



Class Act

Penn State offensive lineman **STEFEN WISNIEWSKI** is making a big impact on the field and in the classroom

BY VINNY PEZZIMENTI

Photographs by
MICHAEL J. LeBRECHT/IDEUCE3 PHOTOGRAPHY

Stefen Wisniewski isn't the type of player most people notice on a football field. He doesn't score touchdowns, and you're unlikely to find fans wearing his number 61 jersey. But Penn State's All-Big Ten offensive lineman plays a major role in keeping the Nittany Lions' offense humming. Wisniewski, the starting center, snaps the ball to quarterback Daryll Clark and also determines the blocking schemes that allow nationally-ranked Penn State to run and pass efficiently.

While he may not be in the spotlight on the gridiron, off the field, Wisniewski — all 6'3", 302 pounds of him — stands before a captive audience five days a week as a student-teacher at a local high school. Defying the stereotype of a dumb jock, Wisniewski is also a straight-A student who was a second-team Academic All-America in 2008 and is very active in community service.

SI TEEN spent a day with Wisniewski to find out how he is able to balance all his responsibilities so successfully.

School Ties

While most of the students on the Penn State campus are still

sleeping, Wisniewski gets up before 7 a.m. and is soon on his way to nearby State College Area High School. A secondary education major, he started student-teaching there this fall as part of his class requirements. This semester, Wisniewski is teaching English to 10th-graders.

In the classroom, Wisniewski is comfortable with the students, some of whom ask for his autograph when they find out he plays for the Nittany Lions. During this day, he spends most of his time working with his class on the children's books that they have created as part of a project. He makes sure the kids stay on task but also jokes around with them when the time is right. "They're always asking football questions," Wisniewski says. "If it's a time when they should be working, I'll get them back to work. But I'm happy to talk about it when it's a lighter time. They think it's cool that their teacher is a football player."

Wisniewski wants to be a teacher so he can use the knowledge he has gained to positively affect others. But during the season, football is never far from his mind. In between periods, Wisniewski slips to the back of the classroom to briefly watch game film of Penn State's upcoming opponent on his laptop.

The schedule is demanding, but Wisniewski wouldn't have it

FULL SCHEDULE

When he gets a break from teaching a high school English class, Wisniewski studies his upcoming opponent. After his teaching duties are finished, he hustles back to campus for practice, where he gets in some additional reps snapping the ball.



any other way. “The hardest thing is finding time for everything,” Wisniewski says. “That’s the only challenge, because when I’m [teaching], I’m enjoying it.”

Center of Attention

Wisniewski’s responsibilities at school cause him to arrive a few minutes late for the Nittany Lions’ daily 2:45 p.m. meeting, which is used to study film and establish the game plan for their upcoming opponent. His coaches understand his responsibilities as a teacher, so they cut him some slack.

Practice begins at 4:30, but centers need to be on the field early to work on snapping. Wisniewski is glad for the extra reps. He played guard last season but shifted to center this year because it made the most sense with Penn State’s current roster. Wisniewski hadn’t played center since he was a freshman in high school, and the transition has been challenging. Center is one of the most complex offensive positions. Before every snap Wisniewski calls out the blocking scheme for his fellow offensive linemen based on what alignment the defense is in.

Wisniewski put in extra effort this off-season to prepare for the change, working hard on the technical aspects of his game, such as footwork and reading defenses. “He’s got a terrific work ethic,” says Wisniewski’s father, Leo, a former Penn State and NFL player. “He’s always willing to put in extra time beyond what is required of him.” Through the first five games of this season, Wisniewski had helped Penn State average 169.4 rushing yards per game, while allowing only seven sacks.

On this day, the Nittany Lions practice for about an hour in

shoulder pads and helmets. The workout is light compared to some days, when Wisniewski can easily lose five pounds in sweat during a demanding practice. But every practice comes with its share of bumps and bruises, so Wisniewski heads to the training room for treatment afterward.

Family Bonds

Football has always been a big deal for the Wisniewski family. His dad played three seasons as a nose tackle for the Baltimore-Indianapolis Colts. His uncle, Steve, also starred at Penn State before heading to the NFL. He spent 13 seasons as a guard for the Los Angeles-Oakland Raiders, earning eight Pro Bowl trips.

Some of Stefen’s fondest memories from his childhood in the Pittsburgh area are of traveling to watch his Uncle Steve play. Those trips planted the seed of an NFL career in his mind. “I thought, That’s what I want to do someday,” Wisniewski recalls. But on this day, his focus is on eating dinner with some teammates before settling in for an evening of grading papers and watching even more game film. Both activities should figure prominently in Wisniewski’s future. “God willing, I’ll make the NFL for a little while,” he says. “I can always be a teacher later.”

It is after 10 p.m. when Wisniewski turns the lights out on another long and eventful day. But before he hits the sack, he offers up one last thought. “Tomorrow I’ll do it all over again.” ■

BIG MAN ON CAMPUS

After having dinner with some teammates, Wisniewski prepares for class and then enjoys some rare down time in his dorm room before heading to bed so he can get some rest before doing it all again the next day.