

the front office

Joe Paterno, my hero

I am a graduate of Penn State's School of Journalism so my reverence for football coach Joe Paterno is deep-rooted and long-standing. But after last season and all it entailed for our country and JoePa, my admiration is greater than ever.

Coach Paterno is a leader, a humble role model, a man who has his priorities straight—not to mention being successful at his chosen profession. In these troubled times, everyone could use a Paterno to emulate.

Paterno began the season needing two victories for the most coaching wins in Division I history. When the team lost its first four games, playing as poorly as any team in Paterno's 36 years as head coach, critics said the game had passed the 73-year-old by. His response: "We're just not a very good football team right now." An honest man doesn't believe in excuses.

Then against Northwestern the Lions rallied for a come-from-behind 38-35 win. The next Saturday they came back from a 27-9 deficit to beat Ohio State, 29-27, and Paterno had the record. The coach had not once mentioned it to his players.

The literature major from Brown still knows how to coach. Down by 17 points at halftime to Michigan State, Paterno ordered every player to keep his helmet on during the intermission. That message, along with his trademark halftime game plan adjustment, sparked the Lions to yet another comeback win.

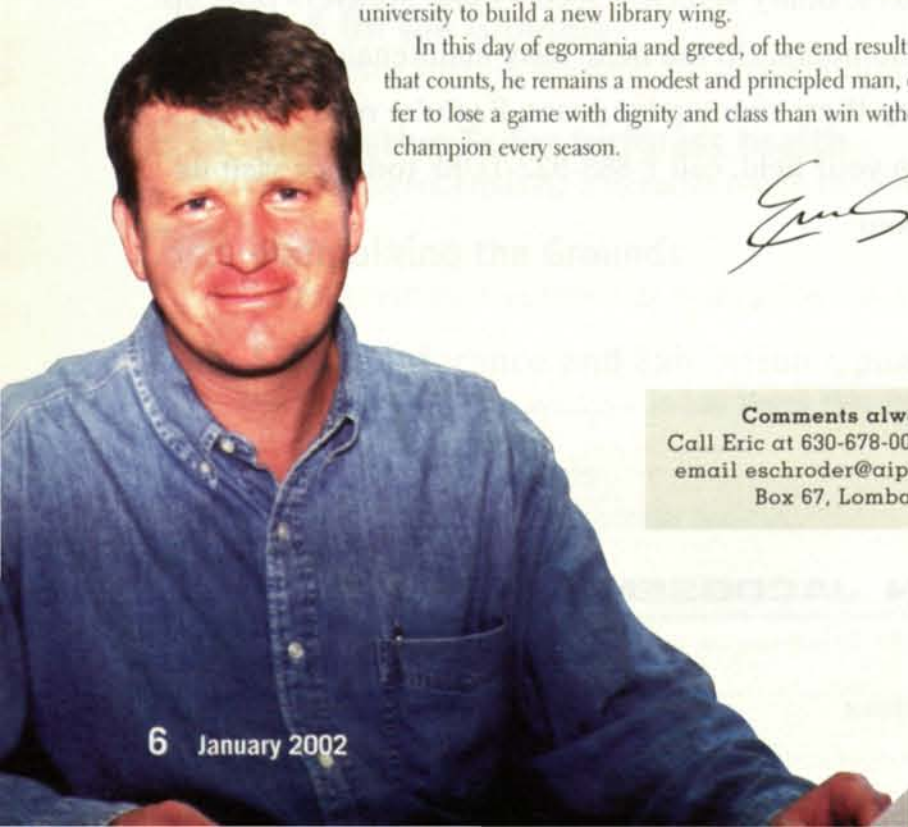
Paterno's lack of ego is commendable. He doesn't ride around practices in a golf cart, wearing wrap-around sunglasses and chatting on a cell phone to the media. He still enjoys teaching the game. It's so Paterno to not put names on jerseys or stickers on helmets for scoring touchdowns. He knows football is a team game.

While winning games is a priority, Paterno is committed to a bigger one: graduating players. The Penn State football team's 68 percent rate continues to track well above the national norm of 50 percent.

This is a man who passed up an opportunity to coach in the National Football League for a \$1 million contract, more than 25 years ago when that was a lot of money. Sue Paterno told ESPN her husband was considering the offer one night when he overheard her crying as she tended to their newest child. He then realized she didn't want to uproot the family; he chose

Happy Valley. The Paternos have since contributed millions of dollars to the university to build a new library wing.

In this day of egomania and greed, of the end result being the only thing that counts, he remains a modest and principled man, one who would prefer to lose a game with dignity and class than win without. Joe Paterno, a champion every season.



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