The “PAT” era

In 1973, the honor of reading “I Am An American” went to Roy Johnson, a Purdue alumnus serving as Associate Registrar when he retired after twenty-five years. Purdue football fans soon linked Johnson’s distinctive reading with the “America the Beautiful” accompaniment.

In 1975, Purdue agricultural staffers W. H. “Bill” Daniel and Melvin Robey developed a natural-turf playing field to counter Astro-Rurf™. They called it Prescription Athletic Turf (PAT). At a cost of about $125,000, Purdue installed the homegrown PAT in Ross-Ade Stadium that year. PAT featured grass sown above a network of pipes sixteen inches below the surface and covered with a mixture of sand and fill. The pipes connected to pumps capable of draining the field to keep it playable in heavy rain or pumping water back to the grass in dry spells. Considered a perfect compromise between natural grass and artificial turf, a PAT field could be kept playable and virtually divot-proof.

Agase coached four Purdue teams to eighteen wins, twenty-five losses, and one tie. In 1973, his team won five and lost six. Six home games—against Miami of Ohio, Notre Dame, Duke, Northwestern, Michigan State, and Michigan—attracted more than 346,000,
nearly 57,700 per game. In 1974, the team won four, lost six, and
tied once. Six home games drew 338,800—56,475 per game. Next
year, Purdue won four and lost seven. Attendance at six home
games averaged 59,428. In 1976, Agase’s last Purdue squad won
five and lost six. Crowds at the six home games again averaged
about 59,000.

Before the 1977 season Purdue hired Ohio native Jim Young from
the University of Arizona to succeed Agase. Young coached at Pur-
due for five seasons. In the process he emphasized forward pass-
ing to match the talent of star quarterback Mark Herrmann from
Indianapolis.

In 1977, Purdue won five games and lost six. Six home games
drew crowds that averaged 57,600. This marked a slippage of
about 2,000, but Young’s 1978 team won eight games, lost two, tied
one, and trounced Georgia Tech forty-one to twenty-one in the
post-season Peach Bowl game in Atlanta. Home attendance for six
games bounced back to nearly 62,250, a new record.

The 1979 Boilermakers won ten games for the first time in
school history and lost two. The team edged Tennessee twenty-
seven to twenty-two for the tenth win in the Bluebonnet Bowl in
Houston, Texas. This Purdue team played six Ross-Ade Stadium
games, each before more than 68,900, still another stadium re-
cord.

In 1980, Young’s players won eight and lost three, beating Mis-
souri twenty-eight to twenty-five in the Liberty Bowl. Home game
crowds in Ross-Ade Stadium peaked that year at nearly 70,000 per
game.

After Herrmann’s graduation, the 1981 team won just five times
and lost six, but six Ross-Ade Stadium crowds still averaged
69,900.

Bill Moffitt succeeded Al Wright as director of the Purdue All-
In 1982, Young resigned and his Defensive Coordinator Leon Burtnett took over Purdue football. In each of Burtnett’s first two seasons, Purdue won just three times and stadium attendance lagged. The per-game averages were 66,800.

In 1982, Purdue built an Intercollegiate Athletic Facility north of Mackey Arena. The “IAF” features included a carpeted football locker room rimmed by weight training and football equipment rooms and a players’ lounge. There was an underground connecting tunnel to Mackey Arena. Another tunnel connected Mackey to Lambert Field House where indoor track and varsity swimming events continued.

Burtnett’s 1983 team won three, lost seven, and tied once, but Ross-Ade Stadium patronage stayed strong. Attendance at five games averaged 65,350. In 1984, Purdue won seven, lost four, then lost to Virginia twenty-seven to twenty-four in the Peach Bowl.

Purdue added an elevator to the south end of the Ross-Ade Stadium press box that year, and seven home game crowds averaged more than 65,200. In 1985, Purdue renovated the home team locker room beneath the Ross-Ade Stadium east stands and built a better visiting team locker in the southwest corner of the stadium. Home crowds at six games averaged 63,400.

In 1985, Indiana University Press in Bloomington published Purdue English Professor Arnold L. Lazarus’s book *The Best of George Ade*. The anthology, with a selection of original drawings by John T. McCutcheon, contained samples of Ade’s “Fables in Slang,” short stories, plays, essays, poems, songs, and letters. “Today, alas, [Ade] remains all but forgotten,” Lazarus lamented in his Preface. “It is hoped that *The Best of George Ade* will afford not only entertainment...but also recognition, at last, for George Ade as a humorist of world class” (Lazarus, ix).
For more than sixty years, Ross-Ade Stadium hosted football games played in daytime, but the reality of television and fees paid to U.S. colleges for television rights dictated change. Night television drew vast viewing audiences and huge fees for the rights. “TV” as it came to be known, called many a shot, and schools like Purdue found it profitable to schedule late-day or even night games to accommodate the popular medium.

The first night game at Ross-Ade Stadium took place on October 18, 1986 against Ohio State. Purdue lost that game thirty-nine to eleven. Portable lighting proved to be the only way to illuminate the playing field because the stadium had no permanent lights or towers for lights.

Portable lighting came into use again for a fifty-one to seventeen victory against Toledo, on September 10, 1994, and on September 21, 1996, against West Virginia (a twenty-to-six loss.) Other late afternoon kickoffs requested by TV started in full daylight but required portable lights to finish. The 1986 Boilermakers struggled through three wins and eight losses. Average home attendance was 63,100.

Burtnett’s five teams won twenty-one times, lost thirty-four, and tied one. Beginning in the 1987 season, former Texas head coach Fred Akers took over at Purdue. He fared no better, coaching the team to twelve wins, thirty-one losses, and one tie in four years. Three of the losses came in hard-to-swallow Old Oaken Bucket battles against Indiana. Attendance in Ross-Ade Stadium fell to as little as 34,600 for a game against Minnesota. Akers then gave way to Jim Colletto, hired from the Ohio State coaching staff.

The Purdue All-American Marching Band, by now a long-time favorite of Boilermaker football fans in Ross-Ade Stadium, performed under the baton of David A. Leppla from 1988 until 2006.
Colletto coached Purdue football for six seasons but with scant success. His teams won twenty-one games, lost forty-two, and tied three. Moreover, Ross-Ade Stadium patronage faded steadily. The low point appeared to arrive on November 13, 1993, when less than half the stadium seats were filled—fewer than 31,800—for a twenty-seven to twenty-four loss to Michigan State.

Athletic progress did, however, take place off the gridiron. In February 1990, Purdue dedicated the ten-million-dollar Mollenkopf Athletic Center, north of both Mackey Arena, and the IAF, east of Ross-Ade Stadium. The Center featured an indoor football practice field, weight training room, meeting rooms, and coaches’ offices. The structure measured 420 feet long, 220 feet wide, and was eighty-six feet high at its peak. In the south end of Ross-Ade Stadium, Purdue also installed an electronic scoreboard and message center, costing one million dollars, and an auxiliary scoreboard on the curving north end.

About the time of the U.S. involvement in the Gulf War in the early 1990s the standing football crowds started chiming in on the last line—“I am an American”—and that, too, become a tradition.

Athletic Director George King retired in 1992. In 1993, President Steven C. Beering, who had succeeded President Hansen in 1983, hired Purdue graduate and swimming letterman, Morgan J. Burke, to run the Department of Intercollegiate Athletics. This department was growing at a runaway rate. Women’s sports—swimming, track, volleyball, basketball, softball, and others—were gaining acceptance nationwide. This meant hiring more staff and building and equipping more sports venues. A 1930-1931 Boilermaker halfback, Howard R. “Monk” Kissell, was among the first to help. He donated nearly one million dollars for third floor and mezzanine expansions, in 1994, in the Mollenkopf Center.
That summer, field-level changes in Ross-Ade Stadium included removal of the chain-link fence around the playing field, removal of the paved walkways around the outer edges of the field, and installation of new sod to replace the walkways.

Purdue started an Intercollegiate Athletics Hall of Fame in 1994. After twelve years, there had been ninety-nine inductees, forty of whom were enshrined because of football as players, coaches, or administrators.

In 1996, Coach Colletto’s Purdue team upset Michigan nine to three and won its 200th game in Ross-Ade Stadium, but the team was in the throes of losing eight out of eleven games. Only 39,328—far below stadium capacity—witnessed the landmark.