

Half the season's behind the Penn State football team

Where you at?

**“We gotta make a change.
“Let’s change the way we eat, let’s change the way we live
and let’s change the way we treat each other.
You see the old way wasn’t working,
so it’s on us to do what we gotta do.”**

— Tupac Shakur, “Changes”

FOR THE PENN STATE FOOTBALL TEAM, it's the midpoint of the season, the halfway mark of a year that hasn't exactly turned out as the redemption campaign it was envisioned to be. The Lions sit at 2-4, 0-3 in the Big Ten — disappointing, to be sure. Changes are in order, however; at least that's what the team believes, meaning that it still feels as though it can turn things around to the point where it is winning football games.

But before the second half of the season is underway, the Collegian offers a mid-season review of the team, unit by unit, on a scale of zero to five stars. Through the six performances thus far, we've taken it all in, from the smoothest artists on the team to nights in which things weren't so straight.

To see if there are truly changes coming, then, in the words of Snoop Dogg, “just chill, ‘til the next episode.”

Players	Ratings	Comments
Quarterbacks	★★★★	Zack Mills has, without a doubt, had to let it burn this season. It's his senior year, but still he's had rough times: turnover troubles, unreliable receivers and another shoulder injury. And though he turned in a fantastically gutsy performance against Purdue, the game's outcome ensured he couldn't even enjoy it. But, while Usher might not be happy when he's hurting, Mills, on the other hand, remains admirably unaffected. He's learned to shake it off — his bad days, the losing, the pain — and comes to lead his team each week, “patiently waiting” for something good to happen.
Running backs	★★★★	We like Tony Hunt's style — how he spins off defenders and resists being tackled — but we've only really seen it when Penn State played Akron and the University of Central Florida. Once physical Big Ten teams came onto the schedule, the ground game disappeared — perhaps gone 'til November. A lot of factors are at work — opponents putting eight men in the box, a shaky offensive line — but the Lions still need to get it started in here.
Receivers	★★	The offseason move of utility player Michael Robinson to wide receiver was smart because, as he's proved, he's got the flavor of a crowd pleaser. The problem is, when Mr. Playmaker was sidelined with a concussion, the reliability of the receivers was sidelined, too. True freshman Mark Rubin stepped up, but for the unit to be dropping passes and running incorrect routes in the fifth game of the season is inexcusable. The Purdue game offered hope, but the Lions still had problems making catches in the red zone. As for Robinson, well, “right here is where we need ya. Welcome back.”
Offensive line	★★	Big Ten defensive lines have left Penn State's O-Line looking so crazy right now as, all too often, either Mills is under pressure or Hunt is getting stuffed. Perhaps most telling is that both Mills and Robinson have sustained game-ending injuries due to the line's poor protection. Ten sacks for a loss of 76 yards on the year and just 39 yards rushing over the past two games say something, too. Somehow, the linemen have to break this thing down, but it won't be for nothing — if they don't, Mills will be asking, “Where's the love?”
Defensive line	★★★★★	After a 2003 season in which it was said, over and over, that Penn State's line couldn't stop the run, this year, these guys can get down, baby, they get down — in the trenches. They haven't been perfect or totally consistent, but the linemen have been a crucial part of a defense that's allowed opponents just 3.2 yards per carry. On top of that, they've been rushing the quarterback, deflecting field goals and breaking up passes — and it's clear they really, really like it. So don't be surprised if you hear a Jay Alford or a Tamba Hali singing along to Cam'ron's “Hey Ma”: “I'm a changed man/ look at the range ma'am/ I got a whole new game plan.”
Linebackers	★★★★★	We like the way these guys move — to the ball. Called “heat-seeking missiles” by a teammate, the youthful Paul Posluszny and Dan Connor lead this unit with their uncanny ability to always get to the football, no matter where on the field they start out. The lyrics to Nelly's “Heart of a Champion” go, “Tryin' to make you remember me like you remember the Titans, cause I'm a warrior,” which could be taken as the motto of this unit. The only problem here is that senior Derek Wake is a captain, but hasn't played much like it, and, still, we see no changes.
Secondary	★★★★★	Just as gangsta rapper AZ made himself known in tandem with the more famous Nas, the AZ in this town, cornerback Alan Zemaitis, broke out alongside Rich Gardner last season. But this year, AZ's got the secondary to himself, and the tone he's set — ferocious hitting and tight coverage — has carried over to his fellow D-backs. Teams that like to pass have been shut down, as even Heisman hopeful Kyle Orton was kept under 300 passing yards and was picked off twice — something no other defense had yet been able to do. It's as if they say to opponents, “come on over to my place,” just so they can “put a helmet where you don't like it.”
Special teams	★★★	It's like this and like that and like this: serviceable special teams, but not dynamic. Robbie Gould hasn't had to kick many field goals, but only made three out of six. The punting game was poor early in the year, but has significantly picked up. Rodney Kinlaw has done the best of the kick returners, averaging 35.7 yards per return, but Calvin Lowry only averages 10 yards on punt returns. Blocked kicks have, however, been impressive. Bottom line: games aren't lost here, which is positive, but this is one spot where the team could certainly afford to bust a move.

—Compiled by Jenny Vrentas