



HEADGAMES

Penn State's sport psychologist Dave Yukelson helps student-athletes achieve their best, both on and off the field.

By Krista Weidner

Penn State's all-time football scoring leader Kevin Kelly says his biggest problem from day one was trying to do too much too fast when he kicked. "For some reason I would try to kick the ball as fast and as hard as I could, and the combination of both of those things was a recipe for disaster," says Kelly. "Dr. Yuke helped me figure out how to slow down using visualization techniques."

"Dr. Yuke" is Dave Yukelson, director of Penn State's Sport Psychology Services, who

came to Penn State nearly 30 years ago as part of Joe Paterno's "Grand Experiment" to build a football team that would excel in the classroom and on the field. Paterno realized the pressures that student-athletes experienced and thought that a full-time sport psychologist would be a valuable resource for the athletes as well as the coaches. Yukelson was hired in 1987 and since then has been an ear, sounding board and friend to more than 4,000 student-athletes and coaches, including Kelly, who was the Nittany Lions' starting placekicker from 2005 to 2008.

"Kevin was one of those kids who got what it was about," Yukelson says. "I would tell him, 'The kicker is what you do, it's not who you are.' But how do you get to the next kick and not worry about what happened last time?"

When athletes try too hard and think too much, they get stuck in a "mental goo," Yukelson says, and they get in their own

way. His role is to help student-athletes overcome the mental goo and get back into the rhythm and tempo of the game.

Yukelson introduces himself to teams at the beginning of each school year, taking a few minutes at team meetings to let the student-athletes know who he is and what he does. Throughout the year, he shows up at various practices. "I'm there in the athletes' world, and I understand the demands and pressures," he says. "I know the commitment

