

'Whatever gets me on the field'

BY MIKE NIXON
For SN Today

Last week, we had our Pac-10 opener against Stanford. They were coming off a good victory against Oregon State. They try to pound the ball to set up the pass, so we were fortunate that our offense was able to get a lead. That kind of took them out of their game plan and forced them to air it out. I really believe they thought they were just going to run it down our throats all game, but because we grabbed the lead, they weren't able to do that.

We didn't really give up any big plays. I think they had maybe two or three plays over 20 yards, and that was it. That's huge when you're trying to play bend-but-don't-break defense.

I can kind of play all three linebacker positions. In our first game, a win over Northern Arizona, I came off the bench. Being versatile helps get me on the field, and it helps us get different guys rest, and I really have no issues coming off the bench. I still feel like I'm getting 50 or 60 percent of the snaps throughout the game. Last week, I got to start at the WILL position and played probably 90 percent of the snaps, so week in and week out, whatever they ask of me, whatever gets me on the field, that's where I'm going to be.

This week, I'll be starting again because one of our linebackers is having pinkie surgery. We play UNLV. They're kind of like Northern Arizona in that they're coming from a smaller conference, and they try to spread you out, and you have to be prepared for anything in the book. They'll give you 20 different looks of spread offense, which in the past has been our Achilles' heel, so it's good to play some of these games.

Two of our losses last year were against Oregon, which runs a complete



PAUL CONNORS/AP

If Arizona State LB Mike Nixon keeps taking down players the way he took down Stanford WR Richard Sherman, Nixon shouldn't have any trouble getting playing time.

spread offense, and Texas, which runs quite a bit of it. Coming into this year, we realized that if we want to end up where we want to be—a potential Rose Bowl opportunity—then we're going to have to get better at defending against the spread offense, and games like this are a stepping-stone to that.

—As told to Jim Ryan



About the author

Mike Nixon Arizona State LB
Thanks to a minor league baseball career, the 25-year-old is just a junior. Through two games this season, he leads 2-0 Sun Devils in tackles with 15.

Bruno's dough balls are Thursday staple

BY CURTIS PAINTER
For SN Today

Every Thursday night, I go out with my starting offensive line and get pizza. It's a chance for us to get away and have a good time. All cell phones must be off—nobody is allowed to use the cell phones for anything—and we all sit around, talk football, eat pizza and watch the Thursday night college game.

It's been going on for a few years here. Previous quarterbacks have done it and we kept the tradition going. We always go to Bruno's, a local place down here in West Lafayette.

You'd be surprised that we can never finish all the pizza. They're big pizzas, but I think we get too stuffed on the breadsticks before, these little dough balls we dip in cheese. There are six of us—myself and the five starting linemen—and each pair of us shares a pizza. So we have three pizzas and it's always kind of a competition to see how much we can eat. I sit with Cory (Benton), the center, and we never can finish one. But it's funny when somebody actual does finish a full pizza, all the stuff we say to them.

Linemen get overlooked and they're the heart and soul of the offense, so when you can go out and show them you appreciate them, it's important. You need to develop a bond with them. Knowing a person that much better really helps you out on the field. It's a lot easier to work with them and communicate with them.

When I started as a starting quarterback, these Thursday nights were a time for me to get to know them and be part of something. Now you get a new starting



ANDREW HANCOCK/JOURNAL & COURIER

When Purdue QB Curtis Painter drops back to pass, his Thursday night dinner buddies protect him.

lineman who comes into the group, and they don't feel like they're alone. To be part of something, especially away from football, really helps out a lot.

—As told to Derek Samson

About the author



Curtis Painter
Purdue QB
Painter is second on Purdue's career completion percentage list (.599), fourth in completions (760), fourth in passing yards (8,763), fourth in touchdowns (54) and fourth in total offense (9,101). Last week, he threw for 286 yards and two touchdowns in a win over Northern Colorado.