Mike woman aims to get lions to roar;
finds much to cheer about,
her job’s no chore

By DENISE RYAN
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Sometimes the going gets rough and the crowds get unruly, but that doesn’t daunt Sandrina Blackwell, the smiling dynamo who leads Penn State’s cheers at the football games. “I’m a person of extremes,” grins the 5’6” art major from Philadelphia, her chestnut-brown eyes dancing with self amusement. “Going halfway isn’t worth it.”

Saundra goes all-out for cheerleading, and the fourth term sophomore has more to say about it than the most eloquent cheerleader.

“I should have some type of control,” she says. “It’s a responsible job and it keeps me alert.”

The frenzied enthusiasm of Penn State crowds sometimes borders on violence. Saundra is quite frank about discussing the over-exuberant fans who occasionally hurl paper cups at the squad. “I can see one coming,” she laughs, “but it’s all fun.”

When several freshmen joined the Maryland team’s band at last week’s home game, Saundra’s task was to re-channel their energies into more sportman-like cheers.

Saundra, who confesses to going home and falling asleep after games, says nervousness has courted her throughout some of her earlier games. At the Houston game, she said she almost shouted “Beat Rutgers” but caught the faux pas just in time to say: “Beat Rutgers-Cougars!”

Saundra gets the most reaction from the freshman stands. “Freshman have spunk,” she says. “Sometimes I think they get into cheers more than the games.”

Practicing monopolizes much of Saundra’s free time, usually two hours every night. She praises the squad for its dedication and enthusiasm. “I feel like I’m in a family,” she says.

The microphone that distinguishes Saundra from the other cheerleaders on the squad also gives her many headaches. She says that she sacrifices the health of her voice by turning the volume down, but often overwhelms people if she turns it up too much. “They’re not used to my voice yet,” she says.

Saundra is very critical of her performance down on the field. In fact, she has an odd way of unwinding from a game: “I look at the game and analyze it, it cools me down a lot,” she says.

Saundra describes herself as a busbody and dedication to all tasks and “pacing yourself” are important to her. “I believe in total involvement — just like cheerleading,” she says. “Total commitment.”

Saundra says she would like to direct an art firm some day or do designing and freelance work.

Competition in her field is something that Saundra is prepared to face. “I have to prove myself and go from the bottom up,” she asserts.

Working in her native Philadelphia after graduation appeals to Saundra, for a while, anyway. “I’ve had good teachers and good supporters,” she says of the people back home.

Saundra graduated from Dobbin’s Area Vocational Technical High School in Philadelphia, where she majored in commercial art and studied on the pep squad. Occasionally, she returns to her old school to get new ideas for cheers, but she also creates new cheers simply by listening to radio songs and picking up a novel beat.

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It is futile to extract an objective reply from Saundra Blackwell when you ask her what she believes Penn State’s chances are for making it to the Bowls this season. Her sparkling eyes widen with excitement.

“PSU all the wayyyyyyy!!! WE ARE SO PSYYYYYYYYYYCHED!!!”