

under the budgetary and administrative control of the university's athletic department. He built an on-campus stadium, purchased modern equipment, and hired one of the best coaches of the era. He consciously used football as a public relations vehicle to expand enrollment, unite fractious alumni, and obtain political and popular support.

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Searching for an Athletic Identity: The Definition and Post-War Emergence of Penn State Intercollegiate Athletics

On October 27th 2001, Penn State's Joe Paterno surpassed Bear Bryant's record for the most wins as an NCAA Division IA head football coach. The seventy-four year old Paterno was carried off the field on the shoulders of his players following the historic three hundred and twenty-fourth win. Penn State supporters felt great pride in the accomplishments of a man who had only coached at one institution. Further, his "Grand Experiment" – an attempt to build a dominant football power with legitimate and ordinary student-athletes – has established a sterling national reputation for "JoePa." Paterno has been credited with defining a Penn State athletic program that mirrors his image: athletic excellence coupled with academic integrity. Is Paterno the foundation that has defined Nittany Lion sports? Or did he inherit a football program in 1966 that had already put the foundation in place that would allow him and Penn State athletics as a whole to rise to the upper echelon of big time college sports?

Archival research in Penn State's Special Collections Library provides an abundance of sources for analysis. The meeting minutes of groups such as the Athletic Advisory Committee, the Board of Athletic Control and the Board of Trustees, as well as numerous newspaper clippings, personal correspondence, program yearbooks and focused historical texts provide the basis to reconstruct the critical historical elements of Penn State athletics. What surfaces from this vast assortment of primary sources are several definitive periods in their athletic history: the origins and early years (pre-1900) sanctioning of rationalized athletic practices (1900- 1917), the hiring of athletic director and football coach Hugo Bezdek and his program of

“Mass Athletics” for all undergraduate students (1918-1926), the re-examination of the institutional priorities relative to athletics and their subsequent reforms (1926-1940), the effects of World War II on the program (1941-1947), and the post-war definition and emergence of Penn State athletics (1947-1953).

The significant issues, personalities and activities of each era are reconstructed. These periods at Penn State reflect the general trends in college sports history as suggested by such historians and critics as Ronald A. Smith, John Thelin, and Murray Sperber. A pioneering and independent spirit at Penn State is also demonstrated in a reconstruction of the athletic history. For example, Penn State is believed to be the first institution to sanction athletic scholarships. Also, the program of “Mass Athletics” developed to encourage complete campus support for athletics eventually results in an internal review and reform suggestions. In 1926, they put a committee in place that would eventually recommend the elimination of athletic scholarships – an initiative that occurred before the 1929 Carnegie Report made similar suggestions to reform NCAA athletics. The post-war period from 1947-1953 would be the defining era for modern Penn State sports. Prior to 1947, the history of the athletic program was characterized by times of searching and redefinition. Emerging from World War II, questions surrounding issues such as freshman eligibility, competitive imbalance and athletic priorities led to significant initiatives and personnel decisions that would shape the future of Penn State athletics. A plan to combat out-of-state recruiting, the return of athletic scholarships/subsidization, the unification of alumni support groups, and attempts to reform NCAA football rules characterized this era. Significant players such as new football coach Rip Engle, the Director of Athletics Dr. Carl Schott, and school President Milton Eisenhower were the main figures that dealt with these issues. In 1953, Pennsylvania State College became the Pennsylvania State University – and everything came into place for the future of “JoePa” and big-time athletic success.
