

# They Played a Game, but the Score Barely Mattered

 [web.archive.org/web/20120121092649/http://pennstatemag.com/2011/11/13/they-played-a-game-but-the-score-barely-mattered](http://web.archive.org/web/20120121092649/http://pennstatemag.com/2011/11/13/they-played-a-game-but-the-score-barely-mattered)

*November 13, 2011 at 1:29 am Lori Shontz 14 comments*

When I remember this game, I'll remember the silence.

I was in the press box, as usual, and so I already knew that Penn State and Nebraska players had planned to meet at midfield for a pregame prayer. Not surprising, not at all, given the trauma of the week, which I know I don't have to recount here.



Patrick Mansell of Penn State Public Information took this photo of the prayer circle.

But I was unprepared for what actually happened. The sidelines *emptied*. Everyone converged at midfield—including several hundred former Penn State football players who had come to stand on the sideline in support. They mingled, Nebraska players gripping hands with their Penn State counterparts. They knelt.

And as Nebraska assistant coach Ron Brown led them in prayer, the stadium fell silent. More than 100,000 people, and you could hear the proverbial pin drop—and not because anyone had asked them to be quiet. University president Rod Erickson, who arrived on campus in 1977, called it “one of the most moving experiences that I’ve ever been at in all my years at Penn State.”

From what Brown said after the game, it seems that he'll remember interim coach Tom Bradley. Brown, a former director of the Nebraska Fellowship of Christian Athletes, recounted how Bradley had asked him where Nebraska coach Bo Pelini was because he wanted to make sure the two head coaches knelt together.

“I thought it really represented the spirit that was taking place inside that huddle,” Brown said. “We knew we were going to go to a battle against each other. It was a big game for both teams, but there was something bigger. We know that there are jobs being lost, and who knows what’s going to happen at Penn State, particularly in the upcoming months. And yet there was a humility and sincerity, and kind of a vulnerability of all these players.

“But then the other thing that hit me was the fans. It was loud and cheering when the players were coming together, but then it got really quiet, and I almost felt everyone in the stadium could hear it. And for a hundred thousand people to instantly hush, I say that’s the favor of

God. It was very touching.”

Following the prayer, they played a game—the first game without Joe Paterno on the Penn State coaching staff since 1949. The Nittany Lions fell behind, 17-0, and clawed their way back to cut the deficit to 17-14 in the fourth quarter before losing. But it’s tough to remember the details. I’ve been covering sports since January 1988, when I was a candidate at *The Daily Collegian*, and this is the only time I can ever remember covering a game and never once looking at the stat sheet.

This game was about the gestures, great and small. Leaving the first seat on the first team bus—Joe Paterno’s seat—open. The “Blue Out,” with students dressing in blue to draw attention to the sexual abuse of children. Bradley refusing to lead the team onto the field—“This is your team,” he told the players—and walking to the sideline all but unnoticed as the team entered the field in dramatic fashion: arm in arm in rows of four or five or six, walking slowly, calmly to the sideline. It was an arresting sight.

“I just saw on the media and TV and the Internet that this team would fall apart with everything going on,” said senior defensive tackle Devon Still, who planned the entrance. “I think we needed to let ourselves know—and to make a statement—that we’ll be together with it all.”

Everything seemed fraught with meaning. Penn State’s first offensive play, for instance. Did it just happen to be a fullback dive, or had the coaches decided to run one of Joe Paterno’s signature plays in tribute? Was it only a coincidence that the ball was handed off to Joe Suhey, a member of the most storied family in Penn State football history?

Bradley didn’t really address that. What he did say, however, was how proud he was of the fans (who “showed class”) and of the players (“who showed a lot of resolve”) during what he called “a week unprecedented in college football history.”

*Lori Shontz, senior editor*

Entry filed under: [Campus events](#), [Campus issues](#), [Joe Paterno](#), [Penn State football](#), [Sandusky scandal](#). Tags: [Bo Pelini](#), [Devon Still](#), [Ron Brown](#), [Tom Bradley](#).

[Lighting Up The Old Main Lawn A Sandusky Scandal Reading List](#)

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- **1.** Cynthia H. | November 13, 2011 at 2:16 am

The class and dignity shown by our football players and coaches is surprising only to those on the outside who think that the pride of the Nittany Nation can be encapsulated in an uninformed media soundbite. I have never been prouder to be a Penn Stater. My loyalty and pride will not waver. WE ARE!!!

- **2.** Liz Bligan | November 13, 2011 at 10:24 am

What Cynthia said.

- **3.** Steve | November 13, 2011 at 10:42 am

Ditto ... PENN STATE!

- **4.** Marianne | November 13, 2011 at 11:39 am

Ditto...Always was and always will be proud to be part of the PSU "family"

- **5.** Jennifer | November 13, 2011 at 12:25 pm

Ditto ditto! I was so proud yesterday, as I watched (through tears) as the team walked onto the field. This has been an awful week but those kids showed exactly what it means to be Penn State...

- **6.** Becky | November 13, 2011 at 3:14 pm

Ditto! What did surprise me was how within minutes, I totally changed my perspective on Nebraska. It was a good game and they proved to be a classy bunch. Welcome to the Big Ten!  
THANK YOU!

- **7.** Al | November 13, 2011 at 9:00 pm

As an office who served in Vietnam, I know that I will always be a Marine. However, before I was a Marine I became a Penn Stater who knows I will always be a Penn Stater regardless of how vile the news medea wants to be to increase their rating. WE ARE and always will be PENN STATE

- **8.** Carol P | November 13, 2011 at 9:12 pm

I felt such pride yesterday as I watched (also through tears) the way the team walked onto the field and the way the former lettermen came to support them. It was very moving to watch as the entire Nebraska team started across the field and were met by the Penn State team and lettermen at midfield. To watch them embrace each other, then kneel in prayer was such a classy move. I have a lot of respect for Nebraska, even more now than before.

- **9.** Anonymous | November 13, 2011 at 9:34 pm

I agree with all of the above comments and not not have said it better. Penn State has always been and will continue to be a class act. The innocent should not be punished for the actions of the abuser. We continue to pray for the victims.

- **10.** Bewildered | November 14, 2011 at 12:50 pm

Are you guys serious here? “Penn State has always been and will continue to be a class act.” ?? Penn State betrayed those children and betrayed ALL of us by nurturing and allowing a monster to thrive for over TEN YEARS. We don’t expect monsters to do the right thing but we DO expect good me to. This cover up and corruption went ALL THE WAY UP the hierarchy and was endorsed by the president himself! We should ALL be ashamed and feel betrayed by what the institution FAILED to do as they betrayed the very core of what Penn State is supposed to mean. When I read ridiculous comments like Al’s “I will always be a Penn Stater regardless of how vile the news medea wants to be to increase their rating” or Cynthia’s “I have never been prouder to be a Penn Stater. My loyalty and pride will not waver” I have to wonder what exactly is wrong with you people? It’s down right delusional! The “news media” did not create this story or the corruption and sickness thriving at the institution, nor did they create the details. Talk about shooting the messenger! You cannot say you are “praying for the victims” in any serious way if you think that this is only about a monstrous child molester. It is about a child molester who was given a free pass and allowed to ruin (as yet) countless lives because people chose to look the other way to protect the myth of an institution. SHAME!

- **11.** Anonymous | November 16, 2011 at 10:14 pm

Don’t going blaming the “medea” – they’re just reporting on your school and its “leaders”. Try to accept some responsibility and not to kill the mssenger.

- **12.** [Behind the Scenes and Below the Surface « The Penn Stater Magazine](#) | January 5, 2012 at 4:10 pm

[...] students weren't doing anything but standing around.) Attended the candlelight vigil. Covered the Nebraska game. Tracked down experts in sociology, ethics, and other fields to explain the big-picture issues. I [...]

- [...] 2. "They Played a Game, but the Score Barely Mattered" [...]
- **14.** [Alumni Ask Questions; President Erickson Answers « The Penn Stater Magazine](#) | January 12, 2012 at 9:41 am

[...] heard Erickson speak several times since the crisis—at the news conference after the Nebraska game, to Sam Richards' sociology class, during the town hall for students. [...]

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