

# Pitt's 'Majors' Overhauling In 3 Years Remarkable

By JOE GERGEN  
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"We have the kind of schedule where if we recruit well enough and coach well enough, we can have a national championship at Pitt."

— Johnny Majors, Nov. 1, 1973

NEW YORK — Yes, that was easy enough for him to say. But for Johnny Majors to believe that such was a realistic possibility back then, in his first season as head football coach at the University of Pittsburgh, required considerable mental exertion. And he must have believed because, look at Pitt now.

That's the Panthers up there, sitting atop the major-college football polls for the first time since the Jock Sutherland era. And, what is even more astonishing, they are only three games, three victories, removed from the national championship which only Majors and a handful of zealots envisioned in the fall of 1973. Pitt's rise in such a short span of time has been remarkable.

It is not just that a team from the East has not won the honor since the 1959 Syracuse team which featured Ernie Davis. It is not just that the odds against an independent other than Notre Dame winning the national championship are prohibitive. It is not just that Pitt had endured nine losing seasons in the 10 that preceded

Majors' arrival that makes the story appear a piece of dime store fiction. It is all that plus the fact that the most successful college football team in the land shares a city with the most successful professional football team in the land. There were many who believed the city wasn't big enough for both of them.

The pattern has been all too familiar in the last two decades. The growth of pro football has coincided with the decline of the college game in big cities. New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit, Atlanta, New Orleans. They all have born witness to the trend. The University of Miami hasn't been the same since the Dolphins moved into town. The Dallas Cowboys have left few people with an appetite for football as played by SMU.

Apparently, Pitt also was suffering by comparison. It hadn't been so bad in the 1950s and early 1960s because the local pro team, the Steelers, had a knack for finishing last and attracting smaller gatherings than was normal for a National Football League franchise. But Chuck Noll was appointed head coach of the Steelers in 1969, the team was jolted into a championship contender, and a new downtown stadium was constructed at the confluence of the Allegheny, the Ohio and the Monongahela Rivers. Suddenly, the Steelers were a very hot item.

And that's where Majors came in. In 1972, the Steelers had reached the playoffs for the very first time; Pitt had lost 10 of its 11 games. So it seemed preposterous that day as Majors sat in his office in Fitzgerald Fieldhouse hard by the 50-year-old concrete bowl where Marshall Goldberg and Bill Daddio led an ear-

lier generation of Panther teams to a Rose bowl and a national championship and talked about the possibility of returning Pittsburgh football to that level of prominence.

"I think this can be a unique city," he said, "one which supports both pro and college. Maybe, it can be like Los Angeles. The Steelers' games are sold out. That's 50,000 people, only 2 per cent of the population. Realistically speaking, we can average 35,000. And there's no reason next year we can't average 45,000."

Pitt averaged 30,484 in 1973, a gain of almost 10,000 per game, as the Panthers registered their first winning season in a decade and earned their first bowl trip in 17 years. The following year the average attendance was 42,087. This Saturday Pitt will close out its regular-season home schedule against West Virginia. The 56,500-seat stadium is sold out.

"When they built Three Rivers Stadium," athletic director Cas Myslinski said in a telephone interview, "there was a lot of sentiment to move down there. Pitt Stadium was run down and the school had to decide what to do about it. We had a heck of a fight. But I couldn't see how we possibly could survive if we moved. We'd be the third team on the list after the Pirates and Steelers. And if the Pirates got into the World Series, we'd have to play our first six games of the season away. I used that as a reason to stay right here. I didn't want to go. The kids wouldn't have followed us."

Of course, when Majors got his first look at Pitt Stadium, he shuddered ever so slightly. "The locker room

was from the Jock Sutherland era," he said. And the equipment, well, that was more appropriate to the Pop Warner League. Oh, yes. Pop Warner lectured Sutherland in the game at Pitt.

With the installation of a sumptuous new locker room and a liberal coat of paint, the stadium soon became a plus for recruiting. The Pitt schedule, traditionally rough, was another asset. "This is one of the few independent schools in the country that has the schedule to play for the national championship," Majors said. "It's probably the most attractive schedule in the East."

"One of the first questions he asked me," Myslinski recalled, "was, 'Can we be national champions?' I assured him we could, that Pitt had been national champion in the past, that there was a strong tradition here."

Pitt's most formidable competition in those bygone days four decades ago came from likes of Carnegie Tech and Duquesne and, principally, Fordham, all of them private, big-city schools. Each of the schools has long since dropped out of the running. Only Pitt remains.

And today there are people walking around Pittsburgh wearing small buttons that say, "Pitt's No. 1." "We started selling them about two weeks ago," Myslinski said. "We were a little premature. But now, I guess, they're pretty accurate." Who would have believed it?

## Plymouth Pops Seneca East For Best Record Since 1967

Plymouth and Seneca East tangled on the football field for the first time ever Friday night coach Mike McFarren's host Plymouth team recorded a 27-6 win over the Tigers.

It marks the first time since 1967 that Plymouth has won its final game of the year. The Big Red finish with a 5-5 record, their best since turning in a 6-4 slate in 1967.

Seneca East wound up with a 1-6-1 record for first-year coach Gary Rutter. Mike Messer got Plymouth off to a good start when he dashed three yards with 1:15 left in the first period for the first score of the game. Jim Wallace kicked the extra point.

Plymouth drove 46 yards in five plays for its first score of the night, following a Seneca East punt. Late in the second period the winners took over on downs at

STATISTICS		SE	P
First Downs (total)		9	13
Rushes (number)		109	157
net yards gained			
Forward Passing			
attempted	11	6	
complete	1	3	
had intercepted	1	1	
net yards gained	1	58	
Total net yards gained	110	215	
Fumbles (number)	3	2	
ball lost	2	2	
Penalties (number)	7	7	
yards penalized	55	55	
SUMMARY			
Seneca East	0	0	6
Plymouth	7	6	14
SCORING:			
P-Messer, 3 run. (Wallace, kick).			
P-Mack, 8 run. (pass failed).			
P-Cunningham, 5 run. (Wallace, kick).			
P-McKenzie, 21 pass from Miller. (Wallace, kick).			
SE-Siesel, 1 run. (kick failed).			

yards. Plymouth held a 13-0 halftime lead.

Jim Cunningham scored the first points of the second half on a five yard run with 9:19 left in the third stanza. Wallace again added the bonus kick. The Big Red drove only five yards in two plays following a Seneca East fumble for the score.

Marty McKenzie capped Plymouth's longest drive of the night when he took a 21 yard pass from Tom Miller with 15 seconds left in the third period to conclude his team's scoring. The drive covered 76 yards in 10 plays following a Seneca East punt.

Seneca East finally got on the board with 3:12 remaining in the game when Greg Siesel went over from the one. The score was set up by a Plymouth fumble at the two.

their 37 and drove the distance in three plays with Charlie Mack going eight

## Browns Hurting

CLEVELAND (UPI) — As the Cleveland Browns held their last heavy practice Friday for Sunday's home game with the Philadelphia Eagles, it appeared possible regular running backs Greg Pruitt and Cleo Miller might not start.

Pruitt has been bothered for three weeks with an ankle sprain he suffered

in Cleveland's victory over San Diego while Miller, who doesn't wear hip pads, aggravated a hip pointer in last week's victory over Houston.

If they cannot start Larry Poole will take Pruitt's place and rookie Mike Pruitt (no relation) would step in for Miller.

For at least one Brown — defensive end Joe "Turkey" Jones — a milestone passed during the week's practices. One year ago the Eagles, who had obtained him in trade from the Browns, cut him from the team.

The Browns promptly picked him up again; by late last season he was playing regularly; and this year he "is playing better than he ever has," according to defensive line coach Dick Modzelewski.

"He's as good at playing the trap as any of our linemen. He's been working hard and has done all that I asked," Mo added.

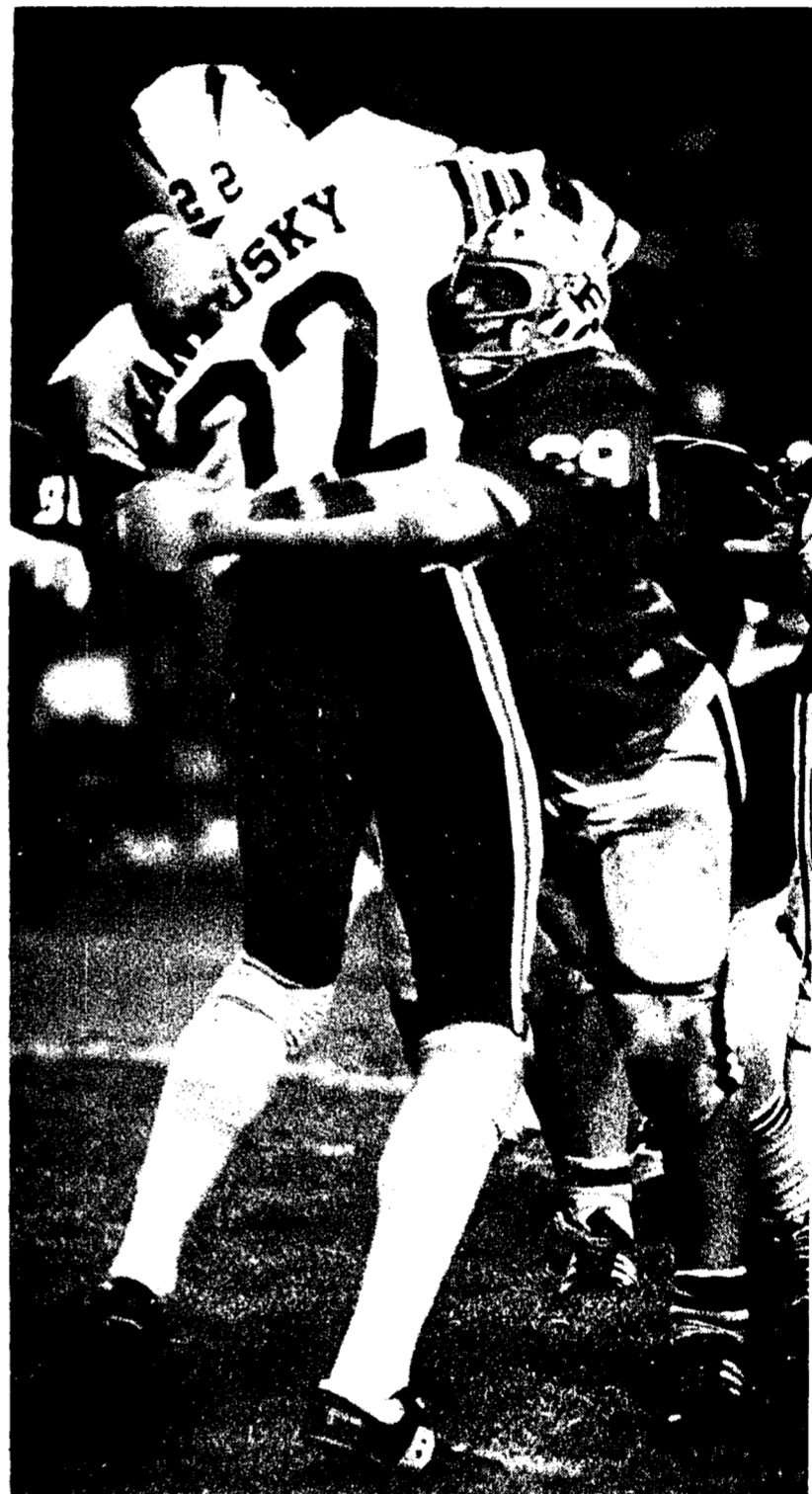
Jones, previewing the game against the team that gave up on him, said "I hope I do well, but that's not because I'm mad at anybody. It's just that the game is so important for us trying to make the playoffs."

The Browns, at 5-4, are tied for second in the AFC Central Division and have a chance at a wild card playoff slot.

"There was nothing wrong with the Philadelphia organization. They treated me fine," Jones said. "It was just a disagreement between the coach (Mike McCormack) and me. I guess it's right to say I was released for disciplinary reasons."

It was understood Jones left the team for personal reasons but stayed away longer than McCormack had sanctioned.

STATISTICS		L	E
First Downs (total)		12	10
by rushing		12	9
by passing		0	0
by penalty		0	1
Rushes (number)		54	41
net yards gained		175	146
attempted		1	6
complete		0	1
had intercepted		0	0
net yards gained		0	6
Total Plays (rushes and passes)		55	47
Total net yards gained		175	152
Fumbles (number)		2	2
ball lost		0	2
yards penalized		22	19
SUMMARY			
Lorain	8	0	6
Elyria	7	0	0
SCORING:			
Lorain — Popovich, 99 yard punt return. (Bob Muzio, kick).			
Elyria — J. Oliver, 9 run. (Bates, run).			
Lorain — Popovich, 4 run. (pass failed).			



(Register Photo — BIL BOWDEN)

PAUL BIDDLE UNLOADS JUST IN NICK OF TIME ... popped by Fremont's ever present Mark Gysan

## Sandusky...

continued from page B-1.

to open the third quarter, it was all Fremont as Bates and Kusmer rammed up the middle repeatedly and the tiring

Streak defenders just couldn't contain the powerful tandem.

Fremont claimed the crown with a 5-1 conference record, while Findlay added 4-2-1 and Elyria also finished with the same mark.

The Little Giants had 296 yards rushing and were two-for-two in the passing department, both key receptions to keep drives alive which ultimately resulted in a touchdown and a field goal.

Sandusky was only three of 14 in the aerial game as both Paul Biddle and Redding had little luck. Either they had passes dropped by wide-open receivers or they completely overthrew the intended receivers.

STATISTICS		S	Fr.
First Downs (total)		9	13
by rushing		7	11
by passing		2	2
by penalty		0	0
Rushes (number)		34	54
net yards gained		130	261
attempted		14	2
complete		3	2
had intercepted		2	0
yards gained			
net yards gained		43	35
Total Plays (rushes and passes)		48	56
Total net yards gained		173	296
Fumbles (number)		0	0
ball lost		0	0
Penalties (number)		0	0
yards penalized		8	3
SUMMARY			
Sandusky	0	3	0
Fremont Ross	10	0	7
SCORING:			
Fremont — Kusmer, 32 run. (Mvers, kick).			
Fremont — Mvers, 30-yard field goal.			
Sandusky — Watson, 25-yard field goal.			
Fremont — Bates, 11 run. (Mvers, kick).			
Fremont — Davis, 30 run. (Mvers, kick).			

## Lorain Decks Elyria

Steve Popovich is the toast of Fremont. And he is the Lorain Senior quarterback.

Popovich supplied the kayo punch to Elyria's bid for a share of the Buckeye Conference football championship Friday night with a 99-yard punt return.

The senior veteran, in fact, scored both touchdowns in the Steelers' 13-8 triumph.

Elyria was knocking at the door early in the game and had a first and goal at the two when the hosts were called for a delay of game penalty. It was costly as the Pioneers failed to go in.

After an exchange of punts, Popovich was standing at the goal-line as John Gollmer's 48-yard punt sailed over his head. Popovich retreated and waited as the on-rushing Pioneers closed in. He suddenly scooped the ball up and zipped by a wave of Elyria defenders and broke into the open. He sailed behind a wall and scampered 99 yards to paydirt. Bob Musio's kick made the score 7-0.

Elyria came right back and marched 57 yards in six plays to score on the last play of the first period. Jerry Oliver covered the last nine yards and Brian Balser earned the bonus points for an 8-7 lead.

After one quarter, Lorain had just three offensive plays for minus one yard, and still had seven points. Elyria had 76 yards, all on the ground, for its eight points.

Lorain marched 55 yards in 13 rushing plays for the go-ahead score at the outset of the second half. Brad Williams carried seven times, but it was Popovich slipping in from the four at the 6:11 mark and Lorain made the five-point lead stand up.

The Steelers had a chance to add another score in the waning seconds of play after Elyria gambled and failed deep in its own territory.

Elyria finished 4-2-1 in the conference, one game behind Fremont (5-1-1) which won its third undisputed crown in the last four years. Findlay ruled in 1975. Lorain finished at 4-3 in the Buckeye and 7-3 overall.

Findlay, which had a chance of earning a four-way tie for the title, annihilated Admiral King, 33-7, as Andy Schramm closed out a great career with 201 yards rushing. The 215-pound tailback finished with 1,017 yards and 18 touchdowns. He had 1,202 yards in 1975.

Schramm bulldozed over from the four in the first period, dashed 18 yards in the second stanza.

Schramm scored on runs of four and 18 yards in the third canto.

The Trojans broke away from a 7-7 tie on Schramm's 18-yard gallop and it was all Findlay the rest of the way.

In the other conference finale, Mansfield blanked Marion, 20-0, to finish its season with a fine 7-3 mark under coach Dave Pierce.

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