

MSU aiming for comeback

On and off the field, Spartans look to bounce back

BY LARRY LAGE
AP Sports Writer

EAST LANSING — Michigan State hopes this is the year of the comeback for the Spartans.

The team is coming off a horrible season on the field and an embarrassing one off it.

Quarterback Jeff Smoker is back as the starter after a substance-abuse problem cut short his junior season. And running back Tyrell Dortch hasn't played in nearly two years after breaking his right leg in gruesome fashion.

The Spartans started last season with hype and high expectations, with some even believing they could wind up at the Rose Bowl for the first time since 1988.

Michigan State was ranked 15th after a 2-0 start, but finished 4-8 overall — its worst record in 11 years.

Coach Bobby Williams was fired with three games remaining as his program collapsed against opponents and was in internal disarray. Smoker was kicked off the team with five games left in the season, and his family later announced he was seeking treatment for substance abuse.

Running back Dawan Moss, a captain, was arrested and later spent time in jail for driving under the influence and attempting to elude police after Michigan handed the Spartans a 49-3 loss, their worst defeat since 1947.

"We fell apart last year in

every way," receiver Kyle Brown said. "We cost a man his job. We cost a university respect, and we wasted pride for our program.

"People think of Michigan State as a party school, not a place where people take care of business on and off the field.

"We've got to change that because people joke about us now. We've got to let people know there's a new Michigan State program around here."

Michigan State lured John L. Smith away from Louisville with a \$9 million, six-year contract to replace Williams and to rebuild a fourth football program.

"The turmoil is hopefully over here," Smith said.

The Spartans have led the Big Ten in one category over the past three decades: number of coaches (eight).

Michigan State has been not put together back-to-back seasons with at least eight wins since 1966.

Smith — who turned around Louisville, Utah State and Idaho over the past 14 seasons — ranks 13th among active NCAA I-A coaches with 110 wins. His teams have been to bowl games the past six seasons, including the past five at Louisville.

"The only thing different is the faces," Smith said. "The problems have been the same wherever we've been."

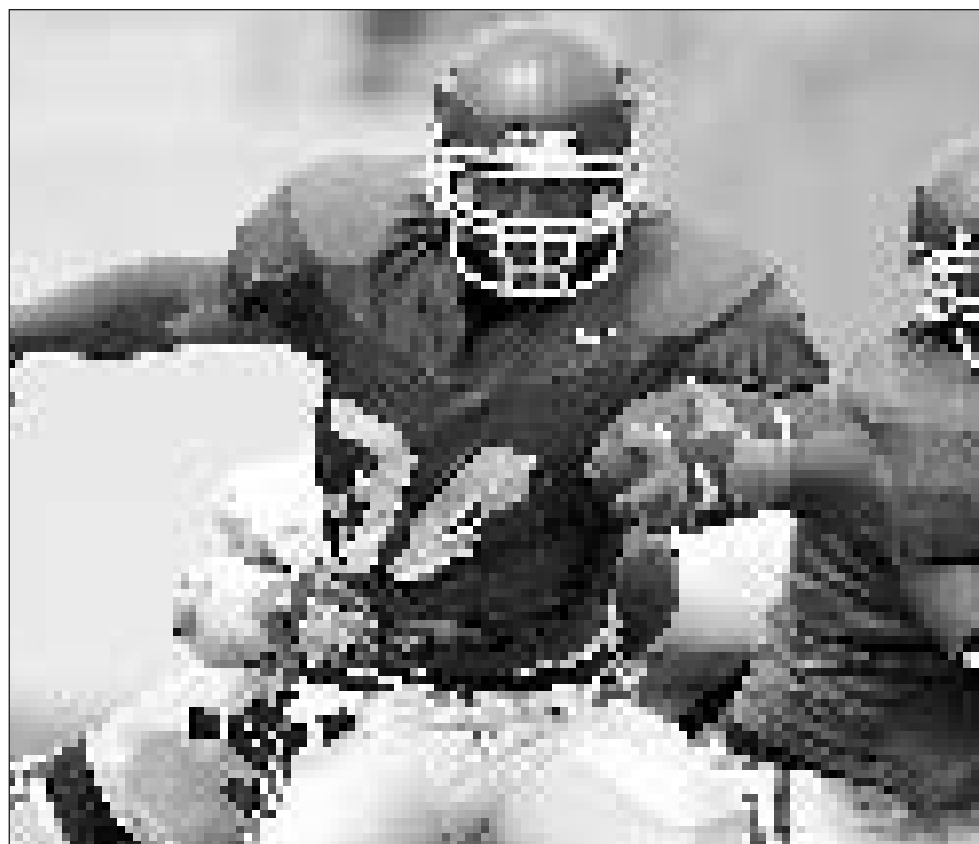
Michigan State returns six starters on offense, including four linemen, and eight on defense.

Dortch may not be the team's No. 1 running back, but is expected to play a significant role.

"Tyrell should be the starter, but he just has got to get the injury out of his head to be the guy," Smith said.

Dortch agreed.

"It will probably take the first game for me to see where I'm at," said Dortch, whose last game was on Oct.



The Associated Press

Tailback Tyrell Dortch is one of several Spartans players looking to rebound and have a successful season.



Smith

27, 2001, at Wisconsin.

The biggest void may be a big-play receiver because Charles Rogers decided to skip his senior season and was picked second overall by the Detroit Lions.

Matt Trannon, a 6-foot-6 receiver, will get a chance to shine after being academically ineligible as a freshman.

Smith knows a key to his short-term success will be whether Smoker can stay sober and show he's still the same player who threw 21 touchdowns and just eight interceptions two years ago.

"It will be one of the great success stories in all of college athletics," Smith predicted.

Smoker is just thankful for the second chance.

"I may have done some wrong things, but I can still do good things for this university and this team," he said.

Smoker, who has started in 24 games and thrown 40 TDs in three years, will direct a wide-open, pass-happy offense that will at times look like the schemes used at Purdue and Northwestern.

"I like it a lot," Smoker said. "Any quarterback likes to throw the ball, and we throw the ball a lot in this offense."

2003 MICHIGAN STATE SCHEDULE

Day	Date	Opponent	Time
Sat.	Aug. 30	vs. Western Michigan	3:40 p.m.
Sat.	Sep. 6	vs. Rutgers	3:40 p.m.
Sat.	Sep. 13	vs. Louisiana Tech	12:10 p.m.
Sat.	Sep. 20	at Notre Dame	2:30 p.m.
Sat.	Sep. 27	vs. Iowa	TBA
Sat.	Oct. 4	vs. Indiana (Homecoming)	Noon
Sat.	Oct. 11	at Illinois	TBA
Sat.	Oct. 18	at Minnesota	TBA
Sat.	Nov. 1	vs. Michigan	TBA
Sat.	Nov. 8	at Ohio State	TBA
Sat.	Nov. 15	at Wisconsin	TBA
Sat.	Nov. 22	vs. Penn State	TBA

2002 STATS

RUSHING

Player	Att	Yards	TD
David Richard	133	654	5
Dawan Moss	125	592	4
JAREN HAYES	61	340	4
Charles Rogers	6	74	0

RECEIVING

Player	Rec	Yds	TD
Charles Rogers	68	1351	13
ERIC KNOTT	35	349	4
B.J. Lovett	33	383	4
J. RANDALL	20	255	3

PASSING

Player	Att	Comp	Pct	Yds	TD	Int
JEFF SMOKER	203	114	56.2	1593	13	10
DAMON DOWDELL	165	92	55.8	1097	10	4

DEFENSIVE

Player	Solo	Ast	Total	Sack	Fum	Int
Thomas Wright	86	40	126	2	0	4
RONALD STANLEY	61	38	99	2	0	0
MONQUIZ WEDLOW	61	29	90	3	0	0
JASON HARMON	46	18	64	0	0	0
MIKE LABINJO	38	24	62	1	1	1
Demario Suggs	41	14	55	0	2	1

2002 RESULTS

Michigan St. 56, E. Michigan 7
Michigan St. 27, Rice 10
California 46, Michigan St. 22
Notre Dame 21, Michigan St. 17
Michigan St. 39, N'western 24
Iowa 44, Michigan St. 16
Minnesota 28, Michigan St. 7
Wisconsin 42, Michigan St. 24
Michigan 49, Michigan State 3
Michigan St. 56, Indiana 21
Purdue 45, Michigan St. 42
Penn State 61, Michigan St. 7