

Now, if there is any other tradition that symbolizes Penn State in the same vein as tailgating, the Lion shrine, the Nittany Lion mascot and the blue and white colors, it has to be the cheer **"We Are... Penn State!"** Some older alumni who remember many popular cheers of

Tailgating is as much a Penn State tradition on game days as wearing blue and white.

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the 1930s and '40s aren't too happy when they hear **"We Are... Penn State!"** They remember the bygone tradition of each senior class developing an original cheer and they liked it better when cheerleaders with megaphones actually led the fans in yelling specific cheers rather than do somersaults, handstands and other gymnastic acrobatics. But today, those simple words, **"We Are... Penn State!"** are shouted everywhere Penn Staters gather, and when 97,000 yell the phrase as a national television audience looks on, it has impact. Penn State's sports rivals detest the phrase as much as we dislike such chants as Alabama's **"Roll Tide"** and Ohio State's **"Go Bucks."**

What few people know about the cheer, however, is where it came from and when it began. It was not an overnight success, either. We can thank three of our football rivals — and loyal fans aren't going to like this, but one of them was Ohio State, of all schools! In the mid-1970s, PSU cheerleaders were looking for a new cheer to get alumni more involved in cheering at games. In creating the "We Are... Penn State!" masterpiece, cheerleaders of that era say they were influenced by the Lions' game at Ohio State in 1975, the game at Kentucky in 1976 and a television game where Southern Cal was playing some other team in the Los Angeles Coliseum.

"At Ohio State, we watched as this loud roar of 'O-I-I' rolled down the field to an 'I-O,' recalled Don Mains, the cheerleaders' microphone man from 1975-77. Bob Krimmel, now an assistant athletic director, is a former cheerleader, and was cheerleader advisor from 1975 to '77. He recalls watching Southern Cal on TV and hearing a chant, "We Are SC", with the entire crowd yelling it at the same time. "We thought that might work," Krimmel said." When the cheerleaders first tried out the cheer with the student section in the first three games of the 1976 season, it fell flat. Then the team went to Kentucky for a night game. "There was this unbelievable roar back and forth across the stadium, with one half yelling 'blue' and the other half screaming 'white,' Krimmel remembers. "We knew that would work for us."

However, former cheerleaders say it took years for the cheer to catch on. "It wasn't until '81 or '82 that the entire stadium got into it," said Lee Giannone, a cheerleader in the early 1980s and later the team advisor. "We had to work section by section," says Tom Twardzik. "I don't think it

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really took off until after we left and after loudspeakers were installed and a second [cheerleading] squad was sent to the press box sideline," said Jeff Fiddler, captain and "mike" man in 1977. George Dennis, cheerleader captain in 1975, is credited with adding "**Thank You!**" at the end of the cheer. Naturally, the fans began responding, "**You're Welcome!**"

This also was the cheerleading era that produced the "**When We Say, Joe**" cheer and the now familiar "**JoePa**" chant. The germination of the phrase apparently started, again, with cheerleaders trying to get fans more involved. Fiddler says cheerleader Bob Samon devised the

cheer in the winter of 1978, patterning it after the yell. [Cheerleaders:] "**When We Say, Joe, You Say Paterno... Joe...** [Fans:] **Paterno... Joe... Paterno.**" As the years went by, the "Terno" was drowned out and, the "**JoePa**" tradition began.