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ESPN's latest Joe Paterno documentary does more for history than fresh perspective

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As a historical document, ESPN's "E:60 — The Paterno Legacy" presentation is as honest and professional a distillation as one can hope for when the topic is one of the most sprawling scandals in recent American memory.

Reporter John Barr sticks to the facts as he takes viewers on an hour-long journey through the now decade-old details of the Jerry Sandusky child sex abuse case that rocked Penn State in 2011 and how they've affected the reputation left by Joe Paterno, the winningest coach of all time at the major college level.

If you lived through those dark days in the place known as Happy Valley, it's easy to be vividly transported through time to where you stood when the charges against Sandusky landed; when Paterno was fired and ultimately died; and when his Nittany Lions took the field amid previously unimaginable turmoil.

As a news product, however, the piece that airs on the network Monday at 8 p.m. is light on new facts or perspectives. For most of the way, it's the same cast of characters repeating the same rhetoric.

There are Paterno's former players — Mike Wallace, Matt McGloin and Matt Millen — telling us about the coach as a molder of men and pillar of the community.

There is son Jay Paterno stridently denying any wrongdoing by his father in the case alongside attorney **Tom Kline**, who represented one of the boys abused by Sandusky and faults Paterno for not doing more to disrupt his former defensive coordinator's crimes.

There is current coach James Franklin, deflecting Barr's inquiries about the former coach's legacy in a post-practice news conference last season, preferring to keep the public's focus on the present.

There are journalists Bob Costas and Howard Bryant to offer national perspective that's never been kind to Paterno and never really changed since his death in 2012.

The viewer is left with a palpable sense of wondering what more we need to hear from a lot of these guys that we haven't already. Where the piece breaks through a bit is with brief interviews with the principals involved.

We get a few lumpy-throated moments from Gary Schultz and Graham Spanier, the former administrators convicted for failing to properly report Sandusky's crimes. Schultz, in particular, states his remorse plainly and powerfully multiple times, giving the piece gravity that others simply can't.

We also hear from Aaron Fisher, the man known as "Victim 1" in court documents from the case. He puts a rare face on the abuse by speaking bravely about the ways Sandusky abused him, to the point that they become too difficult to describe in the most emotional moment of the hour.

Finally, Sandusky is given his chance to respond, which he uses to make familiar but still stomach-turning denials of his convictions on more than 40 charges of abuse.

"You know, I know who I am. OK? I know what transpired," Sandusky tells Barr via a phone call from State Correctional Institution at Laurel Highlands. "So they'll never convince me that I abused or hurt those kids because I didn't. I'm an innocent person."

Then he pivots to tying Paterno's legacy to his own.

"It sits terribly with me because deep down in, we had nothing against one another," he says. "He hired me. He was my 'coaching father,' as you would say. The best thing I can do for Joe Paterno's legacy is to demonstrate how he should have been exonerated. And the only way he can get exonerated is if I'm exonerated."

That turn of events does not appear to be forthcoming, as the state Supreme Court recently denied Sandusky a new trial on grounds of ineffective counsel for a fourth time.

That reality leaves us right back where we were at the start of Barr's journey: pondering a polarizing career on which most people's views have calcified, for better or worse.

And if there's a takeaway to be had from the film, it's that we likely won't end up anywhere else. As much as the scandal still sometimes feels like it roiled the University Park campus just yesterday, it's history now — history Paterno's name will likely never escape.