

LIONS WRAP-UP

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Season alive after victory

By Audrey Snyder

MINNEAPOLIS — There was very little for Penn State to get excited about.

The Nittany Lions had been pounded by Iowa and Illinois, were lining up with a defense that couldn't keep players on the field and couldn't score a redzone touchdown if their bowl-game fate depended on it.

For most of the month, the games were about as bad as the team could experience. Fingers were pointed, playcalls were questioned and the grumblings of the Lions returning to the Dark Age started to seem believable.

But things couldn't stay that bad forever, could they?

For a team that's struggled to play with emotion for most of the season, the Lions looked doomed when cloudy skies hung over a half-full TCF Bank Stadium. It wasn't a primetime, hostile environment like Alabama or Iowa. In fact, at times it was almost comical.

As Goldy Gopher rode onto the field on a motorcycle in front of about 10 rows of students while fireworks shot up from the tunnel, who could take the biker rodent or even the Minnesota team seriously?

But give the Lions credit because for once this season they didn't allow the environment of the game set the stage.

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MY OPINION



Associated Press photo

Despite a pair of momentum-swinging plays, a banged up defense still underachieved Saturday.

Sloppy defense impacts game

By Audrey Snyder
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

MINNEAPOLIS — If anyone on the Penn State defense is looking for some sort of sympathy, he won't find it from Tom Bradley.

With the defense continuing to work through mounting injuries and personal switches, the defensive coordinator isn't moping around feeling sorry for himself or his players.

"Like my dad says, everybody has a SSS: a sad, sympathy story. But my dad used a different word, and I ain't saying it," Bradley said. "But the kids fought hard."

Through seven games, the Nittany Lions defense has struggled to create turnovers, get consistent pressure on the quarterback and make tackles. While the Lions took some steps forward defensively against Minnesota, as they forced a turnover, recorded a safety and showed flashes of a pass rush, there is still a lot of inexperience at key spots.

"I'm always worried about the secondary," head coach Joe Paterno said. "But again I think you got to be careful. I thought coming into this game Minnesota was a good offensive football team."

With safety Nick Sukay done for the year, the Lions came to Minnesota knowing somebody in the secondary needed to step up. Entering the game that somebody appeared to be Andrew Dailey, who started at Hero.

But like it's been for most of the season with the Penn State defense, Dailey was forced out of the game with a shoulder injury. His replacement: Malcolm Willis.

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Run game takes step in right direction

By Audrey Snyder
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

MINNEAPOLIS — As Penn State offensive linemen were pushed off the ball and occasionally back into their quarterback, the Nittany Lions felt the physicality of the conference's worst run defense.

There was little room to run up the middle, the line couldn't keep its blocks long enough to allow Evan Royster to get around the edge and it looked as if the run game was once again doomed.

But the Lions found ways to regroup after rushing for just 36 yards in the first half and were able to use the running game to eat up clock in the fourth quarter. The Lions finished the game with 145 rushing yards, which left Joe Paterno with the feeling his unit was better.

The overall rushing yards were an improvement considering the Lions didn't rush for more than 70 yards against Iowa and Illinois. However, the line said it still left several opportunities for more yards on the field.

"I think we played well," right tackle Chima Okoli said. "There are obviously spots where we could've opened up

some more holes for the running game, but overall I think the protection was pretty good. There weren't too many hits on the quarterback. ... But it definitely wasn't a perfect game."

While the Lions kept the same line they've used since the Iowa game, left guard Johnnie Troutman said the line wasn't looking over its shoulder after struggling early.

Troutman said it was just a couple mistakes here and there that held the line back in the first half.

Throw in a Gophers defense that running back Evan Royster said blitzed more than the Lions expected and it wasn't until the second half the Lions understood what Minnesota was trying to do.

With interim head coach Jeff Horton coaching his first game, the Lions said they couldn't really game plan too much against the defense. But once the offensive line went into the locker room at the half and was able to figure out the Gophers, the Lions were able to open up some holes and take control of the game.

And once Royster reeled off a 29-yard run during the Lions' first possession of the second half, the Gophers

shied away from their blitz-happy gameplan. "They weren't bringing the free guy like the safety off the edge that we can't account for the block," Troutman said. "So that's why most of the runs were breaking off in the second half that weren't in the first half."

That would help explain why the Lions' longest run in the first half was a 12-yard run by Royster. Yet the team took advantage of the Gophers not blitzing as much and had four runs of 17-plus yards in the second half.

While Stefen Wisniewski said the line has got to do a better job of consistently opening up holes, the running backs were able to capitalize when the opportunities presented themselves.

True freshman Silas Redd ran for back-to-back 20-plus yard carries during the fourth quarter as he helped the Lions control the clock. Being able to use the ground game to seal the victory is something the Lions hadn't done since their September 25 game against Temple.

"I thought we were better," Joe Paterno said of the ground game. "I thought we were pretty good."

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Associated Press photo

Evan Royster scored for the second time this year.

Building off win vital for morale

By Audrey Snyder
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MINNEAPOLIS — If Penn State was keeping a check list of its accomplishments this season, there would be quite a few boxes unchecked.

Still no rushing record for Evan Royster, no 400 wins for Joe Paterno, and up until Saturday, no victory on the road.

But Saturday's win against Minnesota checked one box and gives the Lions hope the milestones they faced at the beginning of the season are still attainable. Royster now sits 31 yards shy of the rushing record, Paterno has 398 wins and the quest to return to a bowl game remains possible.

"It lets us know that we're still a team that can win," defensive back Malcolm Willis said.

"We got back on a winning track, and got back over 500 and things like that. We just got to

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Courtesy of Simon Guerra/The Minnesota Daily

Derek Moyer secures his second touchdown catch of the game from Matt McGloin, who stepped in for Rob Bolden and performed well.

Report Card: Penn State 33, Minnesota 21

POSITION	COMMENTS
Quarterbacks B-	Bolden looked sharp, going 11-for-13 with a touchdown pass. McGloin took a lot of chances with the deep ball.
Running backs C+	Going against the worst run defense in the Big Ten, the Lions could've done better with just 36 yards rushing at the half.
Wide receivers A-	With the quarterback situation changing, the wideouts found a way to make it work. Moyer connected with McGloin for two touchdowns.
Offensive line C-	The line had a rough first half and couldn't get a push off the ball. Eventually, the Lions wore down the Gophers.
Defensive line C-	Adam Weber had a lot of time and running back DeLeon Eskridge torched the defense for 111 yards. Safety torched grade up a bit.
Linebackers C-	The unit had many of its players return from injury, but the results weren't too pretty. The Gophers rushed for 134 yards.
Secondary D+	Weber passed for 299 yards and the Lions couldn't slow down Da'Jon McKnight. Missed tackles continue to be a problem.
Special teams C+	Fera averaged 45.2 yards per punt and Wagner tied his career long with a 49-yard field goal but clanked a 37-yarder.