



## FWAA writing contest winners

The FWAA's 10th annual Best Writing Contest results are listed below. All winners will be recognized at the FWAA's annual Awards Breakfast on Jan. 3 in Phoenix, Ariz. The first three

places in each category will receive a cash award as well as a plaque for the first-place winner and certificates for second and third places and honorable mentions.

### COLUMNS

- 1st place:** Steve Henson, *Los Angeles Times*  
**2nd place:** Jon Solomon, *Anderson Independent-Mail*  
**3rd place:** David Jones, *Harrisburg Patriot-News*  
**Honorable mention:** Dennis Dodd, *CBS SportsLine.com*; Steve Ellis, *Tallahassee Democrat*; Wright Thompson, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*

### ENTERPRISE

- 1st place:** John Canzano, *Fresno Bee*  
**2nd place:** Jon Solomon, *Anderson Independent-Mail*  
**3rd place:** Steve Ellis, *Tallahassee Democrat*  
**Honorable mention:** Vaughn McClure, *South Bend Tribune*; Adam Thompson, *Denver Post*; Ed Graney and Mark Zeigler, *San Diego Union Tribune*; and Joe Schad, *Orlando Sentinel*

### FEATURE

- 1st place:** Jason King, *Kansas City Star*  
**2nd place:** Bruce Feldman, *ESPN The Magazine*  
**3rd place:** Tom Dienhart, *The Sporting News*  
**Honorable mention:** Brian Landman, *St. Petersburg Times*; Mark Wangrin, *San Antonio Express News*; Ted Miller, *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*

### GAME — IMMEDIATE DEADLINE

- 1st place:** Vahe Gregorian, *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*  
**2nd place:** Wright Thompson, *New Orleans Times-Picayune*  
**3rd place:** Richie Rosenblatt, *Associated Press*  
**Honorable Mention:** John Bohnenkamp, *The Hawk Eye*; Tommy Hicks, *Mobile Register*; Steve Henson, *Los Angeles Times*

### GAME — LOOSE DEADLINE

- 1st place:** Malcolm Moran, *USA Today*  
**2nd Place:** Brian Landman, *St. Petersburg Times*  
**3rd Place:** Eric Hansen, *South Bend Tribune*  
**Honorable mention:** Ron Musselman, *Toledo Blade*; John Helsley, *The Daily Oklahoman*; Charles Dye, *The Daily News*, Longview, Wa.

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# President's column



During the Eddie Robinson Classic a few weeks ago, Steve Richardson and I met with the Fiesta Bowl's Shawn Schoeffler to review media operations for the national championship game. As expected, the Fiesta Bowl is certainly ready for us.

## KELLY

## WHITESIDE

The media hotel will be the Phoenix Airport Marriott with a room rate of \$109. The head coaches press conference will be on Dec. 12, and media day will be on Dec. 31 at Sun Devil Stadium. At all the press conferences, ASAP Sports Reporting will compile the quotes, which is a helpful addition to those reporters who may miss the early press conferences. For those of you who cover the Final Four, ASAP Sports, which transcribes every word uttered, is a regular there.

On game day, Jan. 3, there will be telephones at every third seat. The Fiesta Bowl promises that the losing coach and two players will be available immediately following the game, followed by the winning coach and two players. Last year at the Rose Bowl, there were problems with postgame stats, which were distributed an hour after the game. The Fiesta Bowl has promised that quick quotes and quick stats will be available immediately. So far, so good.

Now to more immediate issues. For a conference that complains of being overlooked by everyone outside the Pacific time zone, it sure doesn't help that the Pac-10 didn't begin its coaches conference call until Sept. 17. Just about every other conference began its conference call the last week of August. Also, some FWAA members have wondered why conference calls end before the season

does. Most conferences are concluding their calls the week of Nov. 18, even though plenty of their schools have regular-season games Nov. 30 and in some cases, Dec. 7.

Media access has also shrunk at Notre Dame with the arrival of coach Tyrone Willingham, formerly of Stanford. Maybe it's a Pac-10 thing. As of this writing, there is no access on Sundays and Mondays, unless there are "special circumstances," we're told. There is a press conference on Tuesdays. Imagine if you're the *South Bend Tribune* and have to fill Tuesday's paper with Saturday's postgame comments. This is Notre Dame, a program the entire country is interested in. Reducing access is a big step backward. Both Lou Holtz and Bob Davie spoke with reporters on Sundays following game days and were available to the media after practices on Mondays and had press conferences on Tuesdays. Under Willingham, the team practices on Sunday and has Mondays off. Please let us know if access is being cut back anywhere else as well.

In other news, *ESPN Magazine* and the FWAA are collaborating on a College Football Courage Award. The award will be similar to the Most Courageous Award presented each year by the US-BWA. The idea is the handiwork of *ESPN Magazine's* Gene Wojciechowski. Each year the winner will be announced in the magazine in December and will receive a trophy at the FWAA's annual meeting and awards breakfast at the site of the BCS championship game. A head coach, assistant coach, student athlete, administrator or support staff member is eligible. If you have any nominations, please e-mail Gene Wojciechowski at [ggeno@aol.com](mailto:ggeno@aol.com).

Enjoy the rest of the season.

# Columns: Steve Henson

*Comment by the judge, Gene Duffey: Well written, good quotes and excellent analysis.*

Cory Paus is a little boy.

His UCLA coach says so, comparing the quarterback's failure to inform him about two alcohol-related driving convictions to a child deserving forgiveness after behaving immaturely.

Paus is a grown man.

He proved it after the Bruins' 27-0 loss to USC on Saturday, standing in front of a microphone and calmly answering a barrage of pointed questions that stopped just short of "Are you a drunk?" and "Are you a liar?"

Paus is a little boy.

He held the childlike notion that he could hide a terrible secret against all odds because he was in mortal fear of the consequences, the disappointment on the face of his coach and in the voices of his parents 2,000 miles away.

And when his secret became public, it hurt everyone close to him. Despite protestations to the contrary, the fact that Paus' convictions came to light Thursday night clearly contributed to the Bruins' dismal performance two days later.

Paus is a grown man.

He withstood a pounding at the hands of a revved-up Trojan defense, getting sacked five times and every time coming back for more. He threw for 45 yards on seven-for-15 passing, yet laid no blame on his fumble-fingered receivers or his linemen, who made like matadors.

This is not a mystery. The sandy-haired Chicago native is like a million other 21-year-old college students — a man-child, an enigma, a walking, talking contradiction.

The boy in Paus cost the Bruins dearly, so much that the man in him could not overcome the damage.

"I don't think it had an impact on tonight's game — for me," he said.

But for teammates already emotionally drained from coping with tailback DeShaun Foster's ineligibility, the Paus saga had a huge impact. Once USC went ahead, the Bruins had nothing in reserve, no fire to fuel a comeback.

Instead, for the first time all season, UCLA rolled over and died, getting shut out by USC for the first time since 1947.

"We were totally inept out there," Toledo said.

UCLA drives were like people who drink responsibly: They went nowhere.

Twenty-eight yards rushing. Eighty-six yards passing. And when Paus exited after three quarters with UCLA

## STEVE HENSON – Los Angeles Times

**Age:** 45

**Colleges:** San Diego State (B. A.), Pepperdine.

**Background:** Henson came to the Times in 1985 to help launch the Valley Edition as a reporter and editor. He wrote takeouts on a wide range of stories before taking over the UCLA football and basketball beat two years ago. When he's not writing about sports, he coaches youth baseball.



trailing, 24-0, the Bruins had gained 58 yards in 35 plays.

"Obviously, he was under a lot of duress and didn't perform well," Toledo said.

But the coach refused to second-guess his decision not to suspend Paus for the drinking-and-driving episodes or for hiding them from him.

"There are a lot of means of punishment besides suspension," Toledo said. "Obviously, he's being punished now."

If punishment is being peppered with questions, Paus accepted plenty. When a UCLA official attempted to cut short the group interview, Paus wouldn't allow him, saying, "I'll answer more, I'm cool."

He was so cool, in fact, it begs a question: Why didn't he simply come clean at the beginning of training camp and put the issue to rest?

"It was a position I got myself into a long time ago and I've been dealing with it my own way," he said. "I thought it would be in the best interest of the football team not to talk about it. I almost made it through the season."

Paus said he told several teammates about his convictions, which will result in a four-day jail term in January, a hefty fine and a suspended driver's license.

"It didn't come out of nowhere for some people," he said. "I've spoken to a lot of [my teammates] before this week. They've been there for me."

There's an irony. A teammate or a parent of a teammate may well have revealed his secret. Loose lips sink ships.

Asked if he regretted not informing Toledo last summer about his June 9 drunk-driving arrest, Paus had a one-word answer: "No."

This begs another question: Is Toledo so trusting —

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## Enterprise: John Canzano

*Comment by the judge, Gene Duffey: A well written, well researched, interesting angle on what most people view as just another game.*

BOULDER, Colo. — One by one, they remove their football helmets, wrinkle the acne-sprinkled skin on their foreheads, and try to remember who in the world Jim Thorpe is — or was. A few insist they read his name somewhere in a book once. Others look to teammates for help. Some of them figure, that since we're standing on a college football field, Jim Thorpe must have been a football player.

And some of them just guess.

"I'm not sure, but I think he's a senior tour golfer," Fresno State long-snapper Kevin Murphy says Saturday.

The Jim Thorpe Classic kicks off today. It's a college football game between Colorado and Fresno State in which the talk has been focused on offenses, defenses, coaches and quarterbacks. A fair share of it should have been on Thorpe.

"Our minds are wrapped up in football," Fresno State coach Pat Hill says. "Jim Thorpe hasn't crossed my radar, but I guess it should have."

Thorpe is a lot of things — ex-Olympian, football great, baseball legend, hero to fellow American Indians, the greatest athlete of his time. But make no mistake, he is not anywhere near the focus of the football game that bears his name. And that seems silly.

There is no banquet-style dinner for the participating teams in which guest speakers will talk about the victories and injustices that surrounded Thorpe in life and death. There is no history lesson in which it's pointed out that Thorpe won gold medals in the pentathlon and heptathlon in the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm, was stripped of the medals after a dispute about his amateur status, and after a 70-year battle, the medals were returned to his family.

There are, however, complimentary nylon book bags for the players with a Jim Thorpe Classic logo stitched on one side.

"They're nice bags," says Jim Omphs, one of the event organizers.

It's called "swag." And it falls short of helping make this football game about anything other than a \$600,000 television payday for two college football teams. Especially at a time in which Thorpe's family is entrenched in another fight for his memory.

**John Canzano — Fresno Bee/San Jose Mercury News**

**Age:** 31

**College:** California State University, Chico

**Background:** Canzano is the NFL and Major League Baseball columnist at the *San Jose Mercury News*. He wrote this winning enterprise story while at the *Fresno Bee*, where he worked as a columnist from 1999 to 2002. Previously he covered Notre Dame football and Indiana University basketball for the *Fort Wayne News-Sentinel* during the 1998-99 seasons.



"We want dad buried where he wanted to be buried," says Jack Thorpe, 64, the youngest of Thorpe's five remaining children. "We want his remains brought home."

Jack Thorpe is in Boulder because he's been asked to participate in the football game's pregame coin toss. He understands that the captains from both teams will be more interested in heads or tails than the last name of the man flipping the coin or even what his father stood for.

Jack also knows that, if he approaches Fresno State offensive lineman Rodney Michael and asks him who Jim Thorpe is, Michael is likely to say he's not sure.

"I don't have cable television," Michael says.

Jack Thorpe is at peace with this.

"You choose your battles," he says.

Jack knows this better than most. Right now, he and other siblings want their father's remains returned to Oklahoma for a proper American Indian burial in a cemetery in his hometown of Prague. Officials of Jim Thorpe, Pa., the tiny town that adopted Thorpe's name, erected a memorial in his honor and built a tourism industry around it, are promising a war.

"They want us to relinquish this man voluntarily — that's not going to happen," Jack Kmetz, president of the Jim Thorpe Hall of Fame says. "If Jack and his family wants to fly in here and ask that question, they're just wasting their airfare."

Jim Thorpe was an Olympian. He was a multi-sport star some 75 years before Bo Jackson and Deion Sanders made it fashionable. He played college football for Carlisle Indian School, where he reportedly steamrolled

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# Enterprise winner continued

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future President Dwight Eisenhower on a running play in a game against West Point.

"According to our newspaper records at the school, somebody yelled at Ike to 'Get that Indian!' and Jim Thorpe promptly ran him over," says Darren Geimausaddle, of Haskell Indian University. "People still talk about it to this day."

After college, Thorpe played outfield for the New York Giants, Cincinnati Reds and Boston Braves from 1913-1919. He played professional football for Canton, Ohio; Cleveland; the Oorang Indians of Marion, Ohio; Toledo, Ohio; Rock Island, Ill.; the New York Giants and the Chicago Cardinals, making his final appearance in 1929. In 1950, Thorpe was voted the best athlete of the 20th century in an Associated Press poll.

After Jim Thorpe's death from a heart attack in 1953, Patricia Thorpe, Jim's widow and third wife, struck a deal that resulted in his remains ending up in a tiny Pennsylvania town, even though her husband had never set foot in it during his lifetime.

Thorpe's body was supposed to be buried in Oklahoma, where he was born in a single-room cabin in 1887, but things changed when that state's governor, Johnston Murray, vetoed legislation that would have financed a \$25,000 Thorpe memorial in his home state. Instead, Patricia took his remains to Pennsylvania, where two small towns on the Lehigh River — Mauch Chunk and East Mauch Chunk — agreed to merge, become Jim Thorpe, Pa., and raise a granite memorial in his honor.

Jack Thorpe says he and his siblings were never consulted. He has asked that the city return his father's remains.

"It's a great honor to have a town named after your father," he says. "We want them to succeed, but they don't need my father's bones to do it."

Citizens of Jim Thorpe, Pa. disagree. They argue that having Jim Thorpe's remains as a tourist attraction has turned a pair of dying coal-mining towns into a small city that is a popular bed-and-breakfast spot, complete with antique shopping malls.

"They just don't understand [American Indian] culture," says Jack Thorpe, a former Sac and Fox chief who is director of housing for the Kickapoo tribe based in McCloud, Okla. "There's a proper way to honor people and put them to rest. You come from the ground and you

return to the ground. Dad never had his tribal rites."

The Thorpes have received no word since asking for their father's remains in January. They are working with an attorney and say they're ready to go to battle. But, now, that battle seems to have even divided the family.

"It has caused problems between us at times," says Grace Thorpe, 79, the youngest of Jim Thorpe's daughters. "We don't talk as openly as we used to with each other. I think it would cause too much trouble to move the body now. I think they've been good to his memory. And I think the city of Jim Thorpe, Pa. has a legal right to keep my father there."

Grace feels so strongly about it, she says she is prepared to testify on behalf of the city of Jim Thorpe.

"Oklahoma already had its chance," she says. "And I don't think tribal rites are reason enough to move him. As a family we're divided on that."

This is a family that fought for seven decades to have the medals returned and Jim Thorpe's Olympic records restored. Those symbols of his accomplishments had been taken away after it was learned, shortly following the 1912 Games, he'd accepted \$15 a week to play professional baseball in the Eastern Carolina League in 1909 and 1910.

And it's the family who helped put together the Jim Thorpe Classic, which will provide scholarships for American Indian students across the nation.

"We can talk about book bags and football games, but scholarships are really what this game is about," Jim Omph says. "We'll be awarding various scholarships to American Indian students from the University of Colorado during halftime. And that doesn't happen without a game like this to fund it."

Only one of the 15 Fresno State players asked knew much about Jim Thorpe. One Bulldogs player thought Thorpe played for Colorado. One thought he was a great NFL linebacker from the 1960s. One said he'd never even heard of anyone named Jim Thorpe.

It's a sad testimonial, but the ratios and responses probably wouldn't differ much if you polled any team of young athletes.

"I know he played a lot of sports and that he was an American Indian," Bulldogs quarterback David Carr says.

"It's the Jim Thorpe Classic, he must have been great."

## Features: Jason King

*Comment by the judge, Tom Kensler: Dripping with emotion, this study in the human condition through times of tragedy shows us that college football players are people, too. The reader feels the pain and the struggle and is drawn into the story, as if to be sitting in the living room. A writer can receive no better compliment.*

LAWRENCE — If Ervin Holloman ever got off his couch, it was usually to close the curtains so that no one would see him crying.

The television and radio were always off. His wife, Erika, had left for work. Except for his own sniffles, Holloman didn't hear a sound.

Time and time again last spring — often when he was supposed to be in psychology class or at a football weight session — this is where the University of Kansas defensive tackle found himself. Holed up in his dark apartment.

All alone with Nia.

Looking at her picture taken days before her death, Holloman realized the childhood he spent shopping at secondhand stores was tame. Sharing two bedrooms with his 11 brothers and sisters became trivial as he focused on Nia's grossly swollen tummy. Mowing lawns to buy beans and cornbread for his lupus-stricken mother — that was simple, Holloman said, compared to seeing tubes protruding from the body of his precious, newborn daughter.

"I always thought I had it tough when I was young," said Holloman, a senior. "With the way I grew up ... I was always proud of myself for getting through it. I didn't think anything could stop me after that."

Holloman, a 292-pounder with a rugby player's handshake and a Barry White voice, pauses as he shakes his head and stares at the floor.

"But after what happened with Nia ... football, school, everything. I couldn't do it anymore. I felt like I'd been beat."

Forty-eight days after her birth, Nia Holloman died in a Kansas City hospital from complications caused by Down syndrome.

Ervin tried to mourn and move on. But he couldn't. He began skipping classes to take asylum under his bed covers. He got suspended from the football team and said he didn't care.

Sitting in his apartment, Ervin could hear the concern in the voices of his coaches as they left messages on his answering machine. But he rarely picked up the phone. He just sat there, thumbing through the pictures of Nia he'd taken at the hospital.

Holloman had already lost a daughter. Now he was losing himself.

"I thought I was going crazy," Holloman said. "I liter-

### JASON KING — The Kansas City Star

Age: 27

College: Baylor '97

**Background:** Began full-time job at *The Kansas City Star* in February 1998 covering high schools. Was promoted to the University of Kansas beat in May 2000. Won an APSE award for enterprise writing in 2002. His hometown is Dallas.



ally thought I was going crazy.

In the months leading up to Nia's birth on Nov. 20, 2000, one image kept darting through Holloman's mind.

"I kept thinking, 'Oh man, I'm going to have to learn to change diapers.'"

But as he stood in the delivery room at Lawrence Memorial Hospital that day, wearing a sterile cap and scrubs as he knelt by his girlfriend, Erika, Holloman's fear and uncertainty about having a child was erased with one joyous sound.

"That baby came out and started squealing," Holloman said. "I was so happy. I mean, that baby was part of me. I thought, 'I did that.' I'll never be able to describe how good that felt. Right there, I broke down and cried."

Doctors carried the baby over to Holloman and placed her in his arms.

It would be one of the few times he'd ever hold his daughter.

Within hours, Nia had been diagnosed with Down syndrome and was rushed to Children's Mercy Hospital in Kansas City. Her liver and spleen were enlarged, which caused swelling in her stomach. There was a hole in Nia's heart, and leukemia cells circulated in her blood. A high bilirubin count had jaundiced Nia's skin, forcing doctors to place bright lights around her incubator.

Ervin and Erika — who were married shortly after Nia's birth — spent the next six weeks at the hospital.

During the day they watched as doctors fed Nia intravenously. At night they lay in their beds at the nearby Ronald McDonald House and prayed. Thanksgiving came and went. So did Christmas.

"One day they told us she was getting better," Ervin said. "And the next day they said she was worse. But we thought she was going to make it. We really had hope."

The Hollomans had just finished dinner on Jan. 6 when they were summoned back to Children's Mercy. Nia had taken a turn for the worse.

"Her heart rate was at 30," Erika said. "We stood by

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## Feature winner continued

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her bed and watched it beat on the monitor. It was going so slow. She was barely breathing.”

Doctors asked Ervin and Erika if they wanted them to try and resuscitate their child.

“No,” the couple told them. “Let her go.”

The tubes were unhooked from Nia’s body before doctors left her alone in a room with Ervin, Erika and their families.

“We just stood over her and watched,” Ervin said. “There really wasn’t anything else to do. We just watched.”

About an hour later, Nia passed away.

“I only got to hold her three times,” Ervin said. “It was like someone took my heart and just ...”

Ervin and Erika returned to Lawrence and eventually found the strength to walk into the bedroom they’d decorated for Nia. Down came the off-white curtains, the ones adorned with pictures of teddy bears. The stuffed animals she never got to hold were stored and her crib was disassembled.

Classes at KU resumed a week after Nia’s death, but nothing could make Ervin stop thinking about his daughter.

Coaches had to knock on his door each morning to make sure he was up for class. He’d try to pay attention when he went. But he ended up staring out the window. The work he turned in was sloppy. And his first round of tests? All F’s.

“I remember Ervin sitting there each day stone-faced,” said Ellen Kroeker, Holloman’s English professor. “He was numb.”

One day Erika came home on a lunch break and found her husband sitting in the den.

She asked him why he wasn’t in class.

“He said he couldn’t handle it anymore,” said Erika, wiping away a tear. “He told me he wanted to quit — quit football, quit school, quit everything. He wanted to leave. I didn’t try to talk him out of it.

“I wanted to leave, too.”

Ervin went to Jayhawks coach Terry Allen and told him of his plans.

Allen managed to convince Ervin to keep trying. But Ervin’s grades plummeted to the point where Allen was forced to suspend him from spring practice.

“It didn’t bother me,” Holloman said. “I didn’t want to be there anyway.”

Allen hoped Holloman would be able to rebound, but deep down, he had succumbed to the fact that his starting defensive tackle had played his last game in a KU uniform.

“Ervin was on thin ice,” Allen said. “We were just praying he didn’t fall through it.

Holloman’s struggles in the classroom and his absence from the football squad evoked criticism from his teammates.

Some of them called Holloman lazy. Others, questioning his commitment to the team, said it was probably better that he was gone.

But most of them didn’t know that Holloman had lost a child — much less that his wife had ever been pregnant.

“There aren’t many people that really know Ervin,” said KU receiver Roger Ross, who played and lived with Holloman at Garden City Community College from 1998-99. “He doesn’t talk much and, when he does, he doesn’t open up. He was hurting inside, but only a few people on the team really knew it.”

“Ervin didn’t want a pity party,” said Travis Jones, Holloman’s defensive line coach.

This wasn’t the first time Holloman had dealt with adversity. His mother, Bernice Bush, worked hard in her job as a cleaning lady in Wichita. But when you have 12 children, there’s only so much cash to go around.

Before Ervin ever learned his states and capitals, he was mowing lawns to make enough money for his family’s dinner. Ervin’s outfits were bought with welfare checks at used clothing stores. Some nights he shared his twin bed with two siblings.

“My mom told us over and over that we might not have the things we wanted,” Ervin said. “But we’d always have the things we needed.”

In 1990, when Ervin was a fifth-grader, his mother was diagnosed with lupus and had to quit work. Walking became difficult for Bernice so Ervin became the family cook. He made sure to accompany her to church each Sunday. And when Bernice felt like it, the two would go fishing.

It would’ve been nice, Ervin said, if his father would’ve helped with the chores and finances. But he never knew his dad.

“To be honest,” Ervin said, “I’m not even sure what he looks like.”

At 22, Ervin thought his past had been tucked away neatly for years, but suddenly it was haunting him again.

That wasn’t all bad, though, because it made him start thinking about his future, too.

Were he and his wife destined for the same struggles he’d already endured in Wichita? What kind of job could he get if he dropped out of school? Where would he go without football?

“I had no plan in life,” Holloman said. “I’m not going to lie. Going to college is fine and all. But football is really all I know. It’s the only thing I ever did and I love it.

“I’d see the team going out to practice each day while

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# Loose deadline: Malcolm Moran

*Comment by the judge, Mickey Spagnola: Nicely wrapped package of Paterno finally tying Bryant's mark, setting the scene, providing background, some history, some game-related matter and really revealing the core of the old head coach.*

EVANSTON, Ill. — The triumphant sprint was right out of the old days in Happy Valley, when Beaver Stadium was about half its present size, Joe Paterno was a young head coach and Penn State's Grand Experiment — championship football without academic compromise — was in its early stages.

Paterno exited Northwestern's Ryan Field late Saturday afternoon with his 323rd victory, tying Bear Bryant's major college record, and with long, purposeful strides, his right fist pumping toward the darkened sky. The accomplishment would be recorded as his, but its significance had more to do with a rattled team than a history-making coach. Maybe Paterno didn't exit on the shoulders of his players because the rewards from his demands have been minimal. Or maybe the Nittany Lions just couldn't catch their 74-year-old coach.

At long last in their emotionally punishing season, the Lions pushed Paterno into a long-anticipated tie with Bryant. Penn State's cathartic comeback, its 38-35 victory vs. Northwestern that overcame five Wildcats leads, carried an importance to the coach that has nothing to do with record books — a chance for a previously winless team to enjoy some essential positive reinforcement.

Penn State (1-4) never had lost the first four games of a season, but for an instant that was pushed aside. Redshirt freshman quarterback Zack Mills, who replaced the injured Matt Senneca with 1:39 to play, led a 69-yard drive that ended with a 4-yard touchdown pass to Eric McCoo with 22 seconds left.

"I was pretty much speechless after the game," Mills said. "I was in shock."

Senneca scored two 1-yard touchdowns and produced career highs in completions (20), attempts (39) and yards (234). But he suffered a mild concussion as the result of a blindside hit by Napoleon Harris. The Lions, who had scored 31 points and gained 163 rushing yards in their first four games, picked up 213 of their 501 total yards on the ground with the use of a new power-I formation.

"We have a running game again," said Larry Johnson, who rushed for 68 yards before spraining his right ankle.

Actually, it was an old formation, something from the days before Paterno's lifesize cardboard likeness started popping up in storefront windows along College Avenue in State College, before Joe became JoePa. Every now and then, some fact captures the fullness of Paterno's

## MALCOLM MORAN – USA Today

**Age:** 48

**College:** Fordham

**Background:** Moran has covered college sports at *USA Today* since 2000. Before that he spent more than 19 years at *The New York Times*. And before that he spent four years at *Newsday*, long enough ago that the Friday night receptions at Penn State took place at the head coach's home. He also has covered Notre Dame for the *Chicago Tribune*.



career better than any numbers can. The return to the power-I was the latest example.

"We've done it before," Paterno said.

Before? Northwestern's Randy Walker, a head coach for 12 college seasons and an assistant for 13 before that, was a high school junior in Troy, Ohio, when Penn State used the strategy to eliminate a funk.

"We had done that years and years ago, back in 1970," Paterno said. "We were 1-3. Wisconsin had beaten us. I didn't like the quarterbacks. Went back home. Took a kid by the name of Hufnagel, and we put the power-I in and won 17 straight with it, with him at quarterback. Because he hadn't played any quarterback, it was simple to get a couple of things in. He didn't have to have a lot of reads. A good play-action pass game.

"So a couple of days off and I got fooling around trying to figure out something, and I remembered that."

The record was 1-2 after the loss at Wisconsin, but after splitting the next two games, the Lions won 26 of the next 28. John Hufnagel eventually became an All-America quarterback in 1972 and led the Lions to a Cotton Bowl victory against Texas and a final No. 5 ranking in 1971.

Penn State is a long way from the list of ranked teams or the shorter list of championship dreamers. When the school's surprising commitment to join the Big Ten inspired speculation that Northwestern would be pushed out nearly a decade ago, it would have been difficult to imagine that any Paterno team would celebrate a victory against the Wildcats.

Eventually, that reality leads to a complex discussion for another day. When the right rear wheels of Penn State's charter flight became stuck in mud and soft dirt just off a taxi way Saturday night at Midway Airport, the Lions were forced into an improvised overnight stay at four nearby hotels. If Penn State had been 0-5 when the airplane was replaced Sunday morning, the stuck-in-the-

*(Continued on page 11)*

# Immediate deadline: Vahe Gregorian

*Comment by the judge, Mickey Spagnola: A wonderful job of weaving a game story inside the play of the game and the player of the game. Captured the spirit of this Nebraska-Oklahoma game in a concise but revealing manner.*

A week before, University of Nebraska freshman receiver Mike Stuntz wasn't allowed on the field against Texas Tech.

"I just wasn't needed in that game, I suppose," Stuntz said.

And on Saturday at Memorial Stadium, as the No. 3-ranked Cornhuskers and second-ranked Oklahoma Sooners were pulverizing each other in the most significant game of the college season to date, Stuntz again had scant reason to believe his services would be required.

So he spent much of his afternoon gazing at the HuskerVision board, which featured past scenes from this majestic rivalry. "I try to keep my head in the game," he said, "but some of those TV timeouts are kind of long, you know?"

But midway through the fourth quarter, the heretofore anonymous Stuntz assured his place in Nebraska highlight reels of the foreseeable future.

His pinpoint pass to quarterback Eric Crouch on a play called "Black 41 Flash Reverse Pass" was good for a stupefying 63-yard touchdown that propelled Nebraska to a 20-10 victory.

And, perhaps, the inside track to a national title, even if the Cornhuskers can't quite admit it yet.

"The big picture is still unclear," Nebraska coach Frank Solich said.

Yes. But it got less fuzzy after Nebraska extended its home winning streak to 20 games and finally snipped the 20-game winning string of defending national champion Oklahoma.

Nebraska (9-0) had been No. 2-ranked in the Bowl Championship Series rankings, which determine the participants in the national title game. Oklahoma (7-1) had been first. They may meet again in the Big 12 title game in Dallas, but OU's title hopes are hanging by a strand now.

"It's a strange feeling in our locker room . . . because we haven't experienced this in quite a while," said OU coach Bob Stoops, a loser for the first time in nine games against top 10 teams.

Stoops also had a peculiar feeling as he saw Nebraska's trick play unfold with 6 minutes 57 seconds left; Oklahoma had botched an attempt at virtually the same sleight-of-hand earlier.

"I almost had to half-chuckle to myself," he said.

It was perhaps odd that the decisive play in a bruising defensive game, which featured 10 punts from each

## VAHE GREGORIAN — *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*

**Age:** 39

**Colleges:** Penn and Missouri.

**Background:** Vahe was born in Beirut, Lebanon. His beats at the *P-D* have been preps, University of Illinois basketball, Mizzou football and basketball and, most recently, national college football and basketball beat and the Olympics. He has written two books: "Ride of a Lifetime," with George Perles, and "High Hopes," with Gary Barnett. Vahe has previously won three FWAA writing awards.



team, essentially was a scam. But the teams had been so well-prepared for each other and had been so aggressive on defense that deception became a natural resort.

The teams spent much of the first half either scraping the sleep out of their own eyes for the 11 a.m. start or feeling each other out - albeit by thumping each other silly.

With both offenses straitjacketed, every . . . single . . . play seemed precious and perhaps game-deciding.

It was 10-10 at halftime, with Nebraska going to the locker room surging from holding OU to a field goal after the Sooners had first and goal at the 2-yard line.

The 'Huskies took a 13-10 lead on their first drive of the second half on Josh Brown's 26-yard field goal, and neither team would threaten again until midway through the fourth quarter.

That's when Oklahoma lined up for a 53-yard field-goal attempt. But kicker Tim Duncan instead executed a pooch punt to seemingly hem in Nebraska at its 4.

Stoops was torn over whether to attempt a field goal, which was within Duncan's range, but he ultimately thought working for field position was the better move.

When Nebraska was stuck with second and 9 from its 5, the strategy looked good. But then Crouch, a Heisman Trophy candidate who had been contained all game, broke loose for 19 yards to give Nebraska breathing room.

Enter Stuntz, an 18-year-old from Council Bluffs, Iowa, who played quarterback in high school and will return to that position next year. A few series earlier, he had been told to warm up for the special play that Nebraska had practiced all week but that Stuntz didn't really believe would be called.

To avoid tipping off too much, the left-handed Stuntz was sent in for one play before what would become his

*(Continued on page 11)*

## Feature winner continued

*(Continued from page 7)*

I was going to get tutored. I realized I belonged with them. I thought, 'What am I doing? I've got to get back.' "

Slowly, Holloman began to rediscover the main thing his grief had stolen — hope. He started attending extra tutoring sessions and study groups. Never did he miss a class in April or May. Holloman finished his English papers days before they were due so he could take a draft to Kroeker for suggestions. Erika helped by typing his final copy.

"One of the things that helped him succeed was that he was willing to let me know the context of his life," Kroeker said. "I told him, 'Ervin, if you're willing to work then I'll match you step by step. But if you're not going to work then you're going down on your own. I can't do this for you.'"

"I felt like a bit of life was returning to him. Until that point, he had been frozen."

Allen was taken aback by Holloman's new spirit and let him rejoin the team midway through spring practice.

Ervin still had his bad days, occasionally missing a weightlifting workout. But any loss of focus was brief.

"I was basically doing homework day and night," Holloman said. "But I was still so far behind. It was frustrating because I'd finally come around and realized what I wanted. But I wasn't sure I was going to get it."

Holloman took his last exam in May and anxiously awaited his report card.

When it finally came, he could hardly contain himself. Two B's, two C's and a D.

Allen announced in June that Holloman, who started 10 of 11 games as a junior, would be eligible for the 2001 season.

"That," Ervin said, "was one of the biggest accomplishments of my life."

Every now and then, Ervin bends down and puts his head near Erika's stomach.

"Wake up," he whispers. "Whatcha doin' in there?"

In about three weeks, Erika will give birth to another child — another girl. An amniocentesis has already been performed. Although there are no guarantees, doctors expect the child to be healthy.

"We probably go to the doctor more than we need to," Ervin said. "We just keep wanting to hear someone tell us everything's going to be all right. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't a little scared. After what happened with Nia, that's only natural. But it's a happy feeling, too."

"We're getting a second chance."

That's also what Holloman is getting on the football field. After a lackluster junior season — "Twenty-one tackles, that says it all," he said — Holloman has been one of the biggest bright spots for KU's defense.

At 292, Holloman has lost 18 pounds in the last six weeks, making him quicker off the block and a threat to

chase down scrambling quarterbacks. He's made 12 tackles in two games, including a career-high seven-tackle performance against No. 14 UCLA last week.

"Ervin is happy again," said Jones, the line coach. "When you have a devastating loss like he did, why take away something that makes you happy? Athletes are in their own realm when they're on the field. It's their sense of belonging. Ervin needed that back, and he's got it."

Holloman's work ethic leads Jones to believe he has a future in football.

If not in the NFL than maybe in Canada or the Arena League, where his brother, Cliff — a former Kansas State standout — stars for Tulsa.

"Ervin has a chance to be so good," Ross said.

"Everything he did at Garden City was unbelievable. He didn't show that last year. But I've got the feeling he's going to be a dominating player by the time this season is over."

As proud as Ross has been of Ervin on the field, he said he's even more impressed by the way he's conducted himself off of it.

If Erika needs medicine in the middle of the night, Ervin drives to the store and buys it.

Instead of fast food, he barbecues chicken or cooks pork chops. The two rarely miss a Sunday service at Victory Bible Church. And when players go out and celebrate after games, Ervin stays home with his wife.

"I've learned a lot about how to treat a woman by watching Ervin," Ross said. "He's a straight family man. "A family's future

As the birth of his child draws closer, Ervin is getting more and more excited about the day he and Erika, 21, return from the hospital with their new daughter.

Maybe some night, the family will gather for dinner at the Hollomans' apartment. Ervin can invite Bernice, 57, and her 11 other children and 23 grandkids. They could sit around the kitchen table, where a copy of Ervin's favorite poem hangs in a frame nearby.

Written by an unknown author, the passage is entitled "Footprints." Although the famous verse is commonplace in households across America, it's especially poignant to Holloman.

The poem describes a man dreaming about walking through his life on a beach. During his good times, the man notices two sets of footprints in the sand. One set is his, the other is God's.

But during the man's times of struggle, only one set of footprints is visible.

"I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me," the man says to the Lord.

The Lord replies: "My precious child, I love you and would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

## Loose deadline winner continued

*(Continued from page 8)*

mud scenario would have been an unavoidable metaphor for a season of lost hope.

But not now. There may have been more glorious exits, such as the rides he earned after his Lions secured national championships with wins against Georgia and Herschel Walker in the 1983 Sugar Bowl and Miami (Fla.) and Vinny Testaverde in the 1987 Fiesta Bowl.

But the context of Saturday's sprint elevated the moment to the short list of the 36-season Paterno era. After the details were dissected, there was one imperfection to address.

"Joe, why didn't anybody carry you off?"

Paterno thought for a moment.

"Good thing they didn't," he said, and chuckled.

"They were having too good a time celebrating," the coach said quietly, and then he reiterated his point.

"This is a good squad. There are some good athletes on this football team. I've been telling you guys I think we're pretty good. We're not there yet. But they needed something like this."

To reinforce his conviction, Paterno rapped his knuckles quickly — taptaptaptaptap — against the table top before him. The coach's voice was soft, but his staccato delivery offered evidence that inside, he hadn't stopped sprinting.

"I think we can really make great strides from this," Paterno went on. "I think. . . ."

"Coach, you want us to carry you off?"

The lighthearted question had been asked by a rather heavysset reporter. The coach's response was immediate.

"I'm sure not going to carry you," Paterno replied, and loud laughter filled the room. You can take the boy out of Brooklyn . . .

The sentimentality would have to come from elsewhere. It was only a matter of moments before it would. For there in dim light beneath the stands of Ryan Field, as Bear Bryant's equal rode on a golf cart past the lingering fans, many in Northwestern purple, he slapped their outstretched hands as he passed through their echoing applause.

## Immediate deadline winner continued

*(Continued from page 9)*

marquee moment. But when he came in for The Play, he was spooked to see Oklahoma coaches making a throwing motion to their defense.

But the play was on: Crouch handed off to Thunder Collins, running right. Collins then flipped the ball to Stuntz, running left behind him. Stuntz looked downfield for Crouch. If he were covered, Stuntz was to run.

Stuntz saw the speedy Crouch being "shadowed" only by 6-foot-2, 275-pound defensive tackle Kory Klein.

He was anxious about his grip on the ball, worried about having it caught in a gust of wind or rifling it too low.

But his pass was flawless. Crouch hauled it in and zoomed to the end zone. OU never recovered.

As for Stuntz, 90 minutes after the game, he still was waiting for it all to overwhelm him.

"Maybe it will hit me later," he said, smiling. "Maybe this is all there is to it."

And maybe he'll be seeing himself next time he looks up at HuskerVision.

## Column winner continued

*(Continued from page 3)*

or so oblivious — he invites this sort of thing?

Obviously, Paus believed the coach would never find out the truth on his own. So apparently did Foster, who drove a 2002 Ford Expedition for six weeks in violation of NCAA rules.

Toledo wants to treat his players like men, but is the first to admit they are children. "Nothing shocks me any more when dealing with young people," he said.

In the absence of shock, the coach needs clarity. In his policies. In his response to crises.

A player who knowingly conceals personal information that could rock the entire team, that could contribute to the kind of debacle the Bruins experienced against USC, must be held accountable.

It's one way a boy becomes a man.

## FWAA Lodge Notes ...

### All-America Calls Set

The FWAA's All-America Committee has two calls set to determine the 25-man 2002 FWAA All-America team. The first call to determine the defensive side of the ball will be on Nov. 18 and a second call to determine the rest of the team will be on Nov. 25. Each call will be approximately two hours in duration. The All-America committee members are listed on this page. We encourage you to call or e-mail them with tips on good players. A voting ballot will be included in the next issue of the Fifth Down. But it isn't too early to contact committee members about players.

### Using the Web Site

For those of you using the FWAA web site ([www.fwaa.com](http://www.fwaa.com)), the usernames and passwords have been expanded to include username: *fiestabowl* and password: *tempe*. The Fiesta Bowl will be the site of the FWAA's annual meeting Jan. 2-4, 2003. The press hotel will be the Airport Marriott. More information will be available on the meeting in later editions of the Fifth Down.

### Volney Meece Scholarship

FWAA members who are interested in their sons or daughters competing for the Volney Meece Scholarship should contact Dave Sittler in Tulsa. His e-mail is [davesitt@aol.com](mailto:davesitt@aol.com). His address is on Page 78 of the FWAA Directory He is accepting applications for the four-year scholarship now. Sons and daughters of FWAA members who are pursuing their college educations are eligible for the scholarship, which is renewable on an annual basis for up to four years.

### This and That

Wright Thompson has moved from the *New Orleans Times-Picayune* to the *Kansas City Star*. ... John Canzano left the *Fresno Bee* to cover the NFL for the *San Jose Mercury*. ... Chad Moeller is the new football SID at Missouri. ... Longtime FWAA member Bill Whitmore, the former Rice SID, passed away this fall. ... The late Orville Henry, the 2002 Bert McGrane winner, was honored at a ceremony at the Arkansas-Alabama game on Sept. 28 in Fayetteville.

## 2002 FWAA ALL-AMERICA COMMITTEE

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