change may be a breath of fresh air and a catalyst for the Minnesota players or a glaring sign of just how far the Gophers are sinking.

"There's obviously uncertainty on the coaching staff with what will happen next year and with a new coach coming in," Horton said during this week's Big Ten teleconference. "We owe it to the kids on the team to do our job and to prepare them."

Much in the same way the Minnesota game could salvage the season for the Lions, a win for the Gophers after a coaching change may spark life into Minnesota.

But after Saturday's game, the Gophers face three top-15 teams — No. 10 Ohio State, No. 7 Michigan State and No. 15 Iowa — in its last four games. Ivan Maisel, an NCAA football columnist for ESPN.com, sees any type

of spark for Minnesota being short lived.

"The fact that, come the last week in November, they're going to have new coaches," Maisel said in a telephone interview. "For a team to be able to maintain its focus and to play really hard week in and week out under those circumstances takes a level of concentration and maturity that is extremely high."

Maturity has been a cause for concern for the Lions, as well. Penn State is inexperienced, but

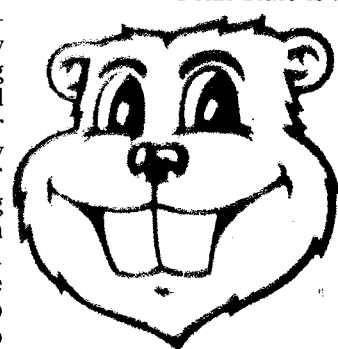
the coaches are quickly allowing that excuse to dissipate after the Lions have regressed in their last two losses.

This game, some Penn State players said, is just as important as

any other, but a loss would cause the Lions to have their first sub-.500 record in six years — and have them spiraling down a path similar to the 1966 team, or worse.

"We've got to make some plays," Paterno said. "We got to make some things happen for ourselves, and until then, we're going to struggle."

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### Daily Collegian Predictions

**Andrew J. Cassavell**

**Score:** PSU 17, Minnesota 16

**What's good:** Bowl hopes still alive.

**What's bad:** Michigan, Ohio State and Michigan State are still looming.

**What to look for:** Who's in and who's out because of injuries.



**Audrey Snyder**

**Score:** PSU 16, Minnesota 10

**What's good:** Lions secure first road win.

**What's bad:** Minnesota's porous run defense.

**What to look for:** Traffic jams with President Obama on campus.



**Brendan Monahan**

**Score:** PSU 24, Minnesota 10

**What's good:** Successful running game.

**What's bad:** A thin defensive line.

**What to look for:** All line-backers back.



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