

On the roster

**Marlon Smith — G**

The sophomore guard has quickly become one of the leaders on the court for the Lions. In his first season, Smith became the first Penn State player ever to make the Big Ten All-Freshman team. He was also the first freshman to be named team MVP, averaging 13.4 points per game. Along with fellow sophomore Ben Luber, Smith had to learn on the fly, averaging 36 minutes per game. Smith said he spent much of the offseason resting his legs after logging so much time last season. However, he did find some time to play with the Big Ten Foreign Tour team in Europe this August, gaining some valuable experience for the upcoming season.

**Ben Luber — G**

Luber has a knack for adaptation as he matched his Philadelphia Inquirer's Rookie of the Year status in high school with Freshman All-America Honorable Mention accolades last season with the Lions. The sophomore point guard played an average of 39 minutes per game, finished sixth in the Big Ten in assists, 13th in steals and 10th in assists-to-turnovers ratio. Making an immediate impact, Luber served as the floor general, running the offense alongside Smith and a handful of upperclassmen. This year will be no different, except Luber will be surrounded by more speed and athleticism, allowing for a more up-tempo scheme.

**Geary Claxton — G**

Claxton is arguably the ace of DeChellis' first recruiting class, consisting of five talented freshmen. The 6-foot-5 guard will make an immediate impact on the squad as he proved in exhibition, showcasing a dunk in between grabbing a few offensive rebounds. Primarily a three-spot player, the freshman can drive, shoot and rebound. As a senior at Hill Regional Career High School, Claxton averaged 21.8 points, 14 rebounds and four blocks per game. Claxton's agility and versatility brings a whole other element to the veteran backcourt of Smith and Luber.

**Aaron Johnson — F**

The inside game will rely heavily on Johnson as he is the Lions primary post player, waiting for a teammate to step up and join him down low. If DeChellis intends to utilize a three-guard lineup, as he did in the exhibition game, Johnson will have to handle the bulk of the rebounding duties, which is nothing new for the walk-on. He posted six double-doubles last season, and averaged 9.7 points and 6.5 rebounds per game. Seemingly the fan favorite on game day at the Bryce Jordan Center, Johnson will be the guy who shoulders the leadership role for this young team. The junior's competitive and aggressive nature, and recklessness on the boards makes him fun to watch.

**Travis Parker — F**

Parker is a rare addition to the Penn State squad because he is a junior college transfer, spending the last two years at Missouri State-West Plains. The 6-foot-5, 242-pound forward looks to help out on the baseline. DeChellis said Parker could step right into the lineup because of his size and experience. Last year, Parker averaged 13.7 points and 5.6 rebounds per game, helping West Plains reach the Region 16 championship game. The Lions will need all the help they can get on the boards, and Parker hopes to fit into that equation.

**Brandon Hassell — F**

Tall and very lanky, Hassell will have to get stronger in the weight room if he wishes to be a force on the inside. His long arms will allow him to disrupt entry passes. Hassell is very athletic and plays well above the rim.

**Danny Morrissey — G**

The Zack Mills look-alike has a decent shot from the outside, but has the ability to get hot and be a game breaker. Think Kyle Korver. Morrissey has the ability to get a board or two. A prolific scorer in high school, he will be a spot player off of the Lions bench.

**Mike Walker — G**

A two-time all-state selection, Walker seems destined to be Luber's backup. One of the first players to come off the bench, Walker is a solid ball handler and a prolific 3-point shooter. Walker and Morrissey can stretch a defense and make up for lack of an inside presence on the bench.

# On the Rebound

## 2004 men's and women's basketball preview



### Lions hope to thrive off transition

**By Tricia Lafferty**  
COLLEGIAN STAFF WRITER | tul104@psu.edu

Ed DeChellis has been through it. Aaron Johnson is stuck in the middle of it. And both are guiding the Nittany Lions through this transition period, fazing out the Jerry Dunn persona and embarking on the DeChellis era.

Reform is nothing new to the second-year Penn State men's basketball coach. DeChellis landed his first head-coaching job at East Tennessee State University, where he was greeted with a 7-20 Buccaneer squad. Seven years and three conference divisional winners, a conference tournament champ, and an NCAA tournament team later, DeChellis' resume garnered considerable attention.

DeChellis was offered two or three positions before patience again paid off for the 1982 Penn State graduate. He held out just long enough for the Lions' head-coaching job to open up with the resignation of Jerry Dunn in March 2003. DeChellis was welcomed back to the Lions squad, this time as a head coach, after a previously successful 10-

year stint as an assistant. DeChellis would be treated to a struggling 7-21 squad. But why start from scratch again?

"I think number one is it's my alma mater and I love Penn State, and I always felt like we should be as good as anybody else in the country in basketball," he said. "You want to coach at the highest level and challenge yourself. DeChellis met his match in then-sophomore forward Aaron Johnson. Visibly the most optimistic and hard-working member returning from Dunn's squad, the walk-on was caught in transition.

"When you have a hard situation, you shouldn't quit on it," Johnson said. "I think for me, staying here the whole time is going to help me out because I'm going through all this controversy and losing. I'm hoping we can turn it around and make a positive out of a negative."

Sharif Chambliss, Brandon Cameron and DeForrest Riley-Smith left Penn State by mid-season last year. Robert Summers transferred and Jan Jagla left the team to play overseas in the off-

season. Seniors Jason McDougald and Kevin Fellows seem to be lost in transition — something these upperclassmen can't afford with the athleticism of DeChellis' first freshman class.

Sophomore guard Marlon Smith is the only player DeChellis acquired in his first season because the coach, who favors recruiting inner-city kids, joined the staff so late in the signing period. Smith earned Most Valuable Player honors for the Lions last season, and was the first Penn State player ever selected to the Big Ten All-Freshman team. Recognizing recruiting as a weakness that needed to be immediately addressed, DeChellis put together a highly touted freshman class for the 2004-2005 season.

"This recruiting class I think is gonna be one of the foundations for the program really turning around," freshman guard Mike Walker said. "And Coach DeChellis is really dedicated to turning it around."

These newcomers, including junior college transfer Travis Parker, not only provide depth, but also challenge the six returning lettermen for playing time.

From freshman Geary Claxton, whose versatility makes him a perfect fit in the three-spot, to freshman Danny Morrissey, whose soft shot enhances the perimeter game, this handful will make an immediate impact.

"Our young kids did a good job," DeChellis said after the team's exhibition against East Stroudsburg. "They executed really well. At times we had four freshmen on the court. Overall it wasn't too bad for the first time out of the gate."

Little more than a rookie himself, DeChellis hasn't done so badly either. While getting his feet wet last year, DeChellis filtered out the players who didn't want to be at Penn State, relying instead on the cast he assembled in Happy Valley. And the players who prevailed did so for a reason.

Players say DeChellis brings out the best in them, particularly Johnson, who is now a scholarship player — and a polished product of the mold into which DeChellis has shaped this team.

"I've been trying to change attitudes, perceptions and expectations," DeChellis said. "When I first arrived at Penn State, they didn't expect much of themselves and weren't really motivated. I don't think, at times, they were in this thing to win."

### Lady Lions look to adjust, fill holes

**By Nate Heckenberger**  
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Heading into this season, there is that aura of the unknown around the Lady Lions.

That type of feeling would come to any team that just lost its most prolific scorer, along with half of last season's point production. There is no more Kelly Mazzante to dish it to when things get cramped, and everyone on the Penn State women's basketball team knows it. That explains why the Lady Lions repeatedly have said that it is going to be more of a team effort this season.

Fortunately for the No. 21 Lady Lions, their new leader is quite sure of herself. Well before preseason practice even started, there was no doubt that it was Tanisha Wright's turn to take the reins of the back-to-back Big Ten champs.

In the exhibition game against the Netherlands National Team on Tuesday, Wright was more than willing to show her assertiveness, scoring 26 points. It will be up to her to create that

offensive spark if the team is to be successful.

And she's quite fine with that. Being the natural leader that she is, Wright too knows that her surrounding players are that much more important this season if her team is to duplicate last year's results.

"I think Jess [Strom] and I are handling it well as far as knowing we're the people that they're looking for to score," Wright said.

Penn State finished 28-6 last season and was one game short of reaching the Final Four. Without Mazzante, Jess Brungo and Reicina Russell (who transferred to Georgia), this year's team has a completely new look.

The theme established by coach Rene Portland this season has been to "create a shot."

"We have to use the individual talents," Portland said. "I think it's there, it's just a matter of pushing them more to create shots."

Wright was second on the team in scoring last season, with 14.8 points per game. With the new emphasis to open up the offense, Wright will have

plenty of chances to prove she is, indeed, one of the premier guards in the country. Portland has already deemed her to become the best all-around basketball player she's ever coached.

Along with Strom, who is fifth all-time in the Big Ten in assists (641), and sophomore Jen Harris, the Lady Lions backcourt will be expected to make things happen. From Tuesday night's game, it is quite apparent that for the Lady Lions to win this year, it will be the guards carrying the scoring load.

"It's about everybody contributing to the game and everybody pulling their weight and doing their part," Harris said. "We don't have a Kelly Mazzante anymore so we need everybody to make up for that."

Big things are expected of Brown inside this year, but as in the past, the post-play is a question mark. First things first, Ashli Schwab and Hazel Joseph are hoping just to stay healthy for their senior campaigns.

It is expected that the front court will not be counted on to win games. Rather, the players will be expected to

do the dirty work, as well as complement the main scorers when opportunities arise.

"We need to have those expectations, and we need to live through those expectations," Brown said. "We can't simply rely on the guards this year."

Russell's decision to transfer to Georgia last year leaves a hole in the paint that will make the task of controlling the middle much tougher.

The defense gave up just 57 points a game last season, but it will be even more important this season if the offense can't match last season's production.

"The guards are gonna have to get up on some people and the posts are gonna have to hold their own," Wright said.

With the type of leaders running this team, the foundation is set. The question is, will it be firm enough to carry the youth, along with stepping up to the level that Mazzante and Brungo made so commonplace in Happy Valley?

On the roster

**Tanisha Wright — G**

Can't stop — won't stop. Wright is the biggest threat on the Lady Lions squad, so big that the Netherlands National Team coach Meindert van Vreen told his players to back off every time the ball was in her hands because, "We couldn't stop her, she's just too physical." For the Lady Lions to live up to their 2004-2005 potential, Wright needs to be unstoppable, and as coach Rene Portland thinks she can, "flat out, be the best player I've ever coached at Penn State."

**Jess Strom — G**

Backyard basketball, driving down the driveway to the garage-door hoop — Strom and Wright have played together since just after they were in diapers, and that psychic connection will be fun to watch all season long in the fast-break. Strom starts the mayhem — second in the Big Ten last season in steals — and her speed on the court is the key to getting everything started on offense.

**Amanda Brown — F/C**

Brown is a new woman, re-born after a summer playing basketball 24 hours a day, seven days a week — at least that's what everyone's been saying.

The low-post has always been a weak spot on the Portland teams, but Brown is a different type of post-player. She's surprisingly quick and will be running the floor with Wright and Strom like whoa.

**Ashli Schwab — F**

Where Brown is agile, Schwab is physical. But for Schwab staying healthy is the major concern. She has struggled with injuries her entire career, and she must be able to stay on the court for significant minutes this season for the Lady Lions to remain atop the Big Ten standings.

Schwab has a solid jumper from the high post but sometimes struggles finishing from the blocks.

**Jen Harris — G**

Harris is a lightning quick sophomore who the Lady Lions hope will justify her McDonald's High School All-American status in her sophomore campaign.

With the Lady Lions playing what amounts to a three-guard system, Harris must be able to get 10-12 a night with her slashing, Iverson-esque game, and use her height and leaping ability to help out on the boards.

**Hazel Joseph — F/C**

The Lady Lions are paper-thin at the post-positions, and Joseph must make a contribution off of the bench night in night out. Joseph has experience as a starter and the case could be made that she is in fact the best rebounder on the team.

Like Schwab she sometimes struggles scoring from the post and is not particularly strong when receiving the ball with her back to the basket, but she will be looked upon to clean the glass and provide a defensive presence on the interior.

**Jenny Brenden — G**

The only fifth year senior on the squad, Brenden returns for her super-senior season after not seeing much playing time thus far in her Lady Lion career.

Brenden is an accurate shooter from the perimeter and will be one of Penn State's only threats from downtown. In addition to being the team's designated sharpshooter, she will provide energy and intensity at both ends of the floor.

**The Freshman Class**

Portland is in the uncomfortable position of relying on the newbies to make a contribution.

Losing guard Amber Blaud for a few weeks due to mononucleosis was a big blow, but this is still a class that has the potential to contribute all year.

Point guard Lisa Etienne is a solid distributor who will be asked to spell Strom during the few minutes she finds herself on the bench and Adrienne Squire will contribute a three-pointer here and there.

Romana Vynuchlova is a slight 6'4" import from Slovakia who has potential but seems lost at times.

### What the Collegian says

**Mark Myers' prediction**



11-15 (6-10 Big Ten)

DeChellis finally gets to play his style of ball because he now has a full roster. That means fans will finally get to see exciting basketball, but the question of attendance still remains. Freshman Brandon Hassell will become a fan favorite early in the season. Penn State will take a step forward and win in the first

round of the Big Ten tournament; that's a stone-cold, mortal lock.

**Tricia Lafferty's prediction**



13-13 (7-9 Big Ten)

"No expectations, no disappointments" will take this team a long way. Penn State only has to win four games more than last year to be at .500. Talent wise, the Lions haven't lost a lick, considering Jan Jagla is already on to his third team overseas. Look for the freshmen guards to provide more than a

breather for Luber and Smith. After a few early wins, Johnson might see a decent amount of students in the student section where his parents usually fill the seats.

**Mark Ludwiczak's prediction**



11-15 (7-9 Big Ten)

Penn State fans certainly know by now that it takes more than one year to turn around a basketball program. But this year's team will be better with addition by subtraction, as it is clearly a more unified squad than last year. Look for games to be more entertaining as Jagla is already on to his third team overseas. Look for the freshmen guards to provide more than a

breather for Luber and Smith. After a few early wins, Johnson might see a decent amount of students in the student section where his parents usually fill the seats.

**Tim Ford's prediction**

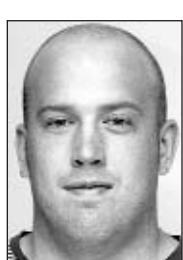


19-8 (12-4, Big Ten) Elite Eight

A 5-5 record going into the Ohio State match-up on Dec. 30th is not as bad as one might think, for Tanisha's team. As more Lady Lions get healthier and the new high-tempo offense starts to click, that tough early schedule pays off, and Penn State plays in the Championship game of the Big Ten

Tournament, but loses, causing a chip on their shoulders that sparks another emotional run to the Elite Eight of the NCAA Tournament.

**Nate's Heckenberger's prediction**

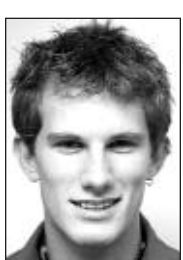


18-9 (11-5 Big Ten) Elite Eight

Tanisha Wright's heart and leadership will lead the Lady Lions to the Elite Eight, but a killer non-conference schedule will bruise the team early. The drop-off from the Mazzante years will be evident, but with Wright and Jess Strom's best years, this team has enough to make it through the regular season and make a run

in March. Lack of depth and scoring options will hurt at times, especially against strong Big Ten foes.

**Justin Kunkel's Prediction**



20-7 (12-4, Big Ten) Sweet Sixteen

The Lady Lions will perform better than expected in their brutal non-conference schedule, but their years of lording over the Big Ten are over. A lack of depth, especially up front, will doom this team and Ohio State will prove to be far and away the best team in the conference.

Appearances in the Big Ten tournament title game and Sweet 16 will be encouraging, but this program's days of contending at the national level are over.