

STOCK EXCHANGE

Projected starters:

Brandon Hassell, junior, forward, 6-foot-11, Farmersville, Ohio
Jamelle Cornley, sophomore forward, 6-foot-5, Columbus, Ohio
****Geary Claxton**, junior guard, 6-foot-5, West Haven, Conn.
David "Mooch" Jackson, senior guard, 6-foot-1, Gaithersburg, Md.
Ben Luber, senior guard, 6-foot, senior guard, Richboro
***Claxton out with hand injury until December*

Geary Claxton makes a statement on the national stage.

Sell. This is not a knock on Claxton's ability; he's got more skill in his broken pinkie than some Penn State teams of the past. The junior forward will suffer from a lack of program notoriety, which is almost impossible to overcome. It will take pure greatness, as in averaging 20 points and 10 boards per game, coupled with a Larry Bird Indiana State-like performance in the NCAA tournament for Claxton to rise up and grab the attention of national media.

At the beginning of the season, it appears that the Penn State basketball programs are traveling on entirely different roads. Following a 2005-06 post-season appearance, the men's team is surrounded by a good deal of excitement. Though the start of the year has been met with a bit of unexpected adversity, namely an injury to Geary Claxton and an exhibition loss, expectations are still higher than normal for the regular season, which tips off tomorrow night at the Bryce Jordan Center against Morehead State. The women's team, which travels to Drexel for its opener tomorrow night, is recovering from its worst season in head coach Rene Portland's 26 years at the helm. This year brings new promise and these roles might be reversed come season's end, but at the moment, it appears the Lady Lions' stock is falling and the Nittany Lions are on the rise.

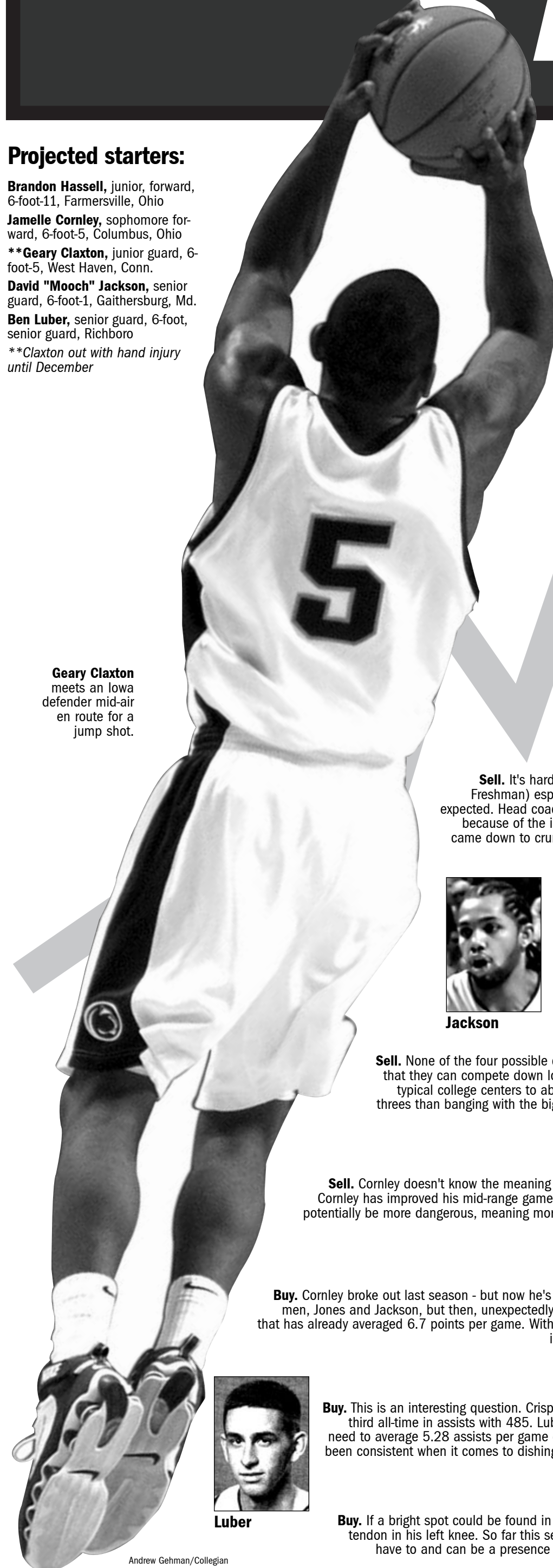
Brianne O'Rourke is the best guard in the Big Ten.

Sell. At Media Day on Oct. 18, a number of Lady Lions said that Brianne O'Rourke is the Big Ten's best point guard. Last year, O'Rourke led the conference in assists and played the fifth most minutes per game (34.07). Over the summer, O'Rourke worked out with demanding strength and conditioning trainer Jackie Ansley in Tennessee and she's improved her three-point shooting. But last season, she was poor from the field (.341 shooting percentage) and turned the ball over too many times (109). With guards like Katie Gearlds of Purdue and Ohio State's Marsicilla Packer and Brandie Hoskins around, O'Rourke can't be considered the Big Ten's top backcourt player.

Projected starters:

Brianne O'Rourke, sophomore, guard, 5-foot-6, Pittsburgh
Kam Gissendanner, junior, guard, 6-foot-1, Clairton
Adrienne Squire, junior, guard, 6-foot-0, Indianapolis
Amanda Brown, senior, forward, 6-foot-4, Kennett Square
Charity Renfro, senior, forward, 6-foot-2, Las Vegas

Geary Claxton meets an Iowa defender mid-air en route for a jump shot.



Jackson

David "D.J." Jackson and Andrew Jones III continue the success of PSU freshmen.

Sell. It's hard to follow up Jamelle Cornley (last year's Big Ten Freshman of the Year) and Geary Claxton (2004-05 Big Ten All-Freshman) especially when this year's freshman don't figure to get nearly as many minutes, though Jackson may get more than expected. Head coach Ed DeChellis intended to bring the freshmen along slowly, but Jackson has been thrust into the spotlight early because of the injury to Claxton. The 6-foot-7 freshman was moved from power forward to small forward a week ago, but when it came down to crunch time Monday night versus Shippensburg, DeChellis went with an extra guard instead of Jackson at the three. Jones looks to be behind the other three options at center at this point.

Senior guard David "Mooch" Jackson becomes more like his namesake.

Buy. Jackson was given the nickname "Mooch" for his resemblance to New Orleans Hornets guard Mookie Moochie Norris, and to avoid confusion with "young D.J." But Jackson might be more of a Mooch than he thinks. Norris, a two-year junior college player, averaged 38 percent from three-point range after transferring to Auburn. Jackson, a JUCO transfer last year, received an offer from Auburn but found his way to Penn State, where he shot just under 30 percent from three-point land last season. Can Jackson close the Moochie-gap even more? Jackson will have a bobblehead doll on Feb. 24. No, not too weird, until you consider that Norris had an infamous, puffy-haired bobblehead with the Houston Rockets. Creepy.

A big man steps up to become a true Five.

Sell. None of the four possible candidates - Milos Bogetic, Joonas Suotamo, Brandon Hassell or Andrew Jones III - have stepped up and shown that they can compete down low with the great centers in college basketball. The new NBA minimum draft age has increased the size of prototypical college centers to about 7-feet, 250 pounds. The added physicality does not suit the Lion big men, who seem more content shooting threes than banging with the big bodies in the paint. They will provide some help on the defensive end, but it will be extremely difficult to find a true center to contribute offensively.

Jamelle Cornley suffers a sophomore slump.

Sell. Cornley doesn't know the meaning of the word slump. The guy plays with so much emotion and heart that his game won't falter. Cornley has improved his mid-range game and will force defenders to guard him on the perimeter. A much more versatile Cornley could potentially be more dangerous, meaning more double teams, which would make it difficult to repeat his 2005-06 numbers, but it won't be a slump. Sell the sophomore slump and look into All-Big Ten investments.



Cornley

Mike Walker has a breakout year.

Buy. Cornley broke out last season - but now he's a soothsayer? When asked to name a Lion to watch, he gave the obligatory nod to the freshmen, Jones and Jackson, but then, unexpectedly, named Walker. Yes, the same Walker that was Penn State's sixth-man last year and a player that has already averaged 6.7 points per game. With Claxton on the shelf, though, guards like Walker will see increased playing time. After spending the summer as the Lions' representative on the Big Ten Foreign Team, maybe Cornley had a beat on this one.

Ben Luber passes Joe Crispin on the Penn State all-time assist list.

Buy. This is an interesting question. Crispin, one of the more popular players in recent Penn State basketball history during his time here (1998-2001), is third all-time in assists with 485. Luber, a target of some fan criticism in recent seasons, is ninth with 153 assists. To pass Crispin, the senior would need to average 5.28 assists per game during the regular season. That's not out of the realm of possibility. Say what you want about him, but Luber has been consistent when it comes to dishing out assists. He averaged 4.07 his freshman year, 3.56 as a sophomore, and 4.45 last season. If he stays consistent and has a few big games along with way, Luber will be movin' on up.



Luber

Danny Morrissey returns strong from a knee injury.

Buy. If a bright spot could be found in Monday's loss, it was the play of the redshirt sophomore. Morrissey missed all of last season with a torn patella tendon in his left knee. So far this season, he has shown no ill effects and has continually said he feels great. He's eager to play and showed he will have to and can be a presence while Claxton is out. Morrissey led the team with 15 points and was 6-for-8 from the field against Shippensburg.

The Jen Harris lawsuit and off-court issues are still distractions.

Sell. Head coach Rene Portland made it clear on Media Day that she was not entertaining any questions regarding the Harris conflict from last year. Captains Amanda Brown and Kam Gissendanner also dodged the subject when it was brought up. The tone for this season has already been set: a fresh look ahead and an attempt to forget about last year's debacle, both on and off the court. Since the case is pending until after the season's completion, the Harris controversy should fade into the background - at least for this year.

Gissendanner becomes a consistent big-time scorer.

Sell. Junior forward Gissendanner, the Lady Lions' most prolific scoring threat from outside of the paint, was second leading scorer on the team in 2005-06 (14.8 points per game). However, Gissendanner was inconsistent, scoring a career-high 34 against Texas Tech, while struggling in three straight games with only 8 in each later in the season. While she won't be expected to replicate her performance against the Lady Raiders every game, it would be ideal if she could consistently turn out a 15-point effort. With emerging scoring options around her, Gissendanner's point total likely won't be increasing by much. Also, she must improve on a .263 shooting percentage (21-80) from downtown.



Gissendanner

The freshmen are as good as advertised.

Buy. Based on how they've been practicing, these freshmen look just about as good as they've been billed. Guard Tyra Grant, who was named 2005-06 Miss Ohio Basketball and averaged 30.8 points per game in high school, has said she's taken her ability to "another level." She's a hustler and practices with intensity. Portland said guard Meggan Quinn might someday be mentioned in the same breath as the Big Ten's all-time leading scorer, Kelly Mazzante, and from what Quinn has shown in practice, that doesn't seem so farfetched. She's an incredible shooter, able to spot-up and nail three-pointers with regularity. "She has a shooter's mentality," Portland said.

Adrienne Squire leads the nation in free-throw percentage again.

Buy. During the 2005-06 season, junior guard Adrienne Squire hit her first 50 free throws en route to setting an NCAA single-season record by making 80 of 83 - a .964 shooting percentage - from the charity stripe. Foul shooting is an ability a player either has or she doesn't, and Squire most certainly has it. Though her record will be tough to top - "I'm gonna try," Squire said - there's no reason to believe she can't lead the nation in free-throw percentage again.

Penn State will finish .500 or better away from the Bryce Jordan Center.

Squire **Buy.** The confines of the Jordan Center have been kind to the Lady Lions. Road matches have been a different story. The Lady Lions posted a winning home record (8-6) last year, but had a miserable 3-8 record on the road, dropping seven of those eight games to Big Ten opponents. However, this year the road schedule might actually be in the Lady Lions' favor. It features games against Drexel, predicted to finish ninth in its conference, Saint Francis (Pa.) and Syracuse, predicted to finish 15th in the Big East. Finishing above .500 for away games won't be easy, but the team has greatly improved since last year.

An offense with heightened emphasis on the post can work for the Lady Lions.

Buy. A traditionally guard-heavy offense, the Lady Lions have a different outlook in 2006-07. Second-team All-Big Ten forward Brown topped Penn State with 15.6 points and 7.3 rebounds per game last season. Anticipate her leading the Lady Lions in both categories again. Brown also improved her free-throw shooting every year of her career, knocking down 79.2 percent of her shots from the line in 2005-06. "We've been working extra hard at just having a well-balanced team," Brown said. If fellow forwards step up, the Lady Lion offense will put more points on the board this season.



Brown

Portland will reach 700 career wins at the end of this season.

Sell. Portland is only 22 wins away from reaching the milestone. She accumulated 678 wins at three schools, first at Saint Joseph's and Colorado, before adding 591 wins here. But with the difficulty of the Lady Lions' schedule this season, coupled with their traditional inability to win on the road, this one seems a little out of reach.

BROKERS' PREDICTIONS



MY OPINION

Corey McLaughlin

(16-13, 8-8 Big Ten) NIT 2nd round
 Posted on a wall inside the Lions' locker room are two goals: Win the Big Ten and make the NCAA Tournament. Unless they improve and improve rapidly, neither target looks within reach. If Penn State did not play two exhibition games so far, I would have predicted they would be on the bubble by March. But two very important things happened so far: Claxton got injured and they lost to a Division II team. Claxton's absence affects the team short-term. A few impressive non-conference wins would help this team make the Big Dance, but without its best player, games against Bucknell and St. Joe's that once looked like possible wins now look like probable losses.



MY OPINION

Jon Blau

(17-12, 8-8 Big Ten) NIT 3rd round
 If you want the team that DeChellis hoped could make the NCAA tournament, sit and wait. While the vast majority of Lions fans might find the gumption to chant "Safety School" once again, when mid-majors like Morehead State, Stony Brook, Hartford and Long Island make games interesting, don't fear, for all is not lost. When Claxton returns to the floor, Penn State can at least win as many games as they lose in the Big Ten. It'll probably be too late for the Big Dance at this point, but the Lions could make a substantial run in the NIT for a bit of a pick-me-up.



MY OPINION

Andrew Wible

(19-10 overall, 8-8 Big Ten) NCAA tourney
 Losing Claxton in the preseason could end up strengthening the team later in the season. His absence will force other players to step up and lead, which obviously didn't happen against Shippensburg. This season depends on how Penn State responds to this upset. Even without Claxton early, the Lions should bounce back with its veteran nucleus and find some stability. But, at the same time, Penn State has shown that it can have cold shooting nights, which will translate into bad losses (i.e. Shippensburg). If the team can hold steady until Claxton returns, Penn State should find its way into the NCAA tournament. And once March comes around, anything can happen.



MY OPINION

Mark Viera

(18-11, 11-5 Big Ten) NCAA 1st round
 With the distractions of last season behind them, this year's Lady Lions should fare better than last season's sub-.500 team that finished as the worst in Portland's 26-year tenure. But with a competitive non-conference schedule that includes three teams ranked in the USA Today preseason top 25, Penn State will be tested early. In conference things don't get any easier, as Ohio State appears to have a stranglehold on the Big Ten. Don't expect Penn State to surge back into the national scene, but a return to respectability is certainly plausible. With a decent record, the Lady Lions could make the NCAAs thanks to the program's reputation.



MY OPINION

Joseph Dolan

(18-11, 10-6 Big Ten) NCAA 2nd round
 This season, the Lady Lions will emphasize the post offense. Portland said she's been running a three-post offense in practice, adding spice to the traditionally strong Lady Lion guard play. Brown has a leader's mentality, but after being thrust into the limelight it's a mystery if she can come close to the production of other premier post players on the schedule. If the younger posts develop, Brown takes bigger strides and the outside shooters can consistently fill the bucket, the Penn State offense can succeed against even its toughest competition. Though they won't be climbing Everest this season, expect the Lady Lions to improve on last season's losing record.



MY OPINION

Virginia Harrison

(17-12, 10-6 Big Ten) NCAA 1st round
 Experience is the greatest asset for the Lady Lions. With the return of every starter, Penn State can only improve. The international experience of Brown, who played for Canada in the FIBA World Championships, and O'Rourke, who played for the Big Ten Foreign Tour team, will add to this advantage. From this experience has come a new level of maturity. At Media Day, Portland said her team came into the gym for off-season workouts "earlier than any team I've ever had." O'Rourke is only a sophomore, and there are only four upper-classmen. Even with the lack of seasoned veterans, the lessons they have learned will help them regain respect in the Big Ten.

2005-2006 STATISTICS

PLAYER	GS	PPG	RPG	FG%	PLAYER	GS	PPG	RPG	FG%
Claxton	30	15.2	7.5	.439	Brown	29	15.6	7.3	.593
Cornley	23	11.4	5.7	.513	Gissendanner	29	14.8	3.9	.404