

# **RB Day overcomes obstacles to earn opportunity**

**By Timothy Schoen**  
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UNIVERSITY PARK -- One word comes to Central Dauphin head coach Glen McNamee's mind when he thinks about the possibility of Derek Day starting at running back this weekend for Penn State.

“Wow.”

And that is not because Day's high school coach is at all surprised his former star running back and team leader has risen to the top of the Penn State depth chart. It is the journey that makes his former coach take a step back and smile.

"Saturday, if you think about where he has come from and what he has overcome, is a very special day," McNamee said by phone Wednesday night.

It was a fall night in November of 2007 that almost ended Day's dream.

Then a senior at Central Dauphin, Day lay helpless on the turf in tremendous pain after severely fracturing his tibia and fibula. His senior season and high school career, where he ran for more than 1,500 yards, were over in one freak play.

But McNamee said Day doesn't run into roadblocks, rather he encounters speed bumps along the way.

Before the injury, Day was gaining interest from different Division I-AA schools such as Delaware and New Hampshire. But the injury caused those schools to back off and only offer Day a preferred walk-on spot, if anything at all.

However, the injury did open up a new opportunity to Day and his family. Penn State became a viable option for him to continue his academic and athletic careers as a preferred walk-on.

McNamee said the Nittany Lions were one of the few schools to believe in Day after his injury. "I see it [the injury] as a blessing in disguise because I don't know if I'd be at Penn State if this didn't happen," Day said of his situation.

After Penn State assistant coach Larry Johnson was confident that Day's leg would heal and he would be able to play football again, the coach offered him a preferred walk-on spot. Day accepted the offer immediately.

Day was put on scholarship before last season.

"He was a football player through and through, and he knew he was going to be playing football once he left college, it was just a matter of where," McNamee said.

Day redshirted in 2008 and he was a steady special teams performer for the Lions for two seasons. Last season, he saw the first carries of his college career.

This year Day has worked himself into the rotation at running back for Penn State, and come Saturday afternoon against Virginia there is a good possibility the senior will make the start at running back.

"Whether it was early in the weight room or on the practice field, I just wanted these coaches to know how much I care about this team and I want to contribute to winning football games," Day said.

During Wednesday's portion of practice that was open to the media, Bill Belton was held out with an ankle injury that he suffered during Saturday's loss to Ohio. Coach Bill O'Brien said during his weekly press conference Belton would most likely have to practice today in order to play on Saturday.

Day was working with the first unit on Wednesday and redshirt sophomore Zack Zwinak ran with the number twos.

The senior said if you were to ask him last year if he would have been in the position he is now, he would have been somewhat surprised. But his hard work in the offseason and on the practice field has prepared him to carry the load if needed.

"I don't exactly know what I was expecting," the senior said when asked of his expectations coming into the season. "I just wanted to get myself ready so I felt as though I should be in this position."

Many of the Lions have called Day one of the hardest workers on the team. Offensive tackle Mike Farrell said that he appreciates blocking for him because he runs so hard and never takes a play off.

Day's high school coach echoed the Penn State players' sentiments and called him the most driven kid he has ever been around.

"He is incredibly hard working and he is a tremendous leader," McNamee said. "I know that word gets thrown around a lot, but he was a true leader and a guy that other people followed and he made the kids around him better."

Last week, Day was rewarded by O'Brien for his leadership and was named one of the captains for the Ohio game.

McNamee said that while Saturday will be a major accomplishment for his former player, it will hardly be the culmination. The coach said Day still has much to accomplish and play for in his final season of football.

"So many people throughout the state and country are going to get to know the story that we have known for so long," McNamee, "and that is what I think is great for everyone to know how special Derek Day is."