

# Pigskin Preview

# SPORTS



More coverage on the Penn State Icers contest with Ohio | **SPORTS**, Page 14.

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# Defense to set tempo for PSU, OSU

By Wade Malcolm

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If, in fact, a weirder score than six points to four exists, well, we might all find that out this weekend.

Perhaps it will be a couple more safeties and a punt block ran back for a touchdown? Or maybe an always-enthralling field goal battle?

Who knows what, exactly, could happen when the defensive heavyweights — and offensive featherweights — of Penn State and Ohio State rain blows down on each others offenses tomorrow in Columbus, Ohio, but one thing is certain: A betting man would take the under in this game.

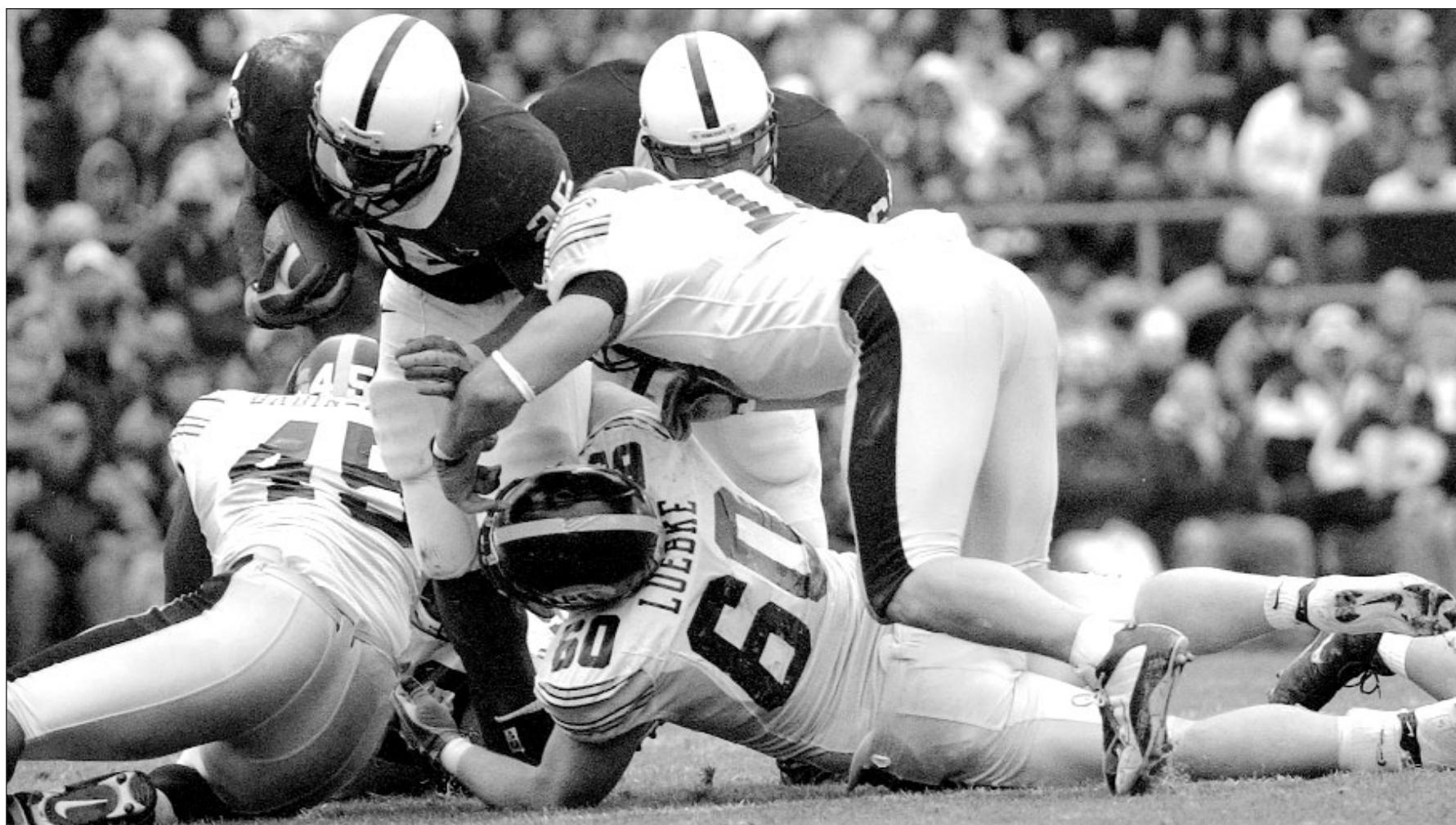
"I don't think this will be a real flashy high-scoring game," Penn State sophomore linebacker Paul Posluszny said. "I think this is going to come down to who's tougher."

If this game really is all about whose tougher, there's no mystery which side of the ball will determine the toughness factor.

It will be the guys on defense. Both units rank in the top half of conference in scoring and pass defense, and in total defense, the Nittany Lions and Buckeyes rank fourth and fifth respectively.

It might appear that the Lions' defense has the advantage, though, having just shut down the same Iowa offense that pasted Ohio State at home two weeks ago for 448 yards in a 33-7 loss.

The Penn State defense allowed the *See DEFENSE*, Page 18.



Kristen Perkins/Collegian

Running back Tony Hunt (26) attempts to get past Iowa defenders during the Nittany Lions 6-4 loss at Homecoming last week. Penn State faces Ohio State tomorrow.



Matt Sowers/Collegian

Zack Mills (7) talks with the offense in a huddle during the 6-4 loss to Iowa last Saturday afternoon at Beaver Stadium.

## Offensive line not helping Lions

By Wade Malcolm

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Considering the strength of the defense, Penn State could have won the ugly way for most of this year.

Too bad they haven't had the "big uglies" up front to do it.

Cruel as it may sound, it would be tough to argue that the offensive line has been anything less than awful this season. At the very least, it has performed below expectations.

Though the linemen have allowed a reasonable number of sacks (12), it seems as if Penn State quarterbacks get hit on nearly every pass play, and the Nittany Lions' miniscule rushing total of 119 yards per game doesn't help their case either.

Apparently they have fallen short of their own expectation as well. Feeling as if they were at the core of last week-

end's embarrassing 6-4 loss to Iowa, they were upset with themselves early in the week.

"Those guys took it personally," utility player and backup quarterback Michael Robinson said. "Of the whole team, of guys who were upset over the game, of the guys who really took Saturday personally, I really think offensive line did."

So personally, in fact, that one of them decided to apologize to his quarterback. Tackle Levi Brown approached Robinson at practice on Monday and said: "Mike, I made rookie mistakes. I should be ashamed of myself right now, I should be ashamed."

Brown might have felt particularly distraught because he was unable to accomplish what he had been specifically reassigned to do in the Iowa game. Penn State football coach Joe Paterno said Brown often played right

tackle instead of left, where he normal plays, because "we thought he would be able to do a better job on number 31, Matt Roth."

Brown did not block Roth all that effectively, as one of the top defensive ends in the conference had a stellar game, recording two sacks, three tackles for a loss, a forced fumble and numerous quarterback pressures.

The rest of the line didn't fair too much better. Iowa battered the Lions' quarterbacks to the point of injury, and the running backs could only find room for only 51 rushing yards, which was actually only the second time in four games the Lions rushed for more than 50 yards. They have not rushed for 100 since the University of Central Florida game on Sept. 18.

The line seems closer to a model of instability each week, too. First it was *See OFFENSE*, Page 18.

## Penn State football has split personality

By Jenny Vrentas

THIS IS A TALE OF two halves of a team.

Two halves so different in nature — an offense troubled, a defense noble — that it's a pity to see the pairing.

A shame, certainly, but it's nonetheless the lullaby of the season, as one of the characters on this team has adeptly termed it, meaning that the existent dichotomy is slowly rocking to sleep the season and the expectations for it.

In a permanent repose things are not, at least as of yet, but at the present point in time, it seems as though, for this suffering Penn State football team, tomorrow's game at Ohio State has already been scripted.

*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.*

Tomorrow will be the best of times for the defense; that's what the trend seems, anyway. Here is a defense that has patiently allowed all its pieces to fall into place; that has combated early doubts with play that doesn't allow for doubts. Each week it has done something new, to the point where, really, a single task remains: taking a loose ball back for a touchdown. These are trying times, this Penn State's defenders know, but they also know the fate of the team now rests on them — scoring is usually a

rarity but now has to be a virtual certainty.

And, as maligned as Penn State's offense was last week, the chance exists for times to be the worst of the season tomorrow. One of two scenarios exists. Zack Mills plays, concussion and all, and struggles to make it through the day with all the hits he'll take behind an inconsistent offensive line. Or, Mills doesn't play, and utility player Michael Robinson, despite needing to be at receiver, will be put at quarterback, a position to which he hasn't devoted all of his preparation this season.

*It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness*

Defensive coordinator Tom Bradley, well, he'll look wise tomorrow. As has happened all season, his players — tough linemen, headhunting linebackers and snazzy guys in the secondary — will know where to go, which way to move, how to shut down a shaky Ohio State offense.

Offensively, however, the mixed signals and predictable set of plays, once again, will ensure a sense of foolishness. There isn't one unit to point to — a receiver drops a pass on one play, a lineman misses a block on the next — and the lack of answers coach Joe Paterno admitted Tuesday makes it seem as though this will persist.

*It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity*

There's a belief that the offense has in the defense, a belief that made them thank the guys who have kept every opponent within reach thus far this season. And, in return, the defense maintains it still has confi-

*See COLUMN: VRENTAS, Page 18.*



MY OPINION

## Concussion could sideline Mills

By Jenny Vrentas

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It was just three years ago, but it has to seem longer ago to him.

It was Oct. 27, 2001, and Zack Mills came off the bench to brilliantly lead Penn State out of an 18-point deficit and past Ohio State, 29-27. Victory was sweet — record-breaking No. 324 for Penn State coach Joe Paterno — and the spotlight was suddenly put onto this marvelous teenager.

Mills was a redshirt freshman then, in his first game against Ohio State. Tomorrow, Penn State will play the Buckeyes for the last time in Mills' career. But after sustaining a mild concussion in last Saturday's loss to Iowa, it's a game in which Mills might not even be allowed to play — and it's part of a senior season he assuredly could not have scripted.

"It's doubtful whether Zack will go,"

Penn State coach Joe Paterno said last night on the Nittany Lion Hotline Show. "If he had to go [Friday], he wouldn't go. They're running tests, and we might not know until game time."

Mills took his final concussion test yesterday morning, the results of which will not be available until today or tomorrow. If he passes the test, he would be cleared to play, but that doesn't necessarily mean he would start.

The injury has kept Mills out of practice this week, meaning that utility player and backup quarterback Michael Robinson has been taking the majority of the snaps. Because Mills' status has been day-to-day all week, Paterno has been doubtful that Mills will play tomorrow and instead has expected to start Robinson.

"Michael Robinson is going to be the quarterback," Paterno said at his weekly press conference Tuesday. "You have to improvise and try to do some things that people you have can do."

Robinson has only seen limited time at quarterback all season, as he has played mainly at receiver, only assuming the role of signal caller when Mills was injured or on trick plays where Mills lines up at wideout. Paterno, however, has been adamant about the fact that Robinson's primary duty is as Mills' backup and, as such, deferred to him for this weekend.

"Michael Robinson deserves a shot," Paterno said yesterday. "He's a little rusty, a little rusty, but he had a good night tonight, a good practice."

Images of Mills' dazzling freshman performance against Ohio State three *See MILLS*, Page 18.



Mills



Levarse Vrentas Malcolm

	OSU	PSU	OSU	PSU	OSU	PSU
Prediction	13	7	9	7	9	3
What's Good	PSU refuses to simply roll over		Lions' defense scores a touchdown...		Penn State defense holds OSU offense	
What's Bad	Penn State's bowl hopes are dashed		...but Lions' offense does not		Spirit of PSU's offense still broken	
What To Look For	4th quarter interception turns tide		PSU D lets out frustrations w/brutal hits		Lions' D gets standing ovation in Ohio	