

Crosses proving dangerous

By Andrew Robinson
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

Early last Sunday morning, Matt Smallwood and Andres Casais took turns on the far sides of the field serving in high-arching balls inside the penalty box to a wave of onrushing teammates.

MEN'S SOCCER

Two nights later at Lafayette, Smallwood drove a ball from the right side into the box, which found its way to Mackenzie Arment who directed it to Daniel Burnham, who put it in the net.

Despite having little experience as outside defenders before this season, Smallwood and Casais have put plenty of effort into developing their crosses. All that work has been paying off for the No. 22 Penn State men's soccer team.

"I never had the chance to do many crosses because I started out as a center mid," Smallwood said. "This is the first season I really got into it, but it's fun playing balls in and getting opportunities. We've worked on it a fair amount, it's not a whole lot different than playing any other ball."

A cross is a lofted pass served from the wide areas of the field, usually into or near the box with the purpose of creating scoring chances. In soccer, it's the responsibility of the outside players, whether it's in the midfield or the outside backs to create width in order to open up space for a cross.

The Nittany Lions main outside midfielders, Arment and Matheus Braga, are both skilled with the ball on their feet and like to make runs into the central midfield.

Because both Arment and Matheus cut inside so often, there's extra responsibility on the Lions'

outside backs to provide the wide service.

"Matty's been particularly effective. We want the width in the final third of the field to come from our outside backs, particularly from Matty on his side, most of the time," coach Bob Warming said.

"Sometimes a forward will pull himself out wide or a wide midfielder will stay out there, but primarily, we want to build the game up enough that we have great numbers in the middle."

Putting numbers in the box gives the Lions more players capable of finishing a goal and it helps prevent counter-attacks if the opposition wins the ball back. Warming said good crossing ability from the backs is essential to a good attacking system.

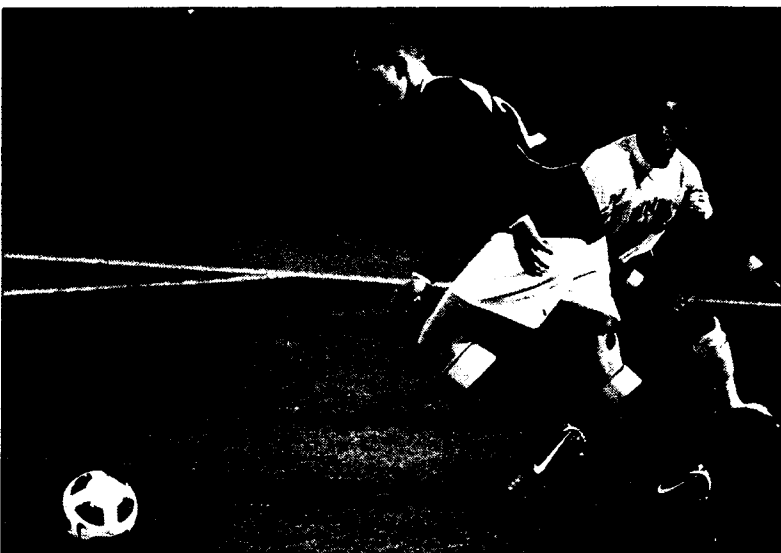
Smallwood has thrived as the right back all season and his crossing has gotten more accurate as the season has gone on. For Casais, who

has only been starting at left back for the last five games, there are still areas the senior is working on.

Casais is a right-footed player, but Smallwood said his teammate has been doing well playing crosses with his left foot. As a life-long defender, Casais said his first job is to prevent goals, but when the opportunity presents itself, he knows how he wants to hit the ball to keep it away from the opposition.

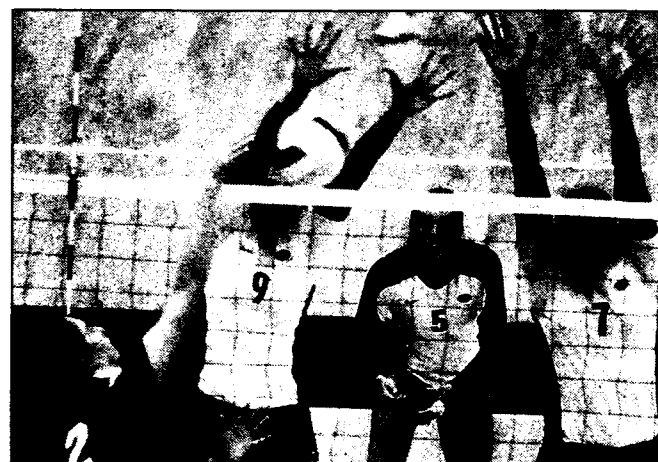
"First thing is I'm looking for a driven ball, I don't want it to hang, because a hanging ball is a defender or goalkeeper's dream to just come out and get to it," Casais said. "Secondly, depending on where our guys are, second post or near post, if you bend it in, it's always good, with one touch or one flick that ball's going in. Those crosses are really dangerous so hopefully that's all we need, one touch or one flick."

To e-mail reporter: adr5079@psu.edu



Sarah Finnegan/Collegian

Matt Smallwood (left) lines up the ball in the Lions' loss to UMBC.



Tyler Sizemore/Collegian

Blair Brown (9) and Arielle Wilson (7) go for a block.

Lions avoiding trap

By Emily Kaplan
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

On Tuesday afternoon, Russ Rose's desk was cluttered with papers.

There was a big black binder, a few stapled packets and loose-leafs sprawled across the surface. It was all information about the Wisconsin Badgers (15-10, 4-10 Big Ten).

WOMEN'S VOLLEYBALL

Behind the desk, meanwhile, was a large, but neat stack. That's the Penn State women's volleyball coach's scouting report on No. 9 Illinois (20-4, 12-2). He hasn't touched that yet.

The No. 8 Nittany Lions (21-4, 12-3) host matches against both squads this weekend. And though the marquee matchup is Saturday night — against the Big Ten-leading Fighting Illini — Rose and his team refuse to overlook Friday night's opponent, the unranked Badgers.

"There's nothing on my desk that says anything about Illinois," Rose said. "I'll spend as much time preparing for Wisconsin because Wisconsin beat Northwestern last week and Northwestern beat Illinois. So it would be foolish to put more stock in one match than the other match when the value is the same for all of them." Rose was referring to the unpredictability of Big Ten volleyball this season.

Upsets have become second nature, and often aren't even considered upsets anymore. The Lions have been right in the middle of that. On Sept. 24 — when Penn State was No. 2 in the AVCA Coaches' Poll — the Lions dropped a match to No. 9 Illinois, snapping their 65-match conference winning streak. A night after that, though, Penn State easily swept the Badgers.

But this weekend, none of that matters. Everything is a clean slate, and everything is taken one step at a time.

"If we don't take care of our business against Wisconsin, Illinois is not going to matter," senior co-captain Alyssa D'Errico said. "We have to take care of our business every single match, every time we step on the floor."

D'Errico said the team doesn't want to think about losing to the Badgers, as it will put the Lions further behind in their goals for the season.

Losing to the Fighting Illini would have even more postseason implications. Illinois is currently in first place in the Big Ten standings. Penn State is No. 2 — one game behind.

But D'Errico insists the Lions haven't looked that far ahead. "Wisconsin is the first team we play, so that's our focus for now," D'Errico said. "After Friday night, whatever happens, then our focus will go to Illinois. We have to take care of our business Friday night first in order to stay on track for what our goal is."

Senior co-captain Blair Brown said that's especially important now, as everyone in the conference is playing with something to prove. Even the Badgers, who have a 4-10 conference record and sit in ninth place.

"You can't overlook anybody in the Big Ten at this point," Brown said. "Everybody's up in the air, everybody's trying to get wins so that they can try to get in the tournament at the end of the year."

To e-mail reporter: exk5049@psu.edu

Tressel not looking to break records

By Audrey Snyder
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

In light of Joe Paterno earning his 400th career victory, Ohio State coach Jim Tressel was asked if he too would continue coaching as long as Paterno.

FOOTBALL

The 58-year-old Tressel, who has 237 career wins to his name, said the game has changed so much since he started coaching at Youngstown State in 1986 that he couldn't imagine himself staying in the game into his late 70s or 80s.

"I don't know what occurs along the pathways of life but I would, I mean it's changed," Tressel said. "It's different than the first 10 years I was in coaching. Just the magnitude, and the pace and so forth I'm not sure I'd be the best guy for the job at that point."

While Penn State enters Saturday's game in Columbus with a 6-3 record and is searching for its fourth-straight victory, Tressel said the overall quality of Paterno's coaching continues to be seen in his bowl game record as well as the improvements the Lions make from one game to the next.

Tressel called the Lions "bright football players" and said in his time coaching against Paterno he always expects to play a team that will get better as the game progresses.

He said watching the Lions defense on film is a testament to the team and the coach's ability to learn from their mistakes and quickly adjust. While he wasn't sure if the Lions have progressed more this year than in years past, he said the

progress is evident on film.

"All they need now is experience," Tressel said. "They've gotten nine games worth of experience and you can just see that incremental growth that has occurred on both sides of the ball and on special teams."

Hoosiers on the brink

Indiana coach Bill Lynch said last week's near upset of Iowa is just another example of how close his team is "to getting over the hump."

With the Hoosiers losing three of their five games by seven points or less, Lynch said each week his team continues to respond to the challenge.

Though receiver Damarlo Belcher's drop in the endzone with less than a minute remaining in the game against Iowa would've given Indiana a much needed conference win, Lynch isn't concerned about his resilient team.

"They keep bouncing back and working and preparing but I think we're honest with them too," Lynch said. "And they understand that when you compete in the Big Ten conference you're going to play against very, very good football teams week in week out and you have to play and execute in order to win."

Though Lynch is high on the character of his team, the schedule ahead will be anything but easy. Indiana heads to Wisconsin this week and then plays Penn State at FedEx Field in Landover, Md. With his team winless in the conference, Lynch said playing the role of spoiler is something he relishes.

Bielema second guessing

The Badgers' biggest nonconference game was a September matchup against Arizona State, but Wisconsin coach Bret Bielema isn't second-guessing his schedule.

With the Badgers ranked No. 6 in the AP Poll and No. 5 in the Coaches' Poll, Bielema said he felt the schedule would give his team the best chance at success, but now he's questioning the BCS computer ranking.

"I've been told, I don't know if this is true, but the computers don't take in the margin of victory which I think is an important element," he said. "I think that's why you see the human polls be significantly affected by not just win or loss, but by the margin."

Bielema is probably hoping his team's 31-18 win against Ohio State would garner more consideration from the computers, but he's not thinking ahead to a Rose Bowl bid just yet.

He said his team's weekly focus got it to 8-1, and with running back John Clay questionable for Saturday's game against Indiana with a sprained MCL, Bielema is expecting third-string running back Montee Ball to carry the load.

But he couldn't help but bring up the computers once more before moving on to another topic.

"I think you got to look at who's programming those computers," he said.

"Somebody's doing it. Whether there's a Big Ten bias or not, I think it's probably a good question to ask."

To e-mail reporter: aas5220@psu.edu

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