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## **Caulcrick's Freshman Season A Success Despite PSU Loss**

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. - I hadn't been to a Penn State football game in 18 years.

The last time I was in Happy Valley, Shane Conlan, Frewsburg's favorite son, was just winding up his All-American career, knocking heads with the Pittsburgh Panthers on a glorious fall afternoon.

But when the interviews were over and I'd made the long walk back to my car, I couldn't help but wonder if I'd seen the Nittany Lions in person for the last time.

After all, how often can you possibly count on a young man from Chautauqua or Cattaraugus counties finding his way to college football's biggest stage? Granted, a number of area athletes have played Division 1 football, particularly at the University of Buffalo in recent years, but rarely does one line up and play in the Big Ten, one of the toughest conferences in the land.

But there I was sitting in the pressbox high atop Beaver Stadium late Saturday morning, watching every move of Michigan State running back Jehuu Caulcrick, who, just two years ago, was setting records against the likes of Randolph, Maple Grove and Ellicottville high schools.

He stretched, he ran pregame drills, supervised by his position coach, and then he sprinted into the tunnel at the end of the gigantic 110,000-seat stadium. Game time was less than 30 minutes away,

And I said to myself, "Jehuu's not in Clymer anymore."

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It was a "homecoming" that Caulcrick would have liked to forget.

For the redshirt freshman, his trip to Happy Valley - a little more than a three-hour drive from where he grew up in Findley Lake - was an exercise in frustration, most of it spent on the sidelines, as the Spartans saw their postseason hopes evaporate amidst a sea of second-half turnovers.

One week after routing fourth-ranked Wisconsin, 49-14, the Spartans (5-6) limped out of Beaver Stadium, tagged with a 37-13 loss to the struggling Nittany Lions (4-7) and, in the process, were eliminated from bowl consideration.

Twenty-eight unanswered points in the third quarter left Michigan State reeling.

"I didn't have a good feeling all week," Spartan coach John L. Smith said.

And Caulcrick, who was coming off a career best 146 rushing yards against the Badgers, managed just 12 yards on six carries and caught one pass for 21 yards on the game's final play.

"We just came out flat," Caulcrick said afterward. "Things weren't clicking as we'd planned."

"Mistake, after mistake, after mistake," Smith said.

Still, on the whole, Caulcrick's first season as a member of the active roster has to be deemed a success.

With one game remaining at Hawaii in two weeks, Caulcrick has rushed for 587 yards and scored four touchdowns, while splitting time in the backfield with senior DeAndra Cobb and junior Jason Teague.

In addition to his breakout game against Wisconsin - his photograph appeared in *Sports Illustrated* this week - Caulcrick has also had strong games against Central Michigan (15 carries, 67 yards, one touchdown) Notre Dame (15-85), Illinois (16-85) and Minnesota (13-94-2), which have earned him the respect of his teammates.

"He's brought a lot of energy to the team," said senior linebacker Tyrell Dortch. "He's brought the rushing game back to MSU. He's brought physicality to the offense. He's a pounder ... and he'll be a great back. He works very hard, day in and day out."

Caulcrick admitted the Wisconsin game was special, but was quick to point out the contributions of the guys up front.

"Going into that game, someone came up to me in the locker room and said that I was going to have a good game," he said. "I went out there and it happened. The offensive line did a great job. They did most of the work."

Among his 13 carries, he had runs of 17, 31 and 59 yards, the latter his longest of the season.

Dortch, a running back before being switched to a linebacker in preseason, said Caulcrick reminds him of former Spartan, T. J. Duckett, now with the Atlanta Falcons.

"Jehuu's got speed and he's got power," Dortch said. "He can get going downfield. He reminds me of T. J. a lot. Next year, he'll break out, I think."

"That's pretty flattering," Caulcrick admitted, "but I haven't done much yet to be compared to him."

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Caulcrick emerged from the Spartans' locker room and was greeted by a host of well-wishers from back home. He received hugs, handshakes and slaps on the back. It was fairly typical stuff for a young man who has made a habit of being the center of everyone's attention since he first donned a helmet and shoulder pads five years ago as

a freshman at Clymer Central.

"It's very disappointing that I didn't perform in front of them and the team couldn't win," he said.

But it's my guess that the Clymer contingent, win or lose, is happy to call No. 30 in the green and white jersey one of their own.