

Royster, running game setting up McGloin

By Andrew J. Cassavell
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Evans Royster has a theory as to why it seems so easy for quarterback Matt McGloin sometimes.

Just watch the opposing linebackers, the running back said.

FOOTBALL

When Penn State's ground game is clicking, Royster said linebackers blatantly creep toward the line of scrimmage, anticipating more runs. In the last two weeks, that has afforded McGloin the chance to find plenty of space in the opponent's secondary.

Royster and McGloin agreed it's no coincidence the gaudy numbers put up by the former walk-on quarterback have coincided with

two of the Nittany Lions' three-best rushing totals of the season.

"It's all about the flow of the linebackers," Royster said. "Getting into the second and third drive of the second half [Saturday], they were all flying toward the run fakes. It opens things up for Matt, and he makes some good decisions."

This weekend the Lions travel to Ohio State, which boasts the conference's top-ranked defense. Running the ball to create space in the secondary will be vital, but it figures to be a chore as the Buckeyes' run defense is tops in the league. It allows just 2.7 yards per carry — the only Big Ten team under three.

If Penn State can't run the ball, McGloin said to expect similar

results to Saturday's first half, when Northwestern jumped out to a 21-0 lead.

Ultimately, McGloin said it was Royster and true freshman Silas Redd who started the turnaround.

"Everybody got off to a slow start in the beginning of the game, but they [Royster and Redd] started to pick things up," McGloin said.

McGloin also noted the pressure taken off him when the backfield performs.

In Penn State's four second-half scoring drives — when McGloin was at his best with three touchdown passes — the Lions ran the ball 18 times, nearly twice as often as their 10 passes.

That's the way it needs to be the rest of the season, Royster said,

especially given the improvement of the offensive line over the last three games.

"It's all about game planning," Royster said. "We're coming out, and the confidence of our offensive line is growing every game."

Royster laughed when asked just how much bigger the holes are now than they were in the season's opening weeks when the Lions couldn't get anything established on the ground.

"Every now and then you get a hole and you're just like, 'Whoa,'" Royster said.

"It's a good feeling because this offensive line is getting that confidence."

The run game has led to more play action opportunities — a vital part of McGloin's game.

The perfect example, he said,

came on McGloin's 36-yard game-tying touchdown pass to Derek Moyer.

Although Redd was standing on the sideline and Royster stood in the backfield without having to block anyone, McGloin said they were the most vital pieces in making the deep ball work.

"We run play action to Derek Moyer over the top — that's an example of what those guys bring to the table," McGloin said.

Senior center Doug Klopacz said that's never been more obvious than it was Saturday.

But Klopacz noted the benefits of a good run game aren't limited to statistics.

"It opens up everything else," Klopacz said.

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Lady Lions hoping to improve team defense

By Ryan Loy
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

More than a third of the Lady Lions' points came off turnovers Sunday.

But coach Coquese Washington believes the team's defense still has a lot of room for improvement.

WOMEN'S BASKETBALL

The Lions played well enough to stifle an inexperienced Division II Gannon squad in Sunday's exhibition, 91-58. In doing so, Penn State outscored the Golden Knights, 33-

12, off turnovers. Despite that significant advantage, Washington said the Lions need to work on their team defense.

"I think we got to have better help-side rotation," Washington said.

The Lions' coach referred to the inability for her players to step away from the player they covered and prevent opponents from driving uncontested to the basket Sunday.



Washington

Sophomore co-captain Mia Nickson acknowledged the team needs to improve its help-side rotation, but she believes the Lions have improved their on-the-ball defense since the of preseason.

Gannon coach Cleve Wright gave credit to the Lions' defense for many of the turnovers, but said some of the Golden Knights' offensive struggles came from their youth. Gannon went 37-1 last season, but it lost all five starters to graduation.

Wright said the Lions did a good job of denying the ball on defense, which caused some of his players

to get out of sync offensively. He believes pressure takes away the desire of some players to handle the ball.

"Everybody has to want the ball. Everybody has to be an option," Wright said.

The combination of Gannon's inexperience and just enough pressure from the Lions' defense led to 15 Penn State steals, while Gannon had only four.

Though the statistics indicate a solid defensive performance, Washington said she would like to see better focus from her team.

Washington also wants to see more involvement on rebounding

from the guards because she believes there was too much pressure on the forwards to corral balls after missed shots.

Improved defense and rebounding can help the Lions transition into their desired fast-paced offense. However, Washington wants her team to pay attention to its defense before it looks to score.

"We want to have a commitment to defense. We gave up 58 points, but I did not feel like our defensive focus was where it needed to be for the whole 40 minutes," Washington said.

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Junior guard Gray producing from beyond the arc

By Jake Kaplan
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Sharp shooting freshman guard Maggie Lucas is thought to be the biggest threat from the perimeter for the Penn State Lady Lions this season.

However, it was junior Zhaque Gray who showed off her range in Sunday's exhibition game blowout win against Gannon (Pa.) at the Bryce Jordan Center.

Gray, who averaged only four points per game in her first two years at Penn State, was perfect

from beyond the arc Sunday. The 5-foot-8 guard knocked down all four of her 3-point attempts, which accounted for two-thirds of Penn State's 3-pointers, and finished the game with 14 points in her 20 minutes of playing time before fouling out with six seconds left in the game.

Gray, who started the game at shooting guard after making just nine starts in her first two seasons, said she works on her outside game a lot at practice, always trying to improve. This season, in which Penn State will attempt to

build off its best season last year since 2004-05, Gray hopes to increase her total of 38 3-pointers on 30.6 percent shooting from downtown that she tallied in her first two seasons.

"[Penn State coach Coquese Washington] keeps telling me to shoot the shots that I'm good at," Gray said after Sunday's game, which was the Lady Lions' final tune-up before they open the regular season Friday night at Dayton. "So, I just keep doing what she tells me to do at the two position."

Washington hopes Gray's long-range shooting is a big component during the regular season. The coach said she has been encouraging Gray to "just shoot the ball."

"She puts time into it, but sometimes she gets out there and she is thinking and wants to be a playmaker," Washington said in her post-game press conference Sunday. "Her value to our team is her ability to make shots. The more she looks for her shots, I think the more confident she will get."

Gray got off to a hot start

Sunday, hitting three of her 3-pointers in the first half, all from different spots on the court. She finished the game as one of five Lady Lions who scored in double digits, adding an extra component to the balanced Penn State offense.

Gannon coach Cleve Wright said Gray's 3-pointers were a big difference in the game.

"When Gray is knocking it down," Wright said, "boy, it tears your heart out."

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