

Spartans hope for Homecoming rebound against fighting Illini

By Ernie Boone

Will they bounce back and give the Homecoming crowd something to cheer about or throw in the towel?

That's the question on the minds of Spartan fans.

After suffering one of the most disappointing losses in Spartan football history, 40-37, at the hands of Notre Dame's Fighting Irish, Coach John L. Smith's MSU gridders prepare to host Illinois in its Big Ten season opener Saturday, September 30.

The Illini will either be just what the doctor ordered for the reeling Spartans or their worst nightmare. They're 1-3 on the year with lopsided losses to Rutgers, Syracuse and Iowa.

They're a young group with four true freshman handling starting assignments. They've shown steady improvement and would like nothing better than to catch MSU looking forward to Michigan Week.

Quarterback Isiah "Juice" Williams heads that list of Diaper Dandies.

Williams broke into the starting line-up in the 24-7 loss to Iowa in Illinois' Big Ten opener with mixed results. He had difficulty

through the first three quarters, but connected with receiver Jacob Wills for a 31-yard touchdown in the final stanza.

He's shown big play capability, throwing touchdown passes of 76, 69

and 31 yards.

That could be problematic for the Spartans who have shown some vulnerability to the deep pass.

The Illini defense also shows promise. They played Iowa

even most of the way, giving up three touchdowns in a four-minute stretch just before halftime.

Iowa, ranked 14, took advantage of miscues, an interception and a short punt to go short distances for two touchdowns.

If MSU maintains focus, the game should provide an excellent opportunity to get back on track.

State made steady progress through its first three and one half games before collapsing before the Irish. Smith and fans would like to see that progress continue.

The 38-23 victory over Pittsburgh was the Spartans' most complete performance. Following a slow start that saw them fall behind, 10-0, in the first quarter, then storm back to tie things 10-10 and halftime.

Pitt opened by forcing the Spartans to punt after just four plays and promptly hit on a 32-yard Connor Lee field goal.

After a H.B. Blades interception, Pitt marched 50 yards to score on an 8-yard run by LaRd Stephens.

Jehuu Caulcrick got MSU going rushing for 26 yards on five carries to lead a 63-yard culminated by a 43-yard field goal by freshman Bret Swenson.

Drew Stanton hit tight end Kellen Davis for two yards to cap an 83-yard drive.

In the second half MSU scored four touchdowns in the second half to put the game away, a pair of short runs by Caulcrick, Drew Stanton a one-yard run and Kerry Reed a 12-yard pass from Stanton.



Ervin Baldwin takes an interception to the house against Norte Dame.

Photo by Adia Boone

Fans must "Get over it"

Notre Dame fiasco should not kill season

By Ernie Boone

Okay Spartans and fans, it's time to GET OVER IT!

And get on with it!

With three wins and a "Would'dah Could'dah Should'dah loss to a pretty good Norte Dame team, MSU is in pretty good shape with realistic hopes of a banner season still intact.

That is if coach John L. Smith and his charges don't use the Notre Dame disappointment as an excuse to go into the tank as they've done in the past.

Somehow, I don't think Drew Stanton, Matt Trannon, Jehuu Caulcrick, Cliff Ryan, Caleb Thornhill, David Herron and their teammates will let that happen.

There's something about this group. They seem to have learned how to compete.

Now they need some help from their coaches to show the world they've learned how to win.

John L. and company may want to re-think their offensive philosophy of

taking just what the defense gives it.

The Spartans have a lot of top quality offensive weapons, so it must be tempting sit back and seek only to exploit the openings their defensive formations



Javon Ringer

Photo by Ada Boone

and focus create naturally.

If a defense pays special attention to Trannon, fine, we'll throw to Kerry Reed and Jerramy Scott. Put nine men in the box to stop the power running of Caulcrick, we'll beat you running outside with the speed of Javon Ringer.

Great idea, but there's one

little flaw. In taking just what the defense gives you, you may never go after what you really want or need.

Case in point. Since catching a record 14 passes, for 151 yards and two touchdowns against Eastern Michigan, Trannon has caught just three passes for 29 yards in two games.

And it hasn't been because he's been playing poorly or teams have forced him out of the Spartan game plan. Rather, teams have focused on him so the Spartans have thrown elsewhere.

The same is true for Caulcrick against the Irish. Notre Dame stacked as many as nine men in the box to stop his power running, so MSU focused on running outside with Ringer.

In both cases, opponents took potent offensive weapons away from the Spartans not by preventing the athletes from making plays, but by giving MSU something else.

Quality athletes make plays when their teams need them.

And championship teams give quality athletes the opportunity to make plays.

That's what's missing in the "Take what the defense gives us," approach. What a team like Notre Dame is willing to give you often isn't what you want or need.

If MSU is to realize its dream of gridiron resurgence and competing for a conference title this season, the Spartans must get the most out of Trannon and Caulcrick.

That's because their strengths are the strengths championship football teams need most.

With his size, speed, jumping ability and hands, Trannon is an ideal possession receiver who can double as a big play threat.

Don't Roll Back Progress

NOVEMBER 7, 2006

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Supplier Diversity Month Event

Tuesday, OCTOBER 17, 2006
7:30 A.M. TO 1:30 P.M.

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