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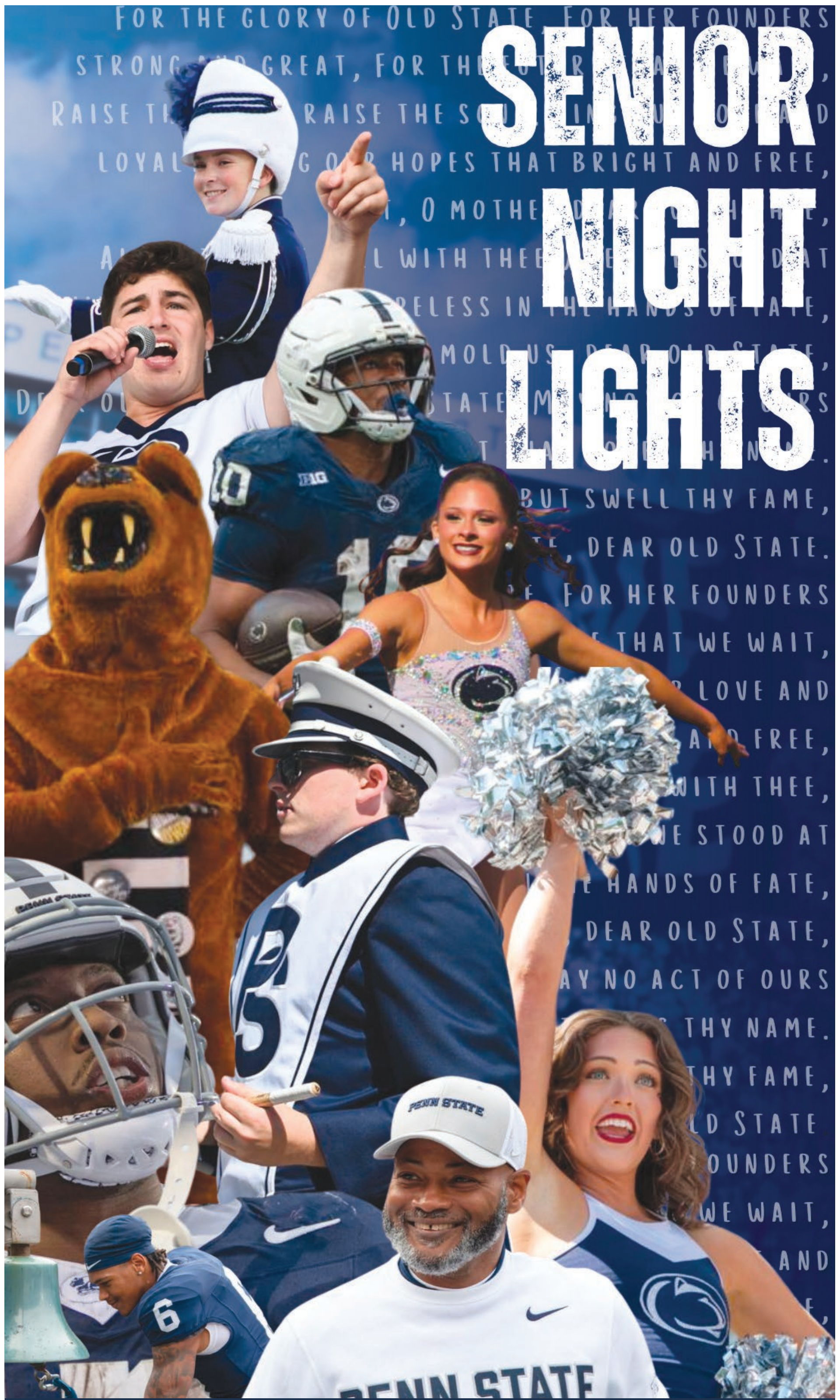
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NEBRASKA (7-3) (4-5) PENN STATE
CORNHUSKERS NITTANY LIONS



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THE FRANKLIN EFFECT

Interim head coach Terry Smith discusses the James Franklin hire, its impact

By Lexie Linderman
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Just over eight hours after James Franklin was introduced as Virginia Tech’s head coach, the interim head coach at his previous institution met with the media following practice Wednesday.

Terry Smith opened up his scrum with a brief statement to clarify some things he said or forgot to say Monday during his emotional press conference. Smith apologized for misstating information about his hometown of Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, and said he does speak with Franklin “every other day.”

Besides that, Smith touched on Franklin joining the Hokies, the team-first mindset and how he’s adjusting despite staff departures.

Franklin’s hire

Smith didn’t get a chance to watch Franklin’s press conference Wednesday morning, but he did express how happy he is that his former employer has already found a new destination.

“I’m really happy for him,” Smith said. “In this industry with coaching, we all go through highs and lows at some point, if you’re coaching, you’re gonna get fired at some point. And just happy for him and his family (that they) bounced back so soon.”

Franklin has already begun recruiting at Virginia Tech, and he’s offered multiple former and current Penn State commits. With that brings issues and problems for the Nittany Lions and Smith, who have continued to try and



Andrea Lara-Marcial/Collegian

Interim head coach Terry Smith talks to the media during a press conference in Holuba Hall on Nov. 19, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

recruit despite the uncertainty ahead.

Smith spoke on the challenges of Franklin already having a job and the immediate threat that poses for Penn State.

“Well, the immediate threat is to take Penn State players right with the uncertainty of the next head coach, with the locker room, which is the most important thing that we can do is protect the locker room,” Smith said. “When it comes to recruits, high school recruits, he has an advantage right now because we don’t have a permanent head coach.”

As for Smith possibly following Franklin and joining his staff in Blacksburg, he didn’t rule it out.

“Anything’s a possibility,” Smith said. “Goes back to when

we brought out the ‘IF,’ our word of infinite possibilities. Nothing matters about those possibilities, except us playing this weekend. I love the game of football. I will be coaching the game of football on Saturday, and ... God willing, next Saturday. And then after that, we’ll let business take care of business. But all that matters is we have to beat Nebraska.”

Playing for the team

Smith has preached effort and playing to win since he took over as the interim head coach, and his halftime speech against Michigan State once again showed how important that was to him. He spoke more about team culture Wednesday.

“I gave a conversation to our

team last week about individual agendas,” Smith said. “We all have an agenda for our own families to be successful in this business. All of our agendas have to align to the team. And right now, all of our guys are aligned to beating Nebraska, and that’s all that matters.”

One of those individual agendas is Kaytron Allen’s. The senior is currently 139 yards away from breaking the Penn State career rushing yards record, and there’s a very real possibility he can hit that mark against Nebraska, which has the fifth-worst run defense in the Big Ten.

But Smith wants Allen to break that record, and knows that if the running back keeps doing what he’s done his whole career —

which is be a team-player — he’ll end up on the top of that leaderboard.

“He rushes within the team aspect,” Smith said. “Him and Nick have shared the ball for their career, and he knows and understands that if Nick is hot, we’re going to continue to give Nick the ball, but we want nothing more than for him to have one of those great days where he can break the record. But again, it’s a team game, so we’re going to feature him and Nick.”

Staff departures

Penn State has already lost seven staff members since Franklin’s introductory press conference, including its chief of staff Kevin Threlkel and General Manager of Personnel and Recruitment Andy Frank.

Smith was asked about those departures and how the Nittany Lions plan to fill the holes that they’ve left. He’s confident, however, that Penn State will be just fine for the rest of the season.

“We just got to restructure, make sure that those job responsibilities are being taken care of,” Smith.

“We have a great staff here. We have a lot of people that take great pride in picking up the slack where things are void. This is no different than injuries on the field. It’s the next person up. The job has to be done. So we’ll adjust. We’ll keep it moving. Our feet are on the ground, and we’re prepared to go beat Nebraska.”

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Energy up for Penn State as it searches for 2 wins in a row

By Lyle Alenstein
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Six hours and 365 miles. That’s the distance between Blacksburg, Virginia and State College, Pennsylvania.

Earlier in the day, it was James Franklin that touched down at Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport for his introductory press conference as the new head coach at Virginia Tech. He shook hands, took photos, did many interviews and took in Lane Stadium for the first time.

Hours away, was Holuba Hall, a building that Franklin hasn’t set foot in since being fired from Penn State. Inside that building was a team that won its first

game on Saturday since Sept. 13.

With the cold weather in the air in Happy Valley, the Nittany Lions went to work inside, getting ready to build off of the momentum they earned after dethroning Michigan State.

It was once again a short viewing window for the media, only seeing two five-minute periods. To start, it was the special teams who took over both ends of the field. Both the starters and developmental squad on punt block worked on getting to Gabe Nwosu.

Defensive ends Dani Dennis-Sutton and Jaylen Harvey looked like they would’ve had success in said drills. It shouldn’t come off as

a shock for Dennis-Sutton, as he’s blocked three punts this year, including one on Saturday against the Spartans. The trio of blocks tied both Jack Ham and Andrew Collins for the most in the program for a single-season.

On the other end, it was Ryan Barker banging kicks through the uprights. He’s been a key piece of the triumph the special teams has had in 2025, going 12-for-13 on field goals with his lone missed being from 50 yards out that got blocked against Villanova to end the half. The horn then sounded to signify the end of the period and a changing of drills.

The safeties worked on blitzes. The running backs worked on

blitz pick ups. The pass-catchers caught short passes with quick routes.

Quarterback Ethan Grunkemeyer was the lone gunslinger to fire off passes during the window. He threw quick outs to running backs and wide receivers working the sidelines.

Freshman quarterback Bekkem Kritza was in attendance after being inactive against the Spartans. Jaxon Smolik was not to be seen, but walk-on Jack Lambert wore Smolik’s No. 14 for scout team.

The aforementioned duo wasn’t throwing during the media portion of practice, but wide receiver Liam Clifford was, continuing his

role as a gadget quarterback.

On the injury front, defensive end Chaz Coleman missed his second consecutive practice after being inactive since the Indiana game. Safety Antoine Belgrave-Shorter also missed his second week in a row of practice, debuting on the injury report against the Spartans.

With the goal being another win this upcoming Saturday against Nebraska, assistant wide receivers coach Mark Dupuis was hyping up the team in between reps.

“That’s a good drill,” Dupuis yelled.

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NEBRASKA CORNHUSKERS											
No.	Name	Position/Elig.	No.	Name	Position/Elig.	No.	Name	Position/Elig.	No.	Name	Position/Elig.
0	Javin Wright	LB/Sr.	19	Cortez Mills Jr.	WR/Fr.	39	David Hoffken	DL/Fr.	62	Sam Sledge	OL/So.
1	Ceyair Wright	DB/Sr.	21	Emmett Johnson	RB/Jr.	39	Bryson Webber	DB/Fr.	63	Brian Tapu	OL/Fr.
2	Jacory Barney Jr.	WR/So.	21	Rex Guthrie	DB/Fr.	40	Dawson Merritt	LB/Fr.	65	Teddy Prochazka	OL/Sr.
3	Marques Buford Jr.	DB/Sr.	22	Maverick Noonan	DL/So.	41	Tanner Terch	DB/Fr.	66	Grant Brix	OL/Fr.
4	Janiran Bonner	WR/Jr.	22	Isaiah Mozee	RB/Fr.	42	Derek Wacker	LB/Fr.	67	Houston Ka'aha'aina Torres	OL/Fr.
5	Riley Van Poppel	DB/Sr.	23	Caleb Benning	DB/Fr.	43	Michael Booker III	LB/Sr.	68	Preston Tauma	OL/Fr.
6	Dane Key	WR/Sr.	23	Blye Hill	DB/So.	44	Luke Lindenmeyer	TE/Jr.	69	Turner Corcoran	OL/Sr.
7	Malcolm Hartzog	LB/Sr.	23	Conor Booth	RB/Fr.	45	Izaac Dickey	RB/Fr.	69	Landen Davidson	DL/Fr.
8	DeShon Singleton	DB/Sr.	24	Derek Branch	DB/Sr.	45	Roger Gradney	LB/Fr.	70	Noaah Fennessy	OL/Fr.
9	Vincent Shavers	LB/So.	24	Jamarion Parker	RB/Fr.	46	Connor Schutt	WR/Fr.	71	Tyson Terry	DL/Fr.
10	Henrich Haarberg	LB/So.	25	Jeremiah Charles	DB/So.	46	Kevin Gallic	LS/Sr.	72	Gibson Pyle	OL/Fr.
10	Andrew Marshall	DB/Jr.	26	Roman Mangini	WR/Jr.	47	Gabe Stenger	LB/Jr.	74	Brock Knutson	OL/So.
11	Cameron Lenhardt	DL/Jr.	26	Brice Turner	DB/So.	48	Cayden Echternach	DB/So.	75	Tyler Knaak	OL/Jr.
11	Bode Soukup	QB/Fr.	28	Kwinten Ives	RB/So.	48	Caden VerMaas	DB/Fr.	76	Jason Maciejczak	OL/So.
12	Jalyn Gramstad	QB/Jr.	29	Carter Nelson	TE/So	49	Danny King	TE/Fr.	77	Gunnar Gottula	OL/So.
12	Justyn Rhett	DB/So.	29	Braylen Prude	DB/Fr.	50	Christian Jones	DL/Fr.	78	Jacob Brandl	OL/So.
13	Nyziah Hunter	WR/So.	30	Tristan Alvano	PK/So.	50	Rocco Spindler	OL/Sr.	79	Shawn Hammerbeck	OL/Fr.
13	Jamir Conn	DB/Jr.	30	Vincent Genatone	RB/Jr.	51	Justin Evans	OL/Jr.	80	Jeremiah Jones	WR/Fr.
14	Amare Sanders	DB/Fr.	31	Mario Buford	S/Fr.	52	Dylan Rogers	LB/So.	81	Hayes Miller	WR/So.
14	TJ Lateef	QB/Fr.	32	Kenneth Williams	RB/So.	54	Jacob Bower	LB/So.	82	Eric Ingwerson	TE/Fr.
15	Dylsn Raiola	QB/So.	32	Trent Uhler	LB/Fr.	55	Ethan Duda	LB/Fr.	83	Archie Wilson	P/Fr.
15	Dasan McCullough	LB/Sr.	33	Marques Watson-Trent	LB/Sr.	56	Julian Marks	OL/Fr.	84	DJ Singleton Jr.	WR/Fr.
16	Elijah Jeudy	DL/Sr.	34	Preston Okafor	DB/Fr.	56	Pierce Mooberry	LB/Fr.	85	Keelan Smith	WR/Fr.
17	Luke Longval	QB/Jr.	35	Mekhi Nelson	RB/Fr.	57	Ashton Murphy	DL/Fr.	86	Mason Goldman	DL/So.
17	Willis McGahee IV	TE/Jr.	36	Rowdy Bauer	WR/Fr.	57	Elijah Pitchett	OL/Jr.	87	Mac Markway	TE/So.
18	Quinn Clark	WR/Fr.	37	Donovan Jones	DB/Fr.	58	Jake Peters	OL/Fr.	88	Jackson Carpenter	WR/Fr.
18	Larry Tarver Jr.	DB/Fr.	37	Kamdyn Koch	P/Fr.	59	Henry Lutovsky	OL/Sr.	90	John Hohl	PK/So.
19	Kahmir Prescott	DB/Fr.	38	Thomas D'Onofrio	DB/Fr.	59	Rahmir Stewart	LB/So.	90	Jaylen George	DL/Jr.

PENN STATE NITTANY LIONS											
No.	Name	Position/Elig.	No.	Name	Position/Elig.	No.	Name	Position/Elig.	No.	Name	Position/Elig.
0	Dominic DeLuca	LB/Sr.	17	Ethan Grunkemeyer	QB/Fr.	38	Winston Yates	LB/So.	71	Vega Ioane	OL/Jr.
1	Kyron Hudson	WR/Sr.	17	Kenny Woseley Jr.	CB/Fr.	39	Ty Blanding	DT/So.	72	Nolan Rucci	OL/Sr.
2	Liam Clifford	WR/Sr.	18	Max Granville	DE/Fr.	39	Jashaun Green	S/Jr.	73	Caleb Brewer	OL/Fr.
2	Audavion Collins	CB/Jr.	19	Josiah Brown	WR/Fr.	40	Anthony Specca	LB/Fr.	74	J'ven Williams	OL/So.
3	Antoine Belgrave-Shorter	S/Fr.	19	Chaz Coleman	DE/Fr.	42	Mason Robinson	DE/So.	75	Matt Detisch	OL/Jr.
3	Koby Howard	WR/Fr.	19	Jack Lambert	QB/So.	43	Dayshaun Burnett	DE/Fr.	76	Mason Carlan	OL/Sr.
4	Tyseer Denmark	WR/Fr.	20	Mylachi Williams	DE/Fr.	44	Jaylen Harvey	DE/Fr.	77	Owen Aliciene	OL/Fr.
4	A.J. Harris	CB/Jr.	21	Vaboue Toure	S/Fr.	44	Matt Henderson	TE/Fr.	78	Malachi Goodman	OL/Fr.
5	Daryus Dixon	CB/Fr.	21	Jabree Coleman	RB/Fr.	45	Enai White	DT/Jr.	79	Donnie Harbour	OL/Fr.
5	Devonte Ross	WR/Sr.	23	Tikey Hayes	RB/Fr.	46	Cortez Harris`	DE/Fr.	80	Jeff Exinor Jr.	WR/Fr.
6	Zakee Wheatley	S/Sr.	23	Jahmir Joseph	CB/Fr.	47	Aidan Probst	DE/Fr.	81	Donte Nastasi	CB/So.
6	Matt Outten	WR/Fr.	24	Corey Smith	RB/Fr.	48	Tyler Duzansky	SN/Sr.	82	Ethan Black	WR/So.
7	Kaden Saunders	WR/Jr.	24	Amare Campbell	LB/Jr.	50	Cooper Cousins	OL/So.	83	Brian Kortovich	TE/Fr.
7	Zion Tracy	CB/Jr.	25	Quinton Martin Jr.	RB/Fr.	50	Alonzo Ford Jr.	DT/Sr.	84	Peter Gonzalez	WR/Fr.
8	DaKaari Nelson	LB/So.	25	Alex Tatsch	LB/Fr.	51	Michael Troutman III	OL/Fr.	85	Luke Reynolds	TE/So.
8	Trebor Pena	WR/Sr.	26	Cam Smith	LB/Fr.	52	Randy Adirika	DT/Fr.	86	Aaron Enterline	WR/Fr.
9	Elliot Washington II	CB/Jr.	26	Cam Wallace	RB/So.	52	Dominic Rulli	OL/Jr.	87	Andrew Rappleyea	WR/So.
10	Nick Singleton	RB/Sr.	27	Lamont Payne Jr.	CB/So.	53	Nick Dawkins	OL/Sr.	88	Andrew Olesh	TE/Fr.
10	DeJuan Lane	S/So.	28	Zane Durant	DT/Sr.	54	Xavier Gilliam	DT/Fr.	88	Sam Sifa	DT/So.
11	LaVar Arrington II	LB/Fr.	28	Karson Kiesewetter	S/So.	54	Ian Harvie	OL/Jr.	89	Finn Furmanek	TE/So.
11	Lyrick Samuel	WR/Fr.	29	Daniel Jennings	DE/Fr.	54	TJ Shanahan Jr.	OL/So.	90	Liam Andrews	DT/Fr.
12	Anthony Ivey	WR/Jr.	30	Amiel Davis	RB/Sr.	55	Chimdy Onoh	OL/So.	92	Andrew Dufault	SN/Fr.
12	Xavier Thomas	CB/Fr.	30	Kari Jackson	LB/Fr.	58	Kaleb Artis	DT/Jr.	93	Bobby Mears	DE/So.
13	Kaytron Allen	RB/Sr.	31	Logan Cunningham	WR/Jr.	59	Brady O'Hara	OL/Fr.	94	Ryan Barker	K/So.
13	Tony Rojas	LB/Jr.	31	Kolin Dinkins	CB/Jr.	61	Liam Horan	OL/Fr.	94	De'Andre Cook	DT/Fr.
14	Braz Thomas	S/Fr.	32	Keon Wylie	LB/Jr.	63	Alex Birchmeier	OL/So.	95	Jordan Mayer	DE/So.
14	Riley Thompson	P/Sr.	33	Dani Dennis-Sutton	DE/Sr.	64	Eagan Boyer	OL/Fr.	98	Matthew Parker	K/Fr.
14	Jaxon Smolik	QB/So.	34	Tyler Holzworth	RB/Sr.	65	Jim Fitzgerald	OL/Jr.	99	Yvan Kemajour	DE/Fr.
15	Drew Allar	QB/Sr.	34	Owen Waffe	DT/Fr.	66	Drew Shelton	OL/Sr.	99	Gabriel Nwosu	P/Sr.
15	Joshua Johnson	CB/Fr.	35	Blaise Sokach-Minnick	SN/Jr.	67	Henry Boehme	OL/So.			
16	Khalil Dinkins	TE/Fr.	35	Tyler Armstead	CB/Fr.	68	Anthony Donkoh	OL/So.			
16	Bekkem Kritza	QB/Fr.	36	Zuriah Fisher	DE/Sr.	70	Garrett Sexton	OL/Fr.			
16	King Mack	S/Jr.	38	Jackson Pryts	LB/Jr.						

FRANKLIN TO VIRGINIA TECH

5 questions Penn State needs to answer following his hire by the Hokies

By Lyle Alenstein
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

A new landing spot for James Franklin has been found and it resides in Blacksburg, Virginia. Multiple reports have indicated that Franklin is finalizing a deal to be the next head coach for Virginia Tech.

With Franklin off to be the new leader of the Hokies, here are five questions that Penn State needs to answer.

How much of the current roster changes?

There was expected to be roster turnover for Penn State come the end of the season regardless, but now that topic is at the forefront of the program with Franklin's new spot coming to the attention.

Only one player has entered the transfer portal since his departure in tight end Joey Schaffer. Who knows if more depart during the final stretch of the regular season, but if players chose to go portaling, Franklin will more than likely get the numbers of his former players up and moving.

During Franklin's tenure in State College, the narrative around him wasn't he couldn't win the big game. What wasn't questioned was his abilities as a recruiter and being a players' coach.

No matter the destination of where Franklin landed, he was going to have his former players have eyes on his whereabouts. Now, it's only a matter of how many chose to follow him or decide to look elsewhere if players chose to enter the transfer portal.

What will the staff turnover look like?

Much like Franklin being a players' coach, he's been loyal to

the staff who have worked under his watchful eye.

It is more than likely that Franklin will explore the option of bringing back some staff members.

Penn State's new head coach could choose to clear house regardless if the hire isn't internal, so that could leave a plethora of options to join forces with Franklin or look elsewhere.

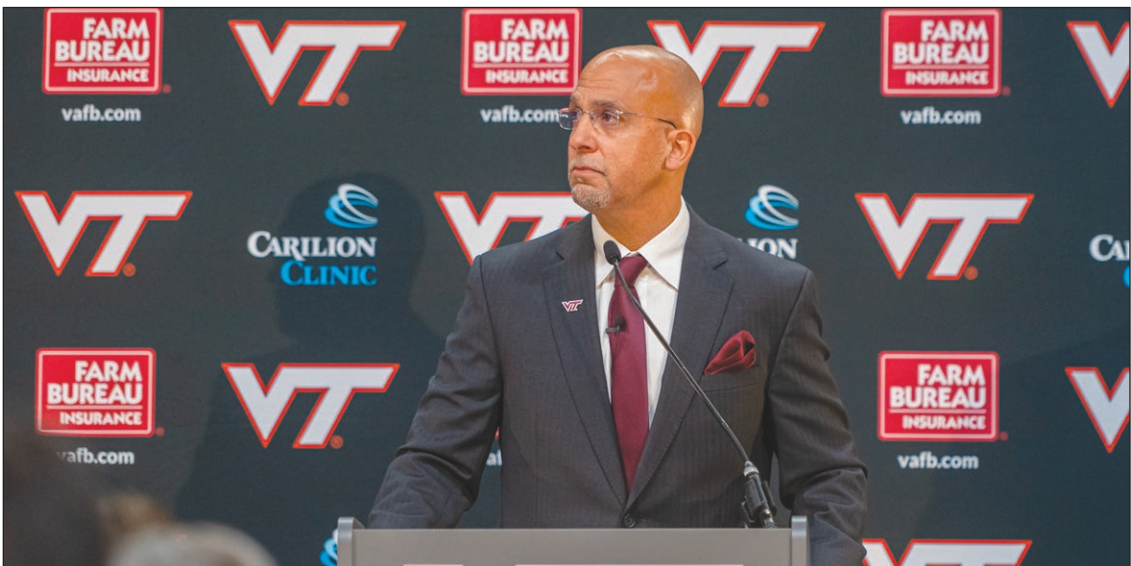
The other lingering factor with this is staff members who are lettermen that hold assistant position spots or analysts. Franklin was loyal to guys with Penn State ties, so he could look to bring them in as the roles for them aren't guaranteed with whoever is next in line in Happy Valley.

How much will the deal for Penn State's next coach be worth?

When Franklin first inked a deal with the Nittany Lions in 2014, the initial contract was worth \$4.5 million per year over six years, according to Bruce Feldman, formerly of CBS.

Then, in 2021, he signed a 10-year contract extension worth \$75 million, with a buyout that was supposed to be nearly \$49 million, but a report from Jon Sauber of the Centre Daily Times said that Penn State reached a settlement with Franklin where the university will owe him \$9 million. Multiple reports confirmed the initial report by Sauber.

According to USA Today, there are currently nine head coaches being paid over \$10 million per year. Lane Kiffin and Eli Drinkwitz, both are hot names to potentially land elsewhere during the coaching cycle, could be names that both reach that status soon after currently holding deals where they receive \$9 million a season.



James Franklin, Virginia Tech's new head football coach, pauses after he was introduced during an NCAA college football news conference, Wednesday, Nov. 19, 2025, in Blacksburg, Va.

That leaves the question as to if the athletic department will raise the price for its next head coach based off of the current market. Franklin made \$8.5 million per season at Penn State.

What will be the recruiting ramifications?

Franklin's buy-in from recruits was clear with the spur of players that have since decommitted following the firing of Franklin.

In the 2026 class, 13 recruits have backed off their pledge while in the 2027 class all four high schoolers dropped their commitments. For comparison, LSU had one player back off their commitment following the firing of Brian Kelly while zero players departed from Florida after it pulled the plug on Billy Napier.

While the wins in "big games" never really occurred for Franklin, his reputation as a recruiter and ability to develop was there.

One of Franklin's strengths as a recruiter was the ability to bring in talent from the DMV. From Virginia, he's landed players such as Tyler Warren, Tony Rojas, Kaytron Allen and Trace McSorley. From Maryland, he's brought in guys like Olu Fashanu, Zakee Wheatley, PJ Mustipher, Dani Dennis-Sutton, Tariq Castro-Fields and Kevin Winston Jr.

To add potential insult to injury, Brian Dohn of 247Sports tweeted that he spoke to multiple former Penn State commits who said they would take a visit wherever Franklin goes.

What will the expectations be for Penn State's next head coach?

Franklin had a comfortable seat in the Lasch Building for over 11 seasons. He arguably had the safest job in college football for a really long time.

That argument was made

because he kept winning games against winnable teams. He had double-digit wins in six of 11 seasons, won five bowl games, consistently churned out NFL talent and had an appearance in the College Football Playoff a season ago.

Between Franklin, Joe Paterno and Rip Engle, Penn State has a long track record of having coaches stick around for a long time. That expectation in the new era of college football isn't as common anymore, as if expectations fail to be reached, programs often move on.

So if Penn State's next head coach doesn't meet expectations of whatever they might be, it'll be an interesting case of how long the athletic department keeps the coach around — a potential shorter leash in Happy Valley could be in store.

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Who could follow Franklin?

By Lexie Linderman
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

After weeks of rumors, James Franklin was officially hired by Virginia Tech on Monday, marking his third collegiate head-coaching gig and his first in the ACC.

The job was open after the Hokies decided to fire Brent Pry, Franklin's former defensive coordinator and long-time assistant, after three straight losses to open up the 2025 season.

Penn State's players have expressed plenty of support after Franklin was fired by the Nittany Lions in October. He's always been a coach loved by his guys, which could cause some significant transfer portal movement.

There will surely be guys that follow Franklin, and Penn State could see its roster decimated this offseason. Here's a few that could potentially choose that path.

Tony Rojas, linebacker

First up is Tony Rojas, who already posted on X that Franklin's hire is "well deserved." He also posted after Franklin's firing, saying it was "heartbreaking," and reposted his former coach's quote on College GameDay the week after Franklin was let go about winning a national championship somewhere else.

Rojas is a Virginia native and was offered by Virginia Tech out of high school, but he never took an official, or unofficial, visit to campus. But Franklin being in his home state might change some things for the soon-to-be senior.

There's of course the chance Rojas declares for the NFL draft, but the long-term injury he picked up this season could deter him away from doing so in order to put more on film and boost his draft stock.

If Franklin wants to bring Rojas to his new destination, it's

very possible he could. He just needs to sell playing in the ACC versus playing in the Big Ten, as Franklin said himself multiple times that the latter and the SEC have separated themselves from the pack.

Chuck Losey, assistant athletics director for football performance enhancement

Chuck Losey and Franklin have been together since Franklin was the head coach at Vanderbilt. His loyalty to Franklin has been unwavering throughout his career, as he always spoke highly of him and was noticeably by Franklin's side for his last few moments in Beaver Stadium.

"James Frank's, my guy," Losey said July 14. "I don't want to work for anybody else in this profession. I know what I'm going to get from him every day. He knows what he's going to get from me every day. We have a strong relationship. We're like minded, we have the same goals. I don't take that for granted."

Franklin has also praised Losey right back. Across his career, he consistently spoke about how elite Penn State's conditioning and strength program is, and that's all run by Losey. If Franklin wants Losey to come with him, chances are the Nittany Lions will be in the market for a new strength coach.

Luke Reynolds, tight end

Before deciding he wanted to play tight end in college, Luke Reynolds was committed to Virginia Tech to play quarterback, giving the sophomore some familiarity with Franklin's new school.

That familiarity could be a defining factor in Reynolds' decision to stay at Penn State, transfer elsewhere or follow Franklin.

Franklin always spoke highly of Reynolds, and he was one of the highest-rated recruits in Penn State's 2024 recruiting class. He earned a green light from Franklin last year as a true freshman and has been playing a large role this season for the Nittany Lions with 218 receiving yards.

"Yeah, I think (there's) a lot of confidence (with Reynolds)," Franklin said Sept. 8. "There is also the thing that we look at too is not just that they caught it. It's, okay, after they caught it, one of the things he did is consistently made people miss ... I think there is a ton of confidence in him making the tough catch on a consistent basis."

Ty Howle, tight ends coach

Ty Howle has been on Penn State's staff for five years, and in

that time frame, he's been Penn State's primary recruiter in the Virginia region. With Franklin picking a school in that state, it's likely he'll want Howle to join him.

Howle has been one of the best tight end coaches in the country in recent years, churning out talent like Pat Freiermuth, Brenton Strange, Theo Johnson and Tyler Warren, who was the first Nittany Lion to win the John Mackey Award.

The North Carolina native, however, is a Penn State letterman, so it might be tougher to convince him to leave his alma mater.

Ethan Grunkemeyer, quarterback

While many players from Penn State will be transferring out, Virginia Tech will be dealing with the same thing, and Franklin will likely want to pick his own quarterback rather than pick one from the Hokies' current roster.

Insert Ethan Grunkemeyer. As a recruit, Grunkemeyer mainly had interest from schools in his home state of Ohio, but the Nittany Lions saw something in him and he committed to Franklin. With Penn State's future head coach also likely wanting to pick their own quarterback, Grunkemeyer might be forced to find a new school anyway. Why not Virginia Tech?

If Franklin wants to pick his own quarterback, Grunkemeyer is the top option. He was set to be the Nittany Lions' starter in 2026 when Franklin was still in Happy Valley, he might just end up being Franklin's starting quarterback elsewhere.

Danny O'Brien, quarterbacks coach

On the same note, if Franklin brings Grunkemeyer, he's also bringing Danny O'Brien.

O'Brien played quarterback at Maryland while Franklin was the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach in 2009 and 2010, so the two have a familiarity and long-standing relationship. O'Brien has been coaching the quarterbacks at Penn State for five years.

Franklin will likely also want Grunkemeyer to have the familiarity with O'Brien, as that would be more likely to draw the quarterback to Virginia Tech. Additionally, the Nittany Lions' new head coach is probably not keeping O'Brien on staff, as his record developing quarterbacks hasn't been great up to this point.

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3 takeaways from Franklin's introduction

By Will Horstman
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

James Franklin arrived at Roanoke-Blacksburg Airport Wednesday morning, officially starting a new era for the coach.

Franklin later went to his introductory press conference as Virginia Tech's next head coach inside Cassell Coliseum, where he outlined his future with the Hokies.

Here's a few takeaways from the presser.

High aspirations remain

When Franklin was interviewed on ESPN's College GameDay the weekend after he was fired at Penn State, he said his goal is still to win a national championship. At his presser Wednesday, Franklin spoke on how Virginia Tech can thrive.

"I think the first thing is alignment, like we've already talked about, from the board, the president, the athletic director, the head football coach, some of those things deal with a financial commitment, which has been made," Franklin said. "Those things started early in the process, and before I was even a candidate."

Franklin also said hiring the right assistants on staff is a part of building success for a program. He had a history of bringing in coordinators at Penn State who went on to head coaching jobs of their own.

Helping that is a supportive fanbase, which Franklin said he still has in his new destination.

"I think the things that kind of stood out to me right away is the passion for Virginia Tech football, the things that kind of align from a regional perspective," Franklin said. "I got tremendous respect for the state of Virginia, the high school football. And also when you talk about a six-hour radius from campus the number of high level football players, the types of coaching that they're getting, and the attractiveness of Virginia Tech to them as well."

Virginia Tech got its guy

Franklin was fired from Penn State on Oct. 12, and he was soon targeted as a coaching candidate by Virginia Tech. Franklin said he didn't want to go into the specifics of the hiring process, but he provided some insight into it.

"I think they were very aggressive," Franklin said. "The very first time we met, I don't want to speak for them, but I feel like they were ready for me to say yes that night, and I thought it was just an initial con-

versation, but I think they were aggressive. And what I will also say, thanks to the leadership of everybody, is what was very obvious to me very early on is that they had a plan."

Franklin said Virginia Tech came to him with a plan that not only outlined what the program needed to do in the ACC but also on the national stage.

Franklin said "commitment must match those expectations," and he felt the Hokies did so.

"There was an approach and mentality that I think aligned with what I was looking for and what my family was looking for," Franklin said. "I think that really helped the process. It wasn't like having a conversation with me. I'm talking about the things that I think we need to have to be successful at the very highest level, they were already there. So I think that really helped with the entire process."

Franklin's meshing his experience with Hokie history

Franklin said he was a drive away from competing for a national championship last season when Penn State lost to Notre Dame in the Orange Bowl, giving him confidence he could compete for titles.

"I know what it looks like. I know what you need to do," Franklin said. "We learn from that experience. We grew from that experience again, the alignment, the commitment based on what we've done in our past as well. You pour all these things together at a place that's got great history, that's got great traditions, that's got great pride."

Franklin had been the Nittany Lions' coach since 2014, winning 10 or more games in a single campaign six times. Before that, he was at the helm of Vanderbilt from 2011-13, where he had two nine-win seasons.

Now with the Hokies, Franklin said he'll mix those experiences with his knowledge on Virginia Tech.

"But the reality is, I'm going to need to lean into all these men, coach (Frank) Beamer, coach (Bud) Foster and understand the institutional knowledge, the community knowledge and be able to take my experiences and intertwine them with the university, with the institutional knowledge, to put Virginia Tech in the best position to be successful," Franklin said.

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Penn State tight end Luke Reynolds catches the ball before the Homecoming football game against Northwestern.

A STORIED TRADITION

By Will Horstman
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State is set to host Nebraska this weekend, and the history between these two teams goes way back.

The Nittany Lions and the Cornhuskers met over 100 years ago, and they’ve since had games between famous coaches prior to both becoming Big Ten foes.

Here’s the full history between Penn State and Nebraska with the Cornhuskers holding a 10-8 advantage in the series.

Early history

Even before these two teams were both in the Big Ten, Penn State and Nebraska met on several occasions, dating back to 1920, when the Nittany Lions won the first matchup, 20-0.

The series went on a 29-year break after the first game with the squads meeting again in 1949, and Penn State came out victorious again. Nebraska got its first win over the Nittany Lions a year later by a 19-0 shutout.

Overall, Penn State started the series by winning four of the first five contests, including pitching another shutout in 1952, 10-0.

Joe Paterno vs. Tom Osborne

Between 1979-83, Penn State and Nebraska met five times as



Running back Saquon Barkley (26) moves the ball forward during the football game against Nebraska at Beaver Stadium on Nov 18, 2017.

the Nittany Lions were coached by Joe Paterno while the Cornhuskers were led by Tom Osborne. Both are among the top 10 head coaches all-time in wins.

Osborne’s squad earned a 42-17 win in the first meeting between the two coaches. Nebraska won again the next season as it got its first win on the road at Penn State.

Paterno defeated Osborne in 1981 with Penn State winning, 30-24, in a top-15 matchup. He won

a second-straight game against the Cornhuskers a year later during the Nittany Lions’ national championship run.

The two coaches met for one last time to kick off the 1983 season, and Nebraska won in a 44-6 blowout, giving Osborne a 3-2 advantage over Paterno.

The two teams didn’t play again under Paterno and Osborne, but they still clashed for the rights to the 1994 national championship. Nebraska went 13-0 and

finished No. 1 in the AP Poll, claiming the national title after an Orange Bowl win over No. 3 Miami. Penn State went 12-0 after winning the Big Ten title and the Rose Bowl. Paterno’s squad finished No. 2 in the poll and hasn’t claimed the national championship.

Modern day

Penn State hosted then-No. 8 Nebraska in 2002 inside Beaver Stadium, and it set an attendance

record at the time with 110,753 people. The Nittany Lions earned a 40-7 win with their defense picking off quarterback Jammal Lord three times.

The 2003 matchup was closer with Nebraska winning 18-10, and that was the last time the two teams met as nonconference foes.

After the Cornhuskers joined the Big Ten in 2011, the two teams met that same year inside Beaver Stadium when Penn State was on the heels of the Jerry Sandusky scandal. Both squads met at midfield prior to the game for a pregame prayer.

Nebraska squeezed out a 17-14 win with running back Rex Burkhead rushing for 121 yards and a touchdown. Penn State had the ball with less than a minute left, but its drive didn’t amount to any points.

The Nittany Lions won their first game over the Cornhuskers as Big Ten opponents in 2017. Running back Saquon Barkley went for 158 rushing yards and three touchdowns to help power a 56-44 victory.

Nebraska has a 4-1 advantage over Penn State since both teams met as conference teams, and the Cornhuskers won the most recent matchup in 2020.

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Players make pitch for Terry Smith to be program’s next HC

By Lyle Alenstein
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

When James Franklin left Vanderbilt for Penn State, he referred to the Commodores as the “previous institution.” In speaking with the Virginia Tech Board of Visitors on Tuesday, he referred to the Nittany Lions as “the last place.”

While Franklin’s next chapter is known, Penn State still doesn’t know its next head coach. A handful of players made their case on why interim head coach Terry Smith should be the man for the job.

“He works very hard for us. He pours so much energy into us. He’s around all the time,” starting right guard Anthony Donkoh said. “He wants to hear player feedback. He wants to know what we’re doing right, what we’re doing wrong. And he doesn’t just listen to it. He takes the feedback and he runs with it, and he makes the changes that are necessary.”

Smith was thrust into a brutal situation, stepping in for a plummeting Penn State team that had fired Franklin, who led the operation for 11 full seasons.

After losses to Iowa, Ohio State and Indiana, the dedication and investment he’s put into the program since taking over as interim head coach was rewarded with a win over Michigan State on Saturday.

“Terry stepped into the fire and didn’t waver once. Stood up to the plate and he’s kept swinging every day,” long snapper Tyler Duszansky said. “So everyone in the building is bought into coach Terry. Everyone knows that we can trust in him and whatever he does that will help lead us to success.”

When the clock struck zero, he was rewarded with a purple Gatorade shower, signifying a much-needed win for Penn State but also a weight off of his shoulders.

“Coach Smith has been really good,” running back Nick



Penn State interim head coach Terry Smith wipes his eyes during a press conference in Beaver Stadium on Nov. 17, 2025.

Singleton said. “When he got the message about coach Franklin, obviously being fired, he stepped in and didn’t blink. His energy was really good. He brings up the team and all that.”

With the regular season coming to a close after a home game on Saturday against Nebraska and a road game the following week against Rutgers, Penn State is approaching the timeline where it needs to name its next head coach.

Smith, who said on Monday that he hasn’t had a formal interview for the job, views his application for it as what he does on a day-to-day basis.

Despite not having a set one-on-one on his calendar with Vice President for Intercollegiate Athletics Pat Kraft, his players believe Smith could easily slot into the head coaching role.

“The amount of respect and how he carries himself as a man with respect, and how he treats everyone, and how much love and effort he puts into the game — it’s crazy,” safety Zakee Wheatley said.

Smith broke down in tears on Monday talking about how much even just being the interim head coach has meant to him. He’s played for Penn State, had both older and younger family members attend the university and has been on staff now for 12 seasons.

The growing feeling within the Lasch Building is Smith embodies what it means to be a Nittany Lion, and that’s the pitch from players for having his interim tag stripped to become the next Penn State head coach.

“He’s an amazing human being, first and foremost,” Donkoh said. “He would keep the Penn State culture, that family culture that we have around and not change the culture into a business-like culture, like most programs in the country. That’s my spiel on having coach Terry be hired as the head coach.”

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Kemajou earns stripes

By Lyle Alenstein
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Mechanical engineering is the study of machines and mechanisms that involve force and movement.

In his freshman year, Yvan Kemajou has become a player of noticeable force and movement on the defensive line — it only makes sense, as he’s studying mechanical engineering.

“I think it’s been great,” Kemajou said. “It’s been a blessing. Really just being here, having an opportunity to play at Penn State. See great players, have great coaches here. It’s been amazing.”

On Wednesday evening, the defensive end was the latest freshman selected by interim head coach Terry Smith on a case-by-case basis to speak to the media. Cornerback Daryus Dixon spoke postgame on Saturday, breaking a streak of around a decade of freshmen not speaking until the postseason at the earliest, as implemented by James Franklin.

He gave quick, but efficient answers and was respectful with his delivery. For his first time speaking with the media he was composed. If he ends up sticking around at Penn State with an off-season that will likely have tons of roster turnover, he’s going to be talking to reporters more often based on the vision people in the Lasch Building have for him.

“Yvan is having an amazing freshman year,” Smith said last week. “This kid is going to be a major part of Penn State’s future. He continues to get more snaps. Love his development, his work ethic. Love his tenacity. He’s a big, strong guy.”

Kemajou, a 4-star prospect via the 247Sports composite rankings, drew rave reviews since getting to campus as an early enrollee last January. He credited work with former assistant defensive line coach Torrence Brown, who left in May to be the defensive line coach at Western Illinois.

Since getting to campus, he’s worked closely with position

coach Deion Barnes on his pass rush. On top of that, he had to get used to getting up to speed with the level of play in college compared to high school, focusing more on scheme instead of going out there and being able to dominate while freestyling.

“Just understanding plays. As a high school player, you kind of go out there and play,” Kemajou said. “Now, I’m really understanding the offensive side of how they’re trying to manipulate you and what not. So just understanding that — there’s been a growth I’ve seen.”

He felt comfortable making the transition to Penn State’s strength and conditioning program. The staff also had conversations with him playing on the interior, but he was adamant about playing on the edge.

He’s also felt at ease with all the off field stuff, which not every player coming from high school to college is used to between living on your own and the balancing act between classes and football. The comfortability within the program has allowed him to settle in quickly and make an impact on the field in the same amount of time.

“I think I’ve been pretty well, school and whatnot, so I don’t think it was a big adjustment for me,” Kemajou said. “Just made sure I got all my assignments done in a timely manner. Everything’s good and the living situation is also great. There really wasn’t much issues coming here.”

In a freshman year where he has notched six total tackles and a pass breakup so far, his head coach got fired and Penn State has underperformed. While Kemajou has turned heads and burned his redshirt, the year isn’t what was originally envisioned.

While lots of uncertainties are ahead for Kemajou, he feels that himself and his teammates are focused on being where their feet are and not what is in store.

“I feel we always focused on the next game or the game we had each week, and just being the best version of ourselves every day,” Kemajou said.

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COLLEGIAN FOOTBALL STAFF PREDICTIONS

AVERY HILL

PENN STATE: 24

NEBRASKA: 7

LEXIE LINDERMAN

PENN STATE: 27

NEBRASKA: 21

LYLE ALENSTEIN

PENN STATE: 33

NEBRASKA: 21

WILL HORSTMAN

PENN STATE: 27

NEBRASKA: 20

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A WORK IN PROGRESS

Increasing destigmatization of mental health discussions

By Anisa Daniel-Oniko
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

In recent times, students have seemingly become less reluctant to discuss their mental health, and while the exact causes are varied, social media has played a large role in opening the floor for more conversations.

Theresa Welles said increased student willingness to talk about mental health may come from a “combination of things,” including a push from mental health professionals to counter the notion that mental health is somehow different from bodily health.

“I think it’s been a work in progress that has been successful, and I think in some ways, what really has worked is communicating about it on all different levels,” Welles said.

Welles has seen some disorders, like attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), losing stigma as they became better understood, while others, like schizophrenia and bipolar disorder, are still less understood and more feared. However, she’s enthusiastic about the general destigmatization of mental health concerns.

“I’m really excited about the group of individuals who are talking about it, communicating, learning about it,” she said. “I think that students are some of the smartest humans we’ve had in history, and I think that they are really open to trying to connect with each other in ways that are really important.”

Welles thinks social media may have contributed to mental health discussions both positively and negatively. She said social media has allowed a broader audience to hear from people experiencing mental health struggles, and has served to normalize and validate those struggles.

“I’ve been to concerts where the lead singers have said, ‘Hey, shout out to my therapist,’” she said. “I mean, I just think overall, there’s been much more



Brittain Banull/Collegian

A sign for the Student Health Center sits outside the University Health Services (UHS) building on Oct. 1, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

education and communication about it.”

However, Welles mentioned a need for caution regarding mental health misinformation, especially on social media.

“Again, it’s a place where most people live at some point,” she said. “It’s a place with very wide reach. Which can be great, but it’s also a place that essentially anybody can get on and discuss things, and talk about things ... whether those things are true or helpful or not. So we have to be cautious, and we have to be informed consumers.”

Similarly, Stephanie Stama, assistant director for community education & outreach at Penn State’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), thinks social media has impacted discussions surrounding student mental health.

Stama said research indicates pro-social uses of social media birth positive outcomes, such as “less distress, more self-efficacy (and) better self-esteem,” by talking about topics like body neutrality and health instead of harmful ones like body im-

age stereotypes. However, she thinks context is key when it comes to assessing the impact of social media on mental health discussions.

“We don’t want people self-diagnosing something that doesn’t need pathologizing,” she said.

Baron Rogers, a Black and African American student services coordinator at CAPS, said people go to social media to feel heard and seen, even if they find community with people they might not physically see. Rogers said there’s “a lot of research showing the importance of connection and belonging.”

He said people forming connections or finding a sense of belonging with others or “something bigger beyond them,” like nature, art or religion, provides a preventive factor for suicide risk.

However, he’s had students whose mental health has been impacted by social media apps like Tea, which lets women post information about former partners and potential ones, while also providing background checks and a sex offender map.

“I’ve had students who felt very judged going through this app and have had a lot of anxiety working through this app,” he said. “So social media can be a real double-edged sword for sure.”

In general, Rogers said destigmatization makes people more comfortable receiving help. He said talking about mental health will improve everyone’s access, which leads to more expansive and inclusive mental health care down the line.

“It kind of begets a wheel, right?” he said. “If you’re part of a very popular fast food chain, that chain grows and access to that chain grows. The more access people have to that, the better the product and the better the quality.”

Welles thinks it’s important to keep the conversation going, and said she’s seen language surrounding mental health change.

“I think language is incredibly important,” she said. “It’s one of the things that sets us apart from the rest of the animal kingdom. It’s really, really important that we’re constantly clarifying and distilling assumptions and de-

fining what we’re meaning, and thinking about how we’re impacting those that we are talking to.”

With the increased openness of mental health discussions, Stama wants students to know when seeking help is appropriate.

“Just because you’re experiencing discomfort doesn’t mean you have to reach out immediately for formal support,” she said. “You do need to reach out if there are deficits or problems with daily needs like hygiene, eating, sleeping, socializing, getting to classes.”

Part of being a human is getting through some things in life that cause discomfort in order to better appreciate the things that create comfort, according to Stama. She said emotions like stress may have negative reputations but can be powerful motivators, and recognizing when stress and anxiety are associated with large life events rather than clinical conditions can be helpful.

Rogers said parents and friends are not always able to help, but conversation — with friends, a

religious leader, family or the free resource CAPS Chat — are the first steps before more serious interventions.

Stama said students can do self-work by making small changes to routine and visiting the mental health section in the library. She also recommends mental-health related events, such Health Promotion and Wellness’s stress management sessions or Campus Recreation’s yoga.

“I’d encourage someone who might be more hesitant to talk about mental health to try one of these adjacent to mental health activities and test it out there,” she said. “When you’re learning to swim, you don’t need to jump in the deep end the first time.”

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Inside the Liberal Arts building

By Jocelyn Bilker
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

A loud boom, shaking floors and a visible crack sent students and faculty rushing out of the Susan Welch Liberal Arts Building on Wednesday afternoon, prompting an hours-long emergency response.

The university cited a structural issue in its statement and said the building will remain closed until further notice. Instructors who teach class in the building have since adjusted class locations and formats.

Alpha Fire Company Chief Tony Berrena said firefighters discovered a crack about an inch wide in one of the building’s interior walls.

Someone became stuck inside a room when the floor movement caused the door to jam, Berrena said. The person sustained no injuries.

James Strauss was teaching a class in Room 114 when the incident occurred.

“I was about five minutes into teaching my class,” Strauss, a professor of biology, said. “The floor raised two to three inches and then went back down in a quarter of a second.”

Strauss said he saw a crack that stretched from the floor to the ceiling on the wall behind him.

“It took a bit for all of us to process what had just happened,” he said. “I looked out the window to make sure it wasn’t a car or truck that impacted the building or something like that.”

Strauss said there were already arrangements for his class to be moved.

Arielle Lacap was in her American Sign Language class in Room 115 when she heard the ruckus.

“We just heard this loud boom, not enough to hurt your ears but it was substantial,” Lacap, a third-year studying communications sciences and disorders, said. “None of us realized it was serious at first. Then we started



Aayan Hamdani/Collegian

A crowd walks by the Susan Welch Liberal Arts Building on Nov. 12, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

seeing people walk out.”

Lacap said the fire alarm went off shortly after and everyone quickly grabbed their stuff.

“My friend saw someone with a sledgehammer go into the building and we were like, ‘Oh someone must be trapped inside,’” she said.

Isabella Snyder was near the Matson Museum of Anthropology, which is housed on the building’s ground floor, at the time of the incident.

“All of a sudden, I heard a big crash, and I thought someone dropped something heavy,” Snyder, a third-year studying anthropology, said. “It was very loud and you could feel it in your body.”

Rosa Eberly was wrapping up a meeting with some colleagues and graduate students on the fifth floor. The room has large glass windows that look toward the Nittany Lion Inn and is near a stairwell.

“It was jarring,” Eberly, an associate professor of rhetoric, said. “I don’t know if the floor sank but I looked at everyone and said, ‘Get out of here,’ and I went down the stairwell.”

Having done research after the 9/11 attacks about how tall buildings come down, she said her main goal was to get out of the building.

“I was out of there before 911 was called, and I made sure to tell everyone I encountered to get out,” she said. “I had an unusually strong flight response because it definitely sounded like it was beneath us somewhere.”

Eberly said it felt like the movement was toward the back of the building on the Park Avenue side.

As of Friday afternoon, orange and white blockades restrict all entrances to the building and each door has a sign stating that the building is unsafe. There is an order to vacate under §PA Code 403.84.

“This order will not be rescinded until the safety conditions are corrected and the (Pennsylvania) Department of Labor and Industry rescinds this Order,” the sign said.

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Graduate students win union

By Rubi Orellana
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State graduate workers have voted to unionize Thursday, marking one of the most important labor developments at the university in recent years.

According to results by the Pennsylvania Labor Relations Board, graduate workers approved the formation of the Coalition of Graduate Employees-UAW (CGE-UAW) by a vote of 1,882 for and 198 against.

This new union will represent around 4,300 graduate teaching, research and administrative support assistants across all colleges and departments. The vote follows years of organizing after a previous unionization effort in 2018 fell short.

“The results of our vote demonstrate the collective power we have built and the strong mandate we have as we head into bargaining,” Maddy Jupina, a graduate assistant in the Department of Communication Arts and Sciences, said.

According to Jupina, with the union, graduate assistants will have a real voice to improve working conditions so that graduate employees can thrive.

While graduate assistants play a central role in delivering instruction, conducting research and supporting de-

partmental operations, many have cited issues such as low pay, limited job security and unreasonable workload expectations.

The vote also drew attention from state-level officials. In October, more than 80 Pennsylvania state senators and representatives sent a letter to university leadership expressing their support for graduate worker unionization and urging Penn State to respect the election results without delay.

With certification of CGE-UAW, Penn State’s graduate workers join a growing national movement among academic employees.

More than 120,000 academic workers are now represented by the United Auto Workers across the country, including graduate workers and postdoctoral researchers at the University of Pennsylvania, University of Maine, University of Vermont and University of New Hampshire.

The union will now prepare for collective bargaining, with its first contract negotiations expected to address pay, workload protections, job security and other workplace concerns raised throughout the organizing campaign.

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Jacob DeLuca/Collegian

Penn State graduate student workers gather outside Old Main to demonstrate on Nov. 7, 2024.

Faculty, students call for stronger union voice at teach-in

By Jocelyn Bilker
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Faculty members and student organizers from the Penn State Faculty Alliance, Students for International Labor Solidarity (SILS) and United Socialists at Penn State gathered Thursday in the Thomas Building to argue that Penn State needs a faculty union.

The groups argued saying that major academic decisions are being made without instructor input and that working conditions in the classroom directly affect student learning.

Sasha Coles opened the event by describing the day-to-day experiences of non-tenure-line instructors, who make up a significant portion of Penn State's faculty.

"We're here to spread the word about why a faculty union makes a difference for students," Coles, an assistant teaching professor of history, said.

She said to attendees that professors routinely face issues of low pay, job insecurity and limited influence over policies that affect classrooms.

"We want to capture a couple of specific incidents into this, like the lack of faculty voice in shaping the way that things are run here at Penn State," she said. "This includes everything from policies related to COVID-19 in-classroom interactions to instructional mode to health benefits. All of these things have decisions that have been made without faculty input."

Coles said most major instructional decisions including salary, benefits, job security and living wages are made without faculty consultation. She said a union would create a mechanism for formal dialogue with



Matt Cropp/Collegian

Brochures sit on a table during the Faculty Union Teach-In hosted by the Penn State Faculty Alliance (PSFA) in Thomas Building on Nov. 13, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

administration.

"A union provides an extra layer of security and a venue through which to have a conversation with the university," Coles said. "It allows for a layer of protection but also the opportunity for negotiation."

One of the speakers, Mary Bellman, pointed to recent issues with classroom temperatures in old buildings during the summer and early fall as one example.

"Some of my students were sweating in the classroom and I thought, 'How is that fair?'" Bellman, a clinical professor of labor and employment relations and director of labor education, said.

Bellman said she believes faculty should have more input in decisions, especially in the hopes of attracting the best people and doing the best job to teach students.

"If we had more input into decisions, I think it would help

more students because we're the closest to the student experience," Bellman said. "Who's going to protect academic freedom otherwise?"

Ben Rutter, a second-year studying psychology, said students should care about faculty labor conditions because those conditions directly influence what happens inside classrooms.

"Faculty needs a greater say in individualized education," Rutter said. "This includes allowing all professors to have a greater say in the faculty senate and a greater influence over the day-to-day of various processes in different departments so we can improve the teaching quality for students."

Rutter said supporting unionization is also a matter of aligning university priorities with its educational mission.

"A huge part of the union is also increasing pay for non-tenure line faculty," he said. "This would give

the university the ability to put less wiggle room toward finances and focus more on academics and education. By doing this, they are forced to pay more attention instead of throwing large sums of money since their budget would be a bit smaller."

He said empowering instructors helps protect the integrity of academic programs. Changing the budget like this would allow professors to be a bit less worried about their pay and be more focused on the role they play in the greater administration.

Richard Evan Sutton spoke about the broader importance of unions and how faculty organizing fits within a long-standing labor movement.

"Students need to realize that faculty have rights in their workplace and deserve to be treated with dignity," Sutton, a fourth-year studying political science

and president of SILS, said. "They deserve a living wage and be treated fairly by their boss and the government."

He said Penn State's faculty, particularly non-tenure-line instructors, frequently feel undervalued despite handling large teaching loads.

"I have seen what the decline of unions in America has done to working people," Sutton said. "They are now growing in support."

He drew the room's strongest reaction when he referenced President Neeli Bendapudi's recent salary increase.

"The only (public university) president paid a slightly higher salary than Bendapudi is the head of the University of Texas," he said.

Students responded with a mix of laughter, boos and groans.

"We can't forget about any sense of rationale," Sutton said. "What about the closing of branch campuses too? What if they get rid of certain majors?"

As part of the event, attendees were invited to contribute anonymous "pinkstickynotes" describing stresses or concerns about academic life, campus conditions or work-study jobs. The wall quickly filled with notes referencing housing costs, exhaustion, workload pressure, limited advising access and classroom issues. Organizers said the activity was meant to highlight that faculty and students often share overlapping concerns.

"Anonymity was important for allowing people to express their true concerns as an employee," Rutter said. "At the end of the day, what we work for is in the name of labor solidarity."

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IPSA boosts visibility on campus



Jacob DeLuca/Collegian

A guest speaker talks during the 5th Annual Together at the Table event in Heritage Hall in the HUB-Robeson Center on Nov. 13, 2025 in University Park, Pa.

By Jocelyn Bilker
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State's Indigenous Peoples' Student Association (IPSA) is using Native American Heritage Month to increase visibility for Indigenous students on campus and highlight how national rhetoric and federal policies continue to affect Native communities.

Ayla Orona said she joined the organization because of the lack of Indigenous representation at Penn State.

"Being a Native American student at Penn State and just knowing the Native American population is so little here ... joining gave me an opportunity to provide light on the Native American community," Orona, a third-year studying data science, said.

Orna, IPSA's president, said campus recognition of Native American Heritage Month is important because the culture can often be undermined and unknown amongst the widespread population.

"A lot of people assume that our population is not here anymore," Orona said. "So many people don't know about Native Americans, their culture or even just history in general."

As part of this year's programming, IPSA brought in Indigenous Chef Lorinda John for a community dinner. Orona said the event drew strong attendance and offered both cultural education and community building. John also hosted a dreamcatcher workshop.

The organization's leaders said these events aim to challenge common misconceptions, including the belief that Indigenous people are rare or absent in contemporary society.

"Once you mention you are Native American, a lot of people's first response is, 'Oh, you're the first Native American I've ever met,'" Orona said. "People don't even realize that Native American people still exist."

IPSA's visibility has improved in recent years, according to Orona. She said the university's addition of an Indigenous faculty advisor and increased engagement from the Indigenous Faculty and Staff Alliance.

"Including an Indigenous faculty advisor was definitely a very strong move," she said.

She said she credits advisor Jacinta Garcia with helping Indigenous students connect, attend events and reach out to prospective Native students.

"Highlighting Indigenous communities has really increased just by seeing it in my past three years," Orona said.

Orona said that IPSA members saw the impact of national rhetoric and federal policy decisions on Indigenous communities, including those from the Trump administration.

"It has especially come through the type of language that is spoken," Orona said. "Policies already undermining communities that are really challenged can definitely increase challenges within Native American reservations."

She said recently, there have been a number of cuts to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention grants that benefit Native American reservations.

Other IPSA officers emphasized the need for Penn State to acknowledge Indigenous history, particularly as a land-grant institution.

Laanee McCoy said it's

important to celebrate Native American Heritage Month because Indigenous people are "still here and their culture is still rich and alive."

McCoy, a third-year studying anthropology and art history, said Penn State is still profiting off of the relocation and displacement of Indigenous communities. The history of this isn't well known but should be, according to McCoy.

"We want to provide a safe place for Indigenous students, faculty and allies to come together and learn," McCoy, the secretary of IPSA, said. "This is especially important when kids come from reservations as they can have a hard time acclimating. It's nice for them to know they have people here that will support them."

Sienna Strong-Jones said cultural celebration is necessary in the face of "cultural erasure."

"It's important that we understand the history and recognize how our culture has evolved over time in such a beautiful way," Strong-Jones, a fifth-year doctoral candidate studying human development and family studies and IPSA's vice president, said.

Looking ahead, Orona said IPSA plans to continue hosting cultural craft workshops, including beadwork and dreamcatcher activities. She said the group's broader mission is to support Indigenous students on campus while spotlighting Indigenous cultures globally.

"We want to show we are one and that we can all help each other in the end," she said.

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Students discuss early graduation

By Keaton Ball
FOR THE COLLEGIAN

For Penn State students planning to graduate early, the financial and career benefits come with the sadness of losing valuable years of the college experience.

To earn an undergraduate degree at Penn State, students must complete at least 120 college credits. Those who have already earned credits prior to college through dual enrollment, Advanced Placement classes and other college preparation programs can reach 120 credits in less than four years, putting themselves on a fast-track to early graduation.

While this likely means a greater workload in high school, students point to several reasons to pursue early graduation.

For many, its simple math: less semesters means saving tens of thousands of dollars in tuition and housing costs. Ken Van Houten said finances are the core reason he's pursuing early graduation.

"I was able to justify coming here by saying I'm only going to be here for two, or two and a half, years instead of a full four," Van Houten, a second-year studying computer engineering, said.

He estimates that he'll save roughly \$150,000 by graduating early, a feat that would've been impossible without the 73 credits he gained through dual enrollment in high school.

In addition to saving money, early graduation offers students a chance to get a head start on their career.

Jacob Duncan served in the military after graduating high school where he worked as an electrical engineer and gained roughly 40 college credits through various training events.

"I just wanted to get done with college as fast as possible so I can move on to getting my master's and getting a career," Duncan, a third year studying psychology, said.

For Duncan the plan was always to go to college after the military, and a large motivator was his ability to graduate a full year early.

Reese Kramer earned credits through her participation in the International Baccalaureate program, an internationally recognized program that provides students with a two-year college curriculum and an IB diploma.

"I felt more prepared than a lot of students coming into college," Kramer, third-year studying finance and accounting, said. "I felt like I had better time management skills, and overall it made the transition a lot easier because I was used to the more difficult course load."

While early graduation can give students a head start on their career path, Allura Musto says it can also create stress.

"There are some times when I definitely have had the 'oh crap' moment when I'm with my friends that have the normal time, and I have to submit a grad school application next semester."

Allura Musto

Kramer brought up similar feelings of stress and said that she received a full-time job offer from the Bank of New York Mellon Corp., but at only 20-years-old she wanted more time to experience college life.

Some early graduates also said they've been experiencing FOMO, fear of missing out, because all of their friends are going to be at Penn State longer than they are.

"Coming into college and meeting people and thinking you're in the same year and realizing you're way ahead of them definitely is hard," Duncan said. "That's probably the hardest part about graduating early."

Duncan will miss the opportunity to walk at graduation with many of their friends. Despite this, he said he recommends all high school students look into options for early graduation. To him, the benefits outweigh the short-term pain of separating from friends.

Musto said he wished opportunities to graduate early were talked about more in high school.

"It felt like something that you very much so had to seek out yourself," said Musto.

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National Duals insight

Cael Sanderson, other coaches provide thoughts on the invitational

By Andrew Deal
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

The National Duals Invitational have made headlines over the past couple of weeks, as it has the absence of the top team in the country from the event.

Penn State opted to not compete in the invitational, leading to many talks across the country about the growth of the sport and the Nittany Lions' participation in a nationally-promoted event.

Penn State's been the best team in the country over the last decade, winning 12 of the last 14 national championships, making it reasonable to have a team of that caliber compete in the event in order to grow the sport.

"I think it's a shame that Penn State's not here. We can stick to the positives about the fact that they're not here is a bit of a sign of how they see things and do things," Ohio State coach Tom Ryan told reporters on a video call prior to the duals. "They should be here. They're not, so we'll focus on all the great coaches that chose to grow the sport."

A big part in why the Nittany Lons didn't join is their participation in international freestyle competitions. Seven of the 10 spots on the USA U23 team were Penn State representatives, all potential



Geraldine Cruz/The Daily Collegian

Penn State's Connor Mirasola speaks to head coach Cael Sanderson and associate head coach Casey Cunningham during the dual against Oklahoma's DJ Parker in the Bryce Jordan Center.

starters for the team's dual season.

"I think they knew right away when they were putting it, when and where they're putting it, we're probably not (participating) because we're pretty consistent," Cael Sanderson said last week.

Wrestling has consistently seen growth in the sport with constant additions being made to broadcasting the national championships at the highest level. ESPN+ recently was added to the broadcast schedule, giving fans the opportunity to watch any match they wanted.

"They should be here. They're not, so we'll focus on all the great coaches that chose to grow the sport."

Tom Ryan

Ohio State coach

With Penn State's recent dominance, and many historical milestones reached within

the Nittany Lions' program, the sport has seen an increase in viewership, as the competitiveness has taken a rise.

One piece to the growth is the recent resurgence of Oklahoma State under David Taylor. The former Nittany Lion has the Cowboys back to national prominence. In addition to Oklahoma State, Ohio State, Iowa and Nebraska continue to make a push to reach Penn State's level.

"It's our obligation as coaches, as athletes, as fans to continue to move the sport forward and this is a pretty awesome event,"

Taylor said on a video call with the media before the event.

It caught a lot of national attention, showcasing the talent in the country outside of Penn State. Ohio State came out victorious, defeating Iowa in the championship. Oklahoma State finished in third place after defeating Nebraska. However, it was the high-profile matches that made headlines.

"Yeah, really good wrestling, cool event," Sanderson said. "But yeah, (it) looked like a lot of fun."

National-title favorites were given a major spotlight, with one of the national broadcast crews on the call. Some of those favorites rose to the occasion, others fell, making immediate shifts in the rankings earlier in the season than normal. Those matches made one thing clear to many people.

"It's gonna be a fun year," Luke Lilledahl said.

The National Duals Invitational will likely return after the success it had. Will Penn State join in the years to come or will it continue to remain consistent in what it does and how it schedules its season?

Only time will tell.

"Yeah, create an event that everyone wants to be a part of and that we're asking you to be a part of, right?" Sanderson said last week.

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Undefeated Start



Herley Gong/The Daily Collegian

Forward Ivan Juric (3) and guard Kayden Mingo (4) block during the Penn State men's basketball game against Fairfield in the Bryce Jordan Center.

By Myles Hannak
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State basketball started 4-0 for the fourth straight year and third under coach Mike Rhoades, yet it wasn't expected to be a continuation of this streak.

The Nittany Lions entered the 2025-26 season with a fresh roster, bolstered by their top Big Ten recruiting class, which featured a mix of freshmen and transfers. Only Freddie Dilione V and Dominick Stewart returned as the only real rotational players from last season.

The blue and white were picked to finish last in the Big Ten at conference media day, and a disappointing 78-62 exhibition loss to Dayton reaffirmed those predictions for their first time on the court together.

But once the official season began, the worries began to fade, and Rhoades' team synchronized well to kick off 2025, maintaining an average victory margin of over 18 points during the undefeated start.

Each opponent ranked below the Nittany Lions in KenPom, but the team handled business with consistency. Wins over Fairfield, New Haven, Navy and La Salle helped Penn State establish an early identity on both ends of the court.

Depth Scoring

Penn State entered the season with uncertainty around how its starting lineup would shape up.

Dilione and Stewart played contrasting roles last year, but it wasn't clear if those would carry over.

Rhoades made some early adjustments, particularly with Dilione. After starting 28 games last season, the redshirt junior

has taken on the role of a vocal veteran leader, coming off the bench in every game this season. He is averaging 12.3 points per game, making him the third-highest scorer in the Big Ten among players who have yet to start a game this season.

With Dilione coming off the bench, Penn State has mainly started Kayden Mingo, Melih Tunca, Eli Rice, Josh Reed and Saša Ciani. Stewart also made his first career start in the opener against Fairfield.

Despite a set starting group, Penn State's depth has stood out, utilizing rotation behind Mingo and Dilione as lead ball handlers.

Rhoades described his bench as "an army," and fresh legs have lived up to the label, rotating in consistently. Nine Penn State players average double-digit minutes, led by freshmen Mingo and Tunca, who play over 30 minutes and lead in scoring.

This season, Penn State has leaned on a collective, heavy team approach that wears down opponents through physical trap defense, with the bench playing 40-60% of the minutes in every game so far.

In the second halves, the Nittany Lions' pace has come alive. Penn State has kept its shooting rate while wearing down opponents, often slowing opposing offenses after the break, where they struggle to match that pace.

Shooting Inconsistency

Penn State's disciplined motor, as shown so far, has posted strong figures across the board, ranking in the bottom three in the Big Ten in fouls and turnovers, while ranking in the top 5 in conference steals per game at 7.8.

Despite holding pace and control for an entire 40 minutes,

the blue and white hasn't been able to turn this momentum into widespread shooting stability.

Stewart has accounted for 34% of Penn State's threes. Outside of him, the team shoots just 32 percent from deep, with only Tunca and Rice having made more than five from downtown.

Through four games, Penn State ranks in the bottom half of Big Ten scoring. Despite efficient shooting numbers, the offense hasn't come easily as it appears in the stat sheet.

If Stewart remains the primary shooting threat, his impact could be limited. The sophomore contributed strong outings, including six downtown makes against New Haven, and he'll soon need teammates to match that shooting touch.

The Nittany Lions have also drawn fouls often, but are shooting just 68.6 percent from the line. It's one of the worst rates in the conference, and improving that shot will be key moving forward.

Rebounding & Inside Presence

Just four games in, Penn State's quick, wing-heavy lineup has shown signs of vulnerability.

The blue and white rank as the second-worst rebounding team in the Big Ten, as it struggled to find an answer after last year's starting center, Yanic Konan Niederhäuser, departed for the NBA.

Guard Dylan Mingo leads the team in rebounding and is one of just two Penn State players averaging more than five boards. That's an early concern for a group hoping to compete physically.

The Nittany Lions have been outrebounded as a team only once this season, in the La Salle win, but have consistently seen opponent big men clean up on the glass.

In the first game of the season, Fairfield's Brandon Benjamin reached double-digit boards, and against Navy, two Midshipmen reached such a feat as no Penn State players notched more than seven in that contest.

The Nittany Lions use a trio of international players down low, Ciani, Ivan Jurić and Tibor Mirtić, and the group will have to step up off the glass for Penn State if it wants to fix their rebounding struggles.

Mirtić has seen more minutes against smaller teams, offering size over speed, but Rhoades will need to adjust the rotation to address the team's early rebounding headaches.

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Series Split

By Maggie Hardy
THE DAILY COLLEGIAN

Penn State returned home after three weeks and played

HOCKEY

host to a division rival — not to mention the No. 2 team in the country — meant an exciting weekend for Hockey Valley.

The Nittany Lions split the series with the Wolverines, after dropping Friday night's matchup and responding with a redemption win on Saturday.

Here's a look at what went right, and what went wrong this weekend.

A resounding response

After the blue and white's 7-1 loss Friday night, the one word coach Guy Gadowsky consistently used to describe his team's performance was "disappointing."

The Nittany Lions were out-skated, out-muscled and purely out-played by the Wolverines for the last two periods, getting outshot 37-27 after 60 minutes of play.

The team's fight and physicality were noticeably lacking, and it seemed like an out-of-character performance for the blue and white during a Big Ten contest in front of a home crowd.

On Saturday, Penn State looked like a completely different team to that of just 24 hours prior.

"There was a shift in mentality in between games, and I think that just comes from within," freshman forward Shea Van Olm said. "Obviously, getting swept in Michigan State, backs up against the wall after Friday, we could have gotten swept both weekends, I think that's a huge motivator."

The blue and white scored the first three goals of the contest, and when Michigan made a late-game surge in an attempt to come back, the home team held strong to capture the eventual 4-2 win.

Penn State also held the edge at the faceoff dot on Saturday, winning 31-of-58.

Secondary scoring

Penn State's roster is one of the most talented in the Big Ten on paper, and its offensive stars are often the ones leading the scoring, but relying on a small group can only get you so far.

After the Nittany Lions' top producers have been shut down in recent weeks, an emphasis



Megan Miller/The Daily Collegian

Forward Shea Van Olm (93) watches the action during the Penn State men's hockey game against Michigan in Pegula Ice Arena.

was placed on the need for their secondary scoring to step up, and this weekend, they did.

Sophomore Nick Fascia notched his first collegiate goal while skaters Reese Laubach, Nic Chin-DeGraves, Luke Misa and Van Olm all recorded their second of the season.

"To win in this league, there's no way you can rely on one line," Gadowsky said. "I thought analytically, (the Misa line) was our best all weekend, and that's really good to see because (secondary scoring) is a necessity, it's not a luxury."

Special teams shine, fail

Heading into the weekend, the Nittany Lions knew they were up for a challenge, facing the Wolverines' NCAA second-ranked power play.

Penn State's penalty kill stood tall in one of its toughest tests yet, killing 7-of-8 powerplay attempts.

"I think it has to give us some confidence that we can get the job done," Gadowsky said. "I think right now, it's four guys plus a goalie that are on the same page, and so far, so good."

On the other side of the puck, the blue and white's powerplay unit was stifled all weekend, going 0-for-5.

The man-advantage has been a consistent struggle for Penn State, ranking fourth in the Big Ten with a powerplay percentage of 21.4%, despite sophomore JJ Wiebusch being tied for first-nationally with six powerplay goals.

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