

PIGSKIN PREVIEW

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THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

ROADBLOCK AHEAD

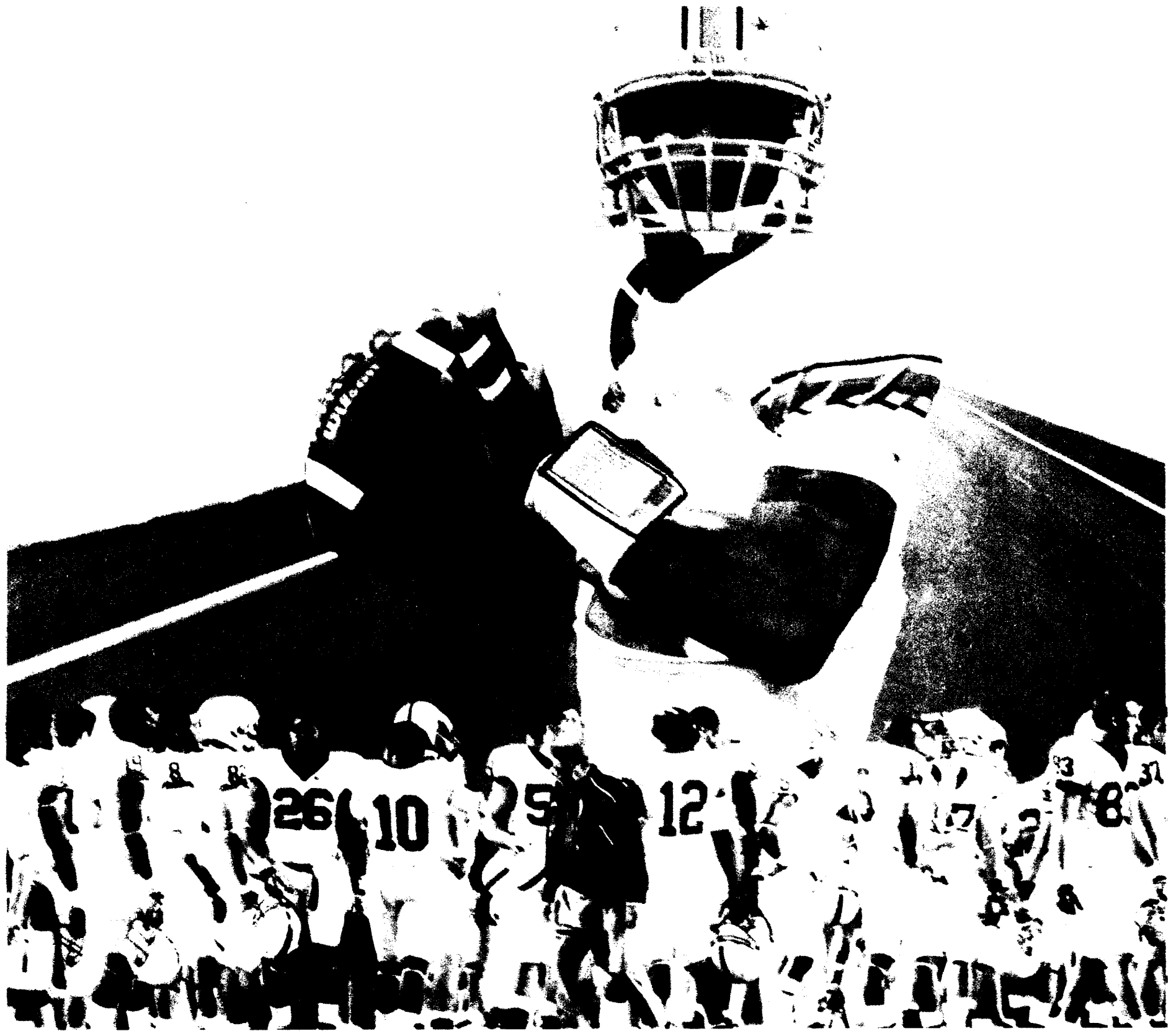


Photo illustration by Ashley Buck/Collegian

Lions out to prove newfound confidence

By **Brendan Monahan**
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER

The Alabama loss seems like an eternity ago, and the Penn State football players would probably like to keep it that way.

The inexperienced Nittany Lions entered Tuscaloosa, Ala. almost nine weeks ago with a freshman quarterback, three new linebackers and lesser-known faces taking over the program. Fast forward 62 days later to Friday, Penn State suffered two more demoralizing losses to Iowa and Illinois but rattled off three-straight victories after the bye week in Big Ten play.

Penn State has progressed those past three games, but the Lions haven't yet contended against a top-10 team on the road. The Lions are out to declare a newfound prominence at 3:30 p.m., Saturday in Columbus, Ohio.

"We're not there yet," Joe Paterno said. "We're getting to be where we're a pretty good football team. Pretty good. We have a long ways to go before we can go around thinking we're better than pretty good."

There are theories for the bet-

ter play. Redshirt sophomore Mike Mauti said the linebackers are playing better because they gained more experience. At the season's start, the linebackers were simply trying to attain experience and step into starting positions.

Redshirt sophomore quarterback Matt McGloin didn't think there was team cohesion earlier in the year. The season took on a new look when McGloin replaced Rob Bolden as the quarterback at Minnesota. In the win, Bolden suffered a concussion, sidelining him the next week against Michigan.

McGloin didn't earn the starting spot until this past Tuesday after he replaced an under-achieving Bolden in the Northwestern win. He adds a different, fiery dimension to the team.

"They just feel like there's confidence in there," McGloin said. "I just bring a little something different to the table, and guys like that."

Ohio State is a whole different breed than the Lions' three previous opponents. The Buckeyes haven't lost a Big Ten home game since Oct. 25, 2008 against

If you go

Time: 3:30 p.m., Saturday
Place: Ohio Stadium
TV: ABC

Penn State, boast the Big Ten's best scoring offense and lost only one game — a 13-point road loss to Wisconsin, the seventh-ranked team in the BCS.

The quality of the Lions last three opponents gradually progressed. Minnesota hasn't won a conference game yet, while both Michigan and Northwestern post 6-3 records, though neither has beaten a ranked team.

Going into Ohio State, the jump in quality of opponent is drastic.

"Hopefully a ballgame like this coming up, we're going to play against a team that's as well organized, as well disciplined as this club with the kind of talent it has — it will be a good experience for us," Paterno said. "Whether we can play with them or not, that's debatable."

Penn State's last road win against a ranked team came in the 2008 contest against No. 9

Ohio State, but the Lions were No. 3 at the time. In the Paterno era, an unranked Penn State team has beaten a top-10 opponent on the road only once.

The game occurred on Sept. 7, 1985, when the Lions defeated No. 7 Maryland in a down-to-the-wire, season-opening thriller. Penn State went to the Orange Bowl that season but lost the national-championship game to Oklahoma.

Former Penn State linebacker Trey Bauer recalled the Maryland game being his first as a Penn State starter. He had a game-clinching fumble recovery and two interceptions in that contest.

Bauer remembers Paterno calling out the team publicly after the 1984 season. The Lions lost their last two games against Notre Dame and Pittsburgh by a combined 57 points and opted not to play in a bowl game.

"We had decided that we didn't want to play," Bauer said. "And then, all of a sudden, it's like you have all these question marks. Well, what kind of team is this going to be? So there was a lot of pent-up frustration on a lot of people's parts."

The 2010 Lions face those same questions after three-straight wins and a new quarterback taking over.

Like Penn State going into Ohio State, Bauer said no one thought the Lions could beat Maryland in 1985.

The biggest question mark for the current Lions may be sustaining play for four quarters on defense.

A slow first half plagued the Lions last week and in their road games against ranked opponents, Alabama and Iowa.

"We can't expect things to happen," senior linebacker Chris Colasanti said. "We have to make things happen."

Sitting back and waiting for tackles were areas of concern in the Alabama loss, in which Crimson Tide running back Trent Richardson gained 144 yards. The Lions face another dominant rushing attack made up of Terrelle Pryor and Dan Herron on Saturday.

"It will help us in the future," Paterno said.

"It's going to be tough to stay with these guys."

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Daily Collegian Predictions

Andrew J. Cassavell

Score: Ohio State 27, PSU 10

What's good: Mauti continues dominance.

What's bad: McGloin grounded.

What to look for: How will Silas Redd fare against a top defense?



Audrey Snyder

Score: Ohio State 34, PSU 16

What's good: Lions get first passing TD in Columbus under Paterno.

What's bad: Defense torched by Pryor.

What to look for: Another Jim Tressel sweater vest.



Brendan Monahan

Score: PSU 23, Ohio State 21

What's good: Sudden spark of turnovers cause touchdowns.

What's bad: My prediction, if the running game fails.

What to look for: David beats Goliath in colossal upset.



2010 Fall
GIVEAWAY

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to be eligible to win a
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GAME 10

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