

GAME DAY CHRONICLE

SATURDAY, SEPT. 17
VS. MINOT STATE

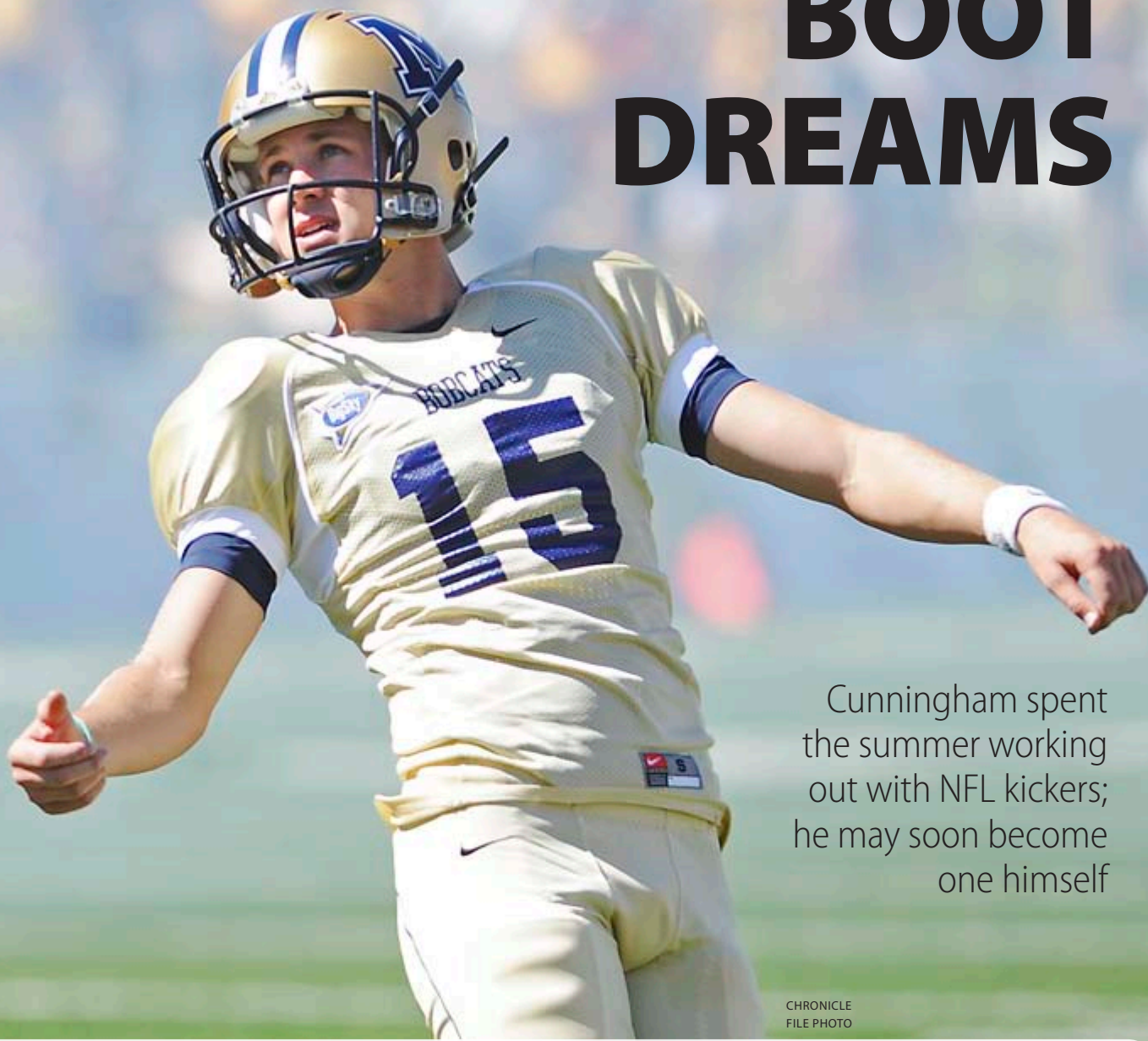


BOZEMAN DAILY

MINOT STATE AT NO. 5 MONTANA STATE, BOBCAT STADIUM, 1:35 P.M. — HALL OF FAME WEEKEND

75¢

BOOT DREAMS



Cunningham spent the summer working out with NFL kickers; he may soon become one himself

CHRONICLE
FILE PHOTO

He is already the most decorated kicker in Montana State football history. The young man they call "Sunshine" has scored more points than any Bobcat, hit more field goals and extra points than any Bobcat. Yet when presented with the opportunity to help his greatness grow, Montana State senior kicker Jason Cunningham knew he'd found the next step toward chasing his NFL dreams.

To be the best, one must first see the best and compete with the best. Cunningham was presented with such an opportunity for six weeks last May and June. The senior All-America spent the first part of his summer working out in Phoenix with the likes of Billy Cundiff of the Baltimore Ravens, Neil Rackers of the Houston Texans, David Buehler of the Dallas Cowboys, Graham Gano of the Washington Redskins and current free agent NFL veteran Shayne Graham.

Most any college football player has NFL dreams, but for most the dream is an unattainable illusion. After working along side All-Pro kickers like Cundiff, Graham and Rackers, Cunningham's confidence in his ability to make his fantasy a reality is strong.

"It was an amazing experience being around all those guys," Cunningham said. "Kicking with them and knowing

that I could keep up with them really gave me a boost in my confidence."

"I'm not going to say I'm good enough to kick in the NFL, but I'd like to think I am. I'm definitely going to give it a shot."

The opportunity to train with the stable of star kickers arose because of MSU head coach Rob Ash, who coached Cundiff at Drake University during the early 2000s. Cunningham was a counselor for the past few summers at Cundiff's kicking camp, something he started doing because of a suggestion from Ash. In May, with the NFL players locked out, Cunningham got a call from Cundiff asking him if he'd like to come to Phoenix to train.

"Billy had a bunch of NFL kickers and punters and snappers there because all those specialist guys, they love to work together," Ash said. "I think it helped Jason a lot. He is a lot stronger, a lot more accurate, a lot more confident."

The kickers Cunningham spent time with ranged from conservative veterans like Cundiff and Graham to brash studs like Buehler.

Buehler has developed somewhat of a cult following among NFL fans because he simply defies the kicker stereotype. The 6-foot-2, 222-pounder played fullback and safety at the University of Southern California before being draft-

ed by the Cowboys. At the 2009 NFL combine, he ran a 4.56-second 40-yard dash, faster than his USC teammates: future All-Pro linebackers Clay Mathews and Brian Cushing. Cunningham said Buehler was one of the more memorable parts of the six-week experience.

"It was hilarious; (Buehler) rolled up in Phoenix with this motorcycle shirt on and I was like 'who is this guy?'" Cunningham said. "He warms up for like five minutes and he is ready to hit 60-yard field goals. He is a different breed of kicker for sure. But he has an absolute cannon on his leg. I wish I had his leg."

Cunningham's right leg isn't too shabby itself. He already has four 50-yard field goals to his credit, including a career-long of 55 last season against Drake. As he enters the third game of his senior campaign today against Minot State, his resume is already stockpiled. His 258 points are the most in MSU history and the 12th-most in the history of the Big Sky Conference. A repeat of last season's 102-point campaign (9th best in league history) would vault Cunningham into the league's top-four all-time point scorers. Not only is he prolific, but he is also accurate. He is 49-for-64 (77 percent) on field goal attempts in his career.

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Story by COLTER NUANEZ of the Chronicle

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BOBCAT GAME DAY
MINOT STATE AT MONTANA STATE
1:35 P.M. BOBCAT STADIUM



Sideline Briefing

- Records: Montana State 1-1, Minot State 0-3
Series: First meeting
Weather forecast: Isolated T-storms, high 68
Crowd: Nearly 15,000 expected
TV: ABC (Chris Byers, Mike Callaghan, AJ Donatoni)
Radio: KXLB-FM (100.7), Jeff Lasky, Dan Davies, Tyler Wiltgen
Coaches: [Photos of Rob Ash and Paul Rudolph]

'Cats plan to be up for Minot State

Beavers may have no answer when it comes to McGhee

By COLTER NUANEZ
Chronicle Sports Writer

Saturday at Bobcat Stadium, it will be MSU versus MSU. Eighteen players from visiting Minot State hail from Montana and 47 Montana State players are native to the Treasure State.

But the similarities between the two opponents essentially end there.

Minot State is currently in the second of three-year transition as the Beavers move from NAIA to NCAA Division II. The team is playing an independent schedule this fall. The Beavers are 0-3 entering today's contest after a 19-7 loss at Texas A&M-Kingsville last week.

While Kingsville is a powerhouse Division II program and last week's matchup against the Beavers was played in front of 13,121 fans, Minot State's visit to Bozeman to play the Football Championship Subdivision's No. 5 team should prove to be the team's most challenging trip of the season. Minot State head coach Paul Rudolph said he wished he could call for a little assistance in slowing down a powerful Bobcat offense that put up 507 total yards last week in a 38-14 win over UC Davis.

"We need the NCAA to pass a rule that says that the home team in Montana can't snap the ball to their quarterback," Rudolph said. "That's pretty much our only shot. It doesn't take watching plenty of film on (Montana State quarterback DeNarius McGhee); you watch a couple plays and you are like 'OOOH.' (McGhee) is a different level than what we are. We haven't had much success on getting that rule passed so I'm not sure what we are going to do."

Minot will look to find its inner David and slay Goliath. On the other side of the spectrum, Montana State head coach Rob Ash said his team cannot overlook any opponent no matter how overmatched. With Montana State's Big Sky Conference opener next week in Cheney, Wash., against defending champion Eastern Washington, the reality of today becoming a trap game is very real.

"I worry about that every week; some weeks you know your team is going to be up for a game and some weeks you know your team is going to be down for a game," said Ash, who is 30-18 in five seasons at Montana State. "That's part of what we do as coaches each week is to try to assess where our team going to be, what's our mood going to be. I never try to motivate my team on Saturday, I try to motivate them on Monday and Tuesday and Wednesday."

"Just looking at what has



COURTESY OF MINOT STATE UNIVERSITY

Minot State senior receiver Jabari Taylor, who has 20 catches this season, gives the Beavers hope through the air.

happened to teams when they do look past play-down teams makes us want to prepare," added junior defensive tackle Zach Minter, who made sure to mimic quotation marks with his fingers when saying the word play-down. "We want to come to practice and prepare, knowing this is a team we have to play and a win we have to have. You never want to think low of any opponent. Watching film, they may not be like teams in the Big Sky or like Utah, but you still have to make sure you get your assignments and your reads. If you do that, you will have success. If you don't, you might play down a level."

The eight other teams in the Big Sky Conference open league play this weekend. Some may see today's matchup against Minot as one last tune-up before running the BSC gauntlet. Ash wants his players to be aware that everyone else around the league is entering that mindset a week before the Bobcats.

"The biggest thing we are going to talk about this week is how hard all the other teams in our conference are going to practice because they are all starting this week," Ash said. "All eight teams will have great practices all week. We have to do the same thing because we know how hard they are going to work. We can't fall behind."

McGhee brings dynamic talent to the quarterback posi-

tion, with last week's virtuoso performance as evidence. He threw for 257 yards and two scores and ran for another touchdown. During a stretch in which Montana State scored on four consecutive drives, McGhee completed 11 straight passes. He accounted for 211 total yards and three touchdowns in the second quarter alone.

But McGhee isn't just a titillating talent on the field. He is also the team's leader in the locker room. He said he isn't letting his troops look past the Beavers in anticipation of the Sept. 24 with the Eagles.

"We try to take it one game at a time and respect each opponent," said the sophomore, who has 444 yards and three touchdowns through the air so far this fall. "We are treating Minot State just like we would treat Eastern. There will be more hype around (the EWU) game, but that's our philosophy going into this game and each game the rest of the season."

McGhee said he was displeased with his performance

last week against Davis. He said the team's two three-and-out drives and his third quarter interception were unacceptable. Although he had a quarterback rating of nearly 160, McGhee said he has a new philosophy on personal preparation for the rest of 2011.

"My new philosophy is to treat every practice like a game," McGhee said. "I don't think I've done a great job of doing that. I will try my best this week so that each and every practice is a game. Then, when the game comes, I can go out and have more fun."

Montana State is seemingly set under center for at least two more seasons after this campaign. Minot State is still trying to find a go-to signal caller this fall. Havre native CJ Evans started the Beavers first two games, but Rudolph said six interceptions in six quarters caused Evans to "lose some confidence in what he is doing." After pulling Evans at halftime against Concordia University two weeks ago, Rudolph inserted Bryce Jorgenson.

Jorgenson proceeded to throw for 307 second-half yards in the team's 46-31 loss, affirming his position as the full-time starter.

Although Rudolph said his team strives for offensive balance, it simply hasn't happened this season.

Minot has just 114 rushing yards in three games, including a season-high 44 yards on the ground last week at Kingsville.

The Beavers have allowed 379 rushing yards and things won't get any easier today. Last week, the Montana State offensive line was in sync all contest, helping the team grind out 250 rushing yards, including a career-high 155 yards from sophomore running back Cody Kirk.

Today's contest will be the second in the newly renovated Bobcat Stadium.

Last week, 18,487 fans set an all-time record for the number of people to watch a football game in Bozeman. It remains to be seen whether the Beavers will

"Some weeks you know your team is going to be up for a game and some weeks you know your team is going to be down. I worry about that every week."

— Rob Ash, Montana State head coach

be as popular a draw, but today is certain to be the largest crowd Minot State plays in front of this season. Rudolph said last week's experience playing in front of a packed house at Kingsville should help, but it doesn't solve his biggest problem.

"We'd certainly like to think that will help coming into this weekend," Rudolph said. "We played in a great environment and we weren't intimidated by any means. But not to keep beating a dead horse, but Kingsville doesn't have anybody who has the ball in their hands like the kid they got under center at Montana State."

Colter Nuanez can be reached at tcnuanez@dailychronicle.com and 582-2690.

Injury report

MONTANA STATE PROBABLE: LB Aleksei Grosulak (knee); WR Everett Gilbert (hamstring).

Game notes

Denarius McGhee's 26 career TD passes are sixth in Bobcat history.

Cody Kirk's 101.5 rushing yards per game lead the Big Sky.

The 41 points allowed by MSU's defense is fewest in the Big Sky by a school that has played two games

One current Minot State Beaver will always have a special place in the Bobcat family. Reserve defensive lineman Bryan Howard from Great Falls High is the son of MSU grads Bob and Kathleen Howard, and the brother of former Bobcat basketball star Bobby Howard.

The Big Sky Little League team from Billings that advanced to the Little League World Series U.S. Championship game last month will be introduced after the third quarter of today's game.

A flood of adversity has washed over this MSU team

Minot State University is 0-3. That's nothing compared to the losses the city of Minot incurred well before the football season began.

There was no state fair this summer in the "Magic City." Local baseball teams were forced to play all of their games on the road, with no bus to take them there. And, the biggest setback of all, thousands lost their homes.

Minot State's head coach is one of them. Same with two of his assistants. A pair of senior roommates saw their house overtaken as well.

"I wouldn't wish anybody to go through this thing," MSU head coach Paul Rudolph told me Thursday.

Minot, the northwestern North Dakota city of 40,000, was marred by high water over the summer. A fourth of Minot's inhabitants were forced to evacuate a flood that caused



TIM DUMAS

Chronicle Sports Editor

the Souris River — known as the Mouse in Minot — to rise above flood stage for 73 days.

If not for a dike hurriedly built in 20-hour shifts near campus, the situation at MSU would have been much worse. The dike has since been taken down, but the damage remains: Rudolph is left with a gutted home.

The Rudolphs, who were under the original impression that their house was not in a flood zone, have lived with three different sets of relatives since the river rose to unprecedented levels earlier this summer: Paul's sister, his wife's sister, his wife's parents. "A little bit of everywhere," Rudolph said.

The coach's youngest of three children, Creighton, 12, started school a week late after the waters rendered three of the city's schools unusable — possibly for good. Creighton's former elementary school is one of them; his current school is now a make-

shift one located inside a city building.

"He's at Ramstad Middle School at the Auditorium," is what they refer to it," Paul Rudolph said.

The story hardly ends with the head coach.

Two of Minot State's assistants — Jeff Engle and Andy Heitkamp — are living with one of Rudolph's roommates from college, packing three families and 10 people into one house.

Engle, a father of two, and Heitkamp, who has six grandchildren, should have a place of their own soon: a FEMA trailer.

Minot State seniors Kris Strang and Eric Henke may be classmates, but they are no longer roommates. Henke, a cornerback, moved back home with his parents in nearby Velva, and Strang, a defensive end, has been crashing on couches, in the MSU locker room — just about anywhere but the campus house he was renting with Strang before the Mouse let loose.

2011 MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

BOBCCATS



Photo by Nick Wolcott



#41 // Defensive End

Brad Daly



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BOBCAT GAME DAY
MINOT STATE AT MONTANA STATE

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Eastern, Griz highlight opening weekend

Defending champion Eagles eye first win in Missoula since 2005, first win of season

By COLTER NUANEZ
Chronicle Sports Writer

While Montana State welcomes Division II Minot State to town for one more non-league tune-up, the rest of the Big Sky Conference begins league play this weekend.

The marquee matchup takes place in Missoula, with the defending national champion No. 10 Eastern Washington Eagles traveling to Washington-Grizzly Stadium in search of their first win of 2011 against No. 12 University of Montana Grizzlies.

But for a league receiving praise as one of America's best at the Football Championship Subdivision level, each conference tilt is crucial, making for several other compelling storylines this week. Sacramento State will search for its first-ever win in Ogden against Weber State. Idaho State will search for its first Big Sky win — and first Division I win period — since 2009 with Northern Colorado coming to town. And Portland State will take the first step in proving it is a contender, not a pretender, as the Vikings host Northern Arizona fresh off a bye last week. Here's a look at this week's four Big Sky Conference games.



COURTESY OF EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

Eastern Washington defensive lineman Evan Cook (56) and the Eagles have their sights set on a rare victory at Washington-Grizzly Stadium today in Missoula.

No. 10 Eastern Washington at No. 12 Montana

This game is rich with intrigue. The defending champs faced with try avoiding a three-game losing streak by going to one of the most intimidating venues in the country. The Grizzlies are thirsty for revenge.

Last season, EWU celebrated the opening of its newly renovated stadium — blood-red turf and all — with a 36-27 win over UM. The Eagles scored nine points in the game's final minute to spring the upset and kick-start its run to the national title.

"Anytime those things happen to you, whether it's an arch-rival or not, it's always a motivating factor as players and coaches," UM head coach Robin Pflugrad said this week during the Big Sky Conference's conference call with the media. "There's a lot of emotions that take place before a game. Hopefully taking our players back to the Cal Poly situation and then the Eastern situation from a year ago can help motivate our players."

Now EWU comes to Missoula to face an improved Grizzly squad fresh off a 37-23 win over Cal Poly last weekend, a game that involved a little revenge itself. Cal Poly beat UM 35-33 in San Luis Obispo last season. Can Eagles head coach Beau Baldwin imagine a tougher place to snap a losing streak than Missoula?

"Probably not," Baldwin said. "It's a challenge, a challenge for our guys. Montana is playing really good football, like they consistently do. They have a lot of veterans, a great defense, so it will be a challenge for our guys. It is, it's a tough place to go play, but even bigger than that, it's a tough opponent."

Eastern lost all-world running back Taiwan Jones to the Oakland Raiders off last season's 13-2 squad. Jones' absence has already

shown up on the stat sheet. Senior quarterback Bo Levi Mitchell has thrown 129 times for 840 yards thus far. The challenge for Montana will be to transition from stopping Cal Poly's multi-faceted power option attack to keeping up with the aerial assault EWU promises to bring to Missoula today.

"That is a major challenge, there's no question about that because not only was Cal Poly a run team, but they were a very physical run team," said Pflugrad, who is 8-5 in his second season at the UM helm. "They were so run-oriented with different styles of run. You bring in a passing game like Eastern has with so many tools and it makes things tough. Mitchell can throw all the kinds of throws there are. You do have to shift gears the whole week in practice."

Eastern won three straight games against the Grizzlies from 1990 to 1992, but haven't won consecutive games since. EWU hasn't won at Washington-Grizzly since 2005.

Northern Colorado at Idaho State

Northern Colorado and Idaho State were picked to finish at the bottom of the Big Sky. But this game has an interesting story line in former Montana State head coach Mike Kramer's official return to the Big Sky.

Kramer has been a part of the league as a player (University of Idaho) or coach (MSU, EWU and ISU) for much of the past four decades. Today, he will try to lead his team to a Big Sky victory for the first time since a win over Portland State in 2009.

Northern Colorado dropped its season-opener to Division II Lindenwood two weeks ago. ISU

snapped an 11-game losing streak with a 44-7 home win over Division II Western State last weekend. But Kramer isn't taking that into account and knows that no win on ISU's schedule is a given.

"I wouldn't call it winnable, I'd call it a game that's pretty level," said Kramer, who is 77-75 all-time in the Big Sky. "Both us and Northern Colorado are trying to find our footing in conference play. They have a much-improved outlook on how they play the sport. I have a healthy respect for what they are trying to do on offense and defense. We really have our work cut out for us."

While Kramer knows his way around the conference, today will be UNC head coach Earnest Collins Jr.'s first Big Sky game as a head man. He said his team is aware of ISU's conference losing streak, but said it shouldn't play a factor.

"For us, it's just about us winning the game," Collins said. "I wouldn't care if it's Idaho State or Eastern Washington, the defending national champions. It's about winning the game. I don't put pressure on the kids saying they haven't won a game or this that or the other. It's a totally different ball club every year. For us, it's about focusing on what we need to do to win the ball game."

No. 20 Sacramento State at Weber State

The Hornets travel to Ogden, a place they've never won before, in search of finding an identity. Media outlets hyped the team as a program on the rise entering the season. Sac looked like the hype was real with a 29-28 overtime win over Oregon State of the Pac-12 in Week 1. But the Hornets had a letdown last weekend, losing to future BSC member Southern Utah 35-14.

Sac State team will look to rebound against a Wildcat team searching for its first win after two Football Bowl Subdivision losses. Weber lost on a last-minute touchdown against Wyoming 35-32. WSU then hung tough with Utah State for one half before falling 51-17.

"Anybody that's been around this game enough knows that each Saturday afternoon brings a life of its own," said Sac State head coach Marshall Sperbeck. "This past Saturday, Southern Utah played harder than us. They made plays when we didn't. I thought they were the better team that day. Conversely, Week 1 we had some things go our way, we made plays and we executed better than Oregon State. Last week was a good lesson for our team."

While Sac's upset win was in stark contrast to last week's loss to SUU, the Wildcats aren't taking any chances. They are expecting the Hornets of Week 1 to show up in Utah ready to play today.

"We are expecting the team that showed up at Oregon State to come to Ogden this weekend," said Matt Hammer, Weber State head coach Ron McBride's top assistant coach. "They showed up big for that game. They flew around on defense. They are a very fast, aggressive defense. They've always been squared away on offense since Coach Sperbeck has been here. We are expecting the team that showed up in Corvallis to be here this weekend."

Northern Arizona at Portland State

Jerome Souers' Lumberjacks travel north to take on a Vikings team fresh off a bye. PSU opened with NAIA Southern Oregon, earning a 52-0 win, but didn't show many folds of Nigel Burton's pistol offense. The mystery surrounding this PSU team is cause for concern for the NAU head man.

"They are a different team than they were a year ago," Souers said. "I'm concerned about the amount of things they have prepared in two weeks that we haven't seen on tape. They kept it pretty vanilla their opener. We have to really be on our toes, be prepared to make adjustments throughout the course of the game."

Opening with a "play-down" game combined with having a bye in Week 2 has Burton thinking his team should have some extra pep in its collective steps.

"The bye week went very well; we gave our guys some extra time because we had a very physical camp," Burton said. "We got some good work in and introduced some of Northern Arizona. We are fresh, which is good because it's back to the grind this week."

Eight of nine Big Sky teams opened up with FBS opponents on Week 1. Eastern, Montana, MSU and Sac State are the only BSC schools who have played an FCS opponent in 2011. Perhaps Souers, the longest-tenured coach in the league (14 seasons), said it best

"Now, it's about making the switch into the conference level of play," Souers said. "That's all that matters."

BIG SKY CONFERENCE

Standings		
Team	Conf.	All
Portland St.	0-0	1-0
Sac St.	0-0	1-1
MSU	0-0	1-1
N. Ariz.	0-0	1-1
Idaho St.	0-0	1-1
Montana	0-0	1-1
Weber St.	0-0	0-2
E. Wash.	0-0	0-2
N. Colo.	0-0	0-2

Today's Games

E. Wash. at Montana, 1:05 p.m.
Minot St. at MSU, 1:35 p.m.
N. Colo. at Idaho St., 4:05 p.m.
N. Ariz. at Port. St., 6:05 p.m.
Sac St. at Weber, 6:05 p.m.

Dumas/ from G1

"It got really old quick," Strang said. "I was living out of my car for awhile."

Engle knows the feeling. The Beavers' defensive line coach hasn't been forced to his vehicle, but hasn't slept in his own bed since June 22 and doesn't plan to until next spring — at the earliest.

Enter football. Fall camp this season was an important step toward normalcy. Team meetings were like family reunions. And Minot's first home game of the season two weeks ago, played at a stadium without bleachers, drew nearly 3,000 fans.

Not that life is A-okay. "It's still odd when you drive by all the garbage and all the disaster," Rudolph said.

The city's hotels are full and more than 400 people are still living in shelters.

"I've grown up here my whole life, and seeing the town pretty much in devastation, that was a pretty crazy feeling," Henke said. "I never thought I'd seen anything like that."

Joe Ford is Minot's defensive backs coach. He's not a native North Dakotan — and he's lucky. He wasn't affected by the flood. Not the water, anyway.

"I have never seen something so devastating," he said. "A quarter of the town was destroyed. And we're not talking about water in the basement; we're talking about four to six feet of water on the main floors."

North Dakota's Magic City will not disappear, however. All its citizens can do now is move on.

"All summer long, it was flood, flood, flood," said MSU starting linebacker Josh Weidler, whose house just on the other side of the dike was flooded, but not beyond repair. "The town has really come together. And not just for football. It's neighbors helping neighbors."

For three hours today, it will be football, football, football. Minot State was 6-4 last year, but hasn't won since. Call it a rebuilding year.

Tim Dumas can be reached at tdumas@dailychronicle.com and 582-2651.

Kicker/ from G1

His kicking prowess earned Cunningham first-team All-Big Sky and All-America honors as a junior. He was a consensus preseason All-America pick heading into his senior season. So how does Cunningham stack up with a 10-year NFL veteran like Cundiff? Ash said it's pretty close. "Billy is still the best I've ever had because he is so clutch," Ash said. "Jason is clutch too. Actually, they are fairly comparable in a lot of respects. They both have really long legs. Billy kicked a 62-yarder for me at Drake. Jason's long is 55. Billy is a little better kickoff guy. But my definition of how good a kicker is comes when the game is on the line. How do they do on those clutch kicks? Both those guys were really tough in those situations."

Four years ago, Cunningham could have never imagined kicking field goals in Big Sky country. Ten years ago, he couldn't have imagined playing football at all.

As a 7th grader in Amarillo, Texas, Cunningham was addicted to soccer. But living in the heart of the one of the most football-crazed states in America rubbed

off on him. When all his friends went out for football, he decided to give it a whirl.

He was lost at first, not liking a single aspect of the game. But then his middle school team had a kickoff contest to determine who would be the regular kicker.

"They were about to stop the competition because a guy hit it kind of far, but I was like, 'whoa, whoa, whoa,'" Cunningham said. "I boomed it way farther than him and they were like, 'hey, we found our kicker. I never played a single other position on the field after that.'"

Six years later, Cunningham was weighing whether to take a full scholarship to kick at the University of North Texas or accept a preferred walk-on spot at Texas Tech. A week before signing day, North Texas called and rescinded their offer, saying they didn't think a freshman could be a Division I starting kicker. Cunningham leaned toward walking on in Lubbock at Tech or going north to take a full ride from the Colorado School of Mines.

Then Montana State called. Cunningham felt out of his element in his first visit to the Gallatin Valley, but he knew Ash's track record when it came to coaching kickers and he liked the enthusiasm of Bobcat fans. After signing with

MSU, Cunningham quickly had second thoughts about moving more than 1,100 miles from home.

"I'm not going to lie, it was really hard the first semester," Cunningham said. "If I wouldn't have had football and teammates around me, I might have given up and went back home. I know I thought about it, especially when the snow and winter set in."

When Cunningham first arrived on the MSU campus, his golden blonde hair was long and flowing. Former Montana State running back Ricky Evans quickly likened Cunningham to the character Rony "Sunshine" Bass from the movie "Remember the Titans" played by Kip Pardue. In the film, "Sunshine" moves to Virginia from California and is quickly given a hard time about his flowing hair and his apparent talent. Evans quickly made the connection since Cunningham came from a far away place and was in the starting lineup from the moment he came to campus.

The nickname stuck. During Cunningham's second collegiate start at Kansas State, the Wildcat faithful showered him with chants of "Sunshine".

During the majority of MSU practices,

Cunningham can be found hanging out with sophomore punter Rory Perez and sophomore long snapper Donald Tudahl. The threesome has endless amounts of "tricks" to stay entertained when they aren't honing their craft. Perez said Cunningham has also been a great mentor. "I came in as a true freshman and he took me in," said Perez, who came to Bozeman from Moreno Valley, Calif. "He didn't have to do that. He took me in, showed me around, made me feel welcome. I've learned a lot from him about kicking, especially how to stay cool under pressure. He is a good friend."

Cunningham can see the light at the end of his college football career tunnel. He is less than two semesters away from earning his degree in industrial engineering. He has confidence he will at least receive a tryout to kick professionally after college. Looking back, he's just glad he made it through that first hard winter.

"Now, I'm so glad I stayed and stuck it out because it's been so worth it," Cunningham said. "I'd go back and do it all over again if I could. I can't believe it's flown by this fast."

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BOBCAT GAME DAY MINOT STATE AT MONTANA STATE

1:35 P.M. BOBCAT STADIUM



THE EDGE

MINOT STATE AT MONTANA STATE

WHEN MONTANA STATE HAS THE BALL

Passing: For 22 minutes in Montana State's 38-14 win over UC Davis last Saturday, sophomore quarterback DeNarius McGhee was magical. He completed 11 straight passes, including touchdowns of 21 yards and 36 yards to Elvis Akpla and Kruiz Siewing, respectively. That was against an Aggie defense with a secondary heralded as one of the most talented in school history. This week, McGhee should be able to do whatever he wants when throwing the football. Minot State head coach Paul Rudolph half-jokingly said the only chance his Beavers have of slowing down Montana State's potent offense would be if the NCAA passed a rule stating home team quarterbacks in the state of Montana couldn't take a snap this week. Although the comment was tongue-in-cheek, Rudolph may have been right in his assessment that his team has no chance to stop McGhee. The good news for Minot State is that it's highly unlikely McGhee will play a full four quarters. Look for junior Grayson Galloway to get his first extended action of his Bobcat career. Today could also be a day for wide receivers like Siewing and redshirt freshmen Matt Thibault and Brian Flotkoetter to show their stuff as well. If McGhee and the offense get into a rhythm like they did for a stretch last Saturday, MSU's

EDGE



507 yards of total offense against Davis could pale in comparison to today's numbers.

Rushing: The Montana State offense achieved almost perfect balance last week against UCD. The team threw for 257 yards and ran for 250. Sophomore tailback Cody Kirk broke out for a career-high 155 yards and two rushing touchdowns en route to his first Big Sky Conference Offensive Player of the Week award. The Beavers have struggled at times stopping the run all season, allowing 379 yards in three losses. Montana State will undoubtedly be the most talented and physical team the Beavers play. With what is almost certain to be a big early lead, look for the Bobcats to pound the Beavers on the ground in an effort to keep the clock ticking. It's unlikely Kirk will get 22 carries like he did last week, but today could be a coming out party for any of Montana State's other three running backs. Look for increased carries to go to junior Tray Robinson, sophomore Kerry Sloan and senior C.J. Palmer. A career day individually isn't likely, but a rushing total that surpasses last week's total certainly is.

EDGE: Montana State

WHEN MINOT STATE HAS THE BALL

Passing: Havre native CJ Evans was the opening-day starter for the Beavers. But he threw six interceptions in six quarters of play, losing his job to today's starter, Bryce Jorgenson. After being inserted against Concordia University two weeks ago, Jorgenson threw for 307 yards and a pair of touchdowns. But the numbers were deceiving, as CU had already pulled its starters because of a 31-0 halftime lead. Last week against Texas A&M-Kingsville, Jorgenson returned to earth, throwing for 91 yards and a pair of interceptions. Montana State has been in the midst of a turnover drought, particularly when it comes to interceptions. The team had just eight picks during last fall's Big Sky Conference title run. This season, the Bobcats have yet to register an interception. The defense, a unit that is third in the Big Sky through two games with 294 total yards per game against average, has no take-aways this season. Montana State must use today's matchup to start creating turnovers defensively. The Mon-

EDGE



tana State defensive line will certainly get pressure with a pass rush on Jorgenson. The Bobcats have to start getting takeaways, particularly by an unproven secondary that features new starters Joel Fuller, Steven Bethely and Sean Gords.

Rushing: Last weekend, Texas A&M-Kingsville limited Minot State to 44 yards rushing. The total doubled as the Beavers' highest number of rushing yards in a game this season. Don't count on anything changing today. The Beavers' offensive line is big, especially right tackle Habeeb Ranu (6-foot-6, 341 pounds). But the Montana State defensive front led by Zach Minter and Caleb Schreiber should wreak havoc in the backfield this afternoon. Minot will have to pass often as it's unlikely that a team with 114 total rushing yards this season will make much money on the ground against the 'Cats. Look for Montana State's sack total of three to double or maybe triple today.

EDGE: Montana State

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kickers & punters: Jason Cunningham enters today No. 12 on the all-time Big Sky Conference scoring list. He is 2-for-3 on field goal tries this season, but last week's 22-yard miss is something he said made him reevaluate his preparation and work to not have a mistake like that again. He is an All-America and one of the greatest kickers in Montana State history. In three games this season, Minot State kicker Nick Phillips has hit one field goal. In other words, Montana State holds a distinct edge in the kicking game. Minot State punter Andrew Walker is averaging 41.7 yards per punt, but that doesn't compare to the 44.3 yard per punt average Montana State's

EDGE



Rory Perez is sporting. Advantage, again, goes to Montana State.

Returns: Montana State is still platooning Akpla and true freshman Shawn Johnson on punt returns. Johnson is also emerging as the go-to guy returning kickoffs.

The punt-return game may be one of the only areas Minot State is comparable to the Bobcats. Eric Kuntz is averaging 12.7 yards per return. But as with all other matchups in this game, Montana State's statistics could receive a huge boost this week because of the disparity in talent between the two teams.

EDGE: Montana State

INTANGIBLES

Minot State head coach Paul Rudolph said it himself: the Beavers simply don't have any players like DeNarius McGhee. Minot doesn't have anyone with McGhee's improvisational abilities nor do they have a field general of Walter Payton

EDGE



Award caliber. But it doesn't stop there. Each Bobcat position group has a definitive leader, a player who won't let the team slip into a lackadaisical attitude with a Division II opponent coming to town.

EDGE: Montana State

OVERALL

If the Montana State offense finds a rhythm like it did a week ago against UC Davis, the Bobcats could realistically score as many points as they wished today. But head coach Rob Ash isn't one to run up the score, so once his team has a comfortable lead, the Bobcat backups should get plenty of playing time. Minot State's only hope may lie in the fact that Montana State plays at Eastern Washington next week. If the Beavers catch the 'Cats napping today, an upset isn't out of the realm of possibilities. But the talent disparity between the two teams is so great, the likelihood of that happening is unlikely.



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Analysis by COLTER NUANEZ of the Chronicle

DEPTH CHARTS

Montana State

Offense

LEFT TACKLE			
68	Conrad Burbank	6-4/297	Sr
79	Quinn Catalano	6-5/276	Fr
LEFT GUARD			
57	Casey Dennehy	6-1/280	Sr
62	Ben Tauanuu	6-4/300	Jr
CENTER			
56	Shaun Sampson	6-0/277	Jr
61	Alex Terrien	6-4/283	Sr
RIGHT GUARD			
61	Alex Terrien	6-4/283	Sr
75	Andrew Verlanic	6-4/279	Jr
RIGHT TACKLE			
50	Leo Davis	6-4/300	Sr
72	Stephen Memory	6-4/295	Jr
QUARTERBACK			
9	DeNarius McGhee	6-0/213	So
5	Grayson Galloway	6-4/207	Jr
RUNNING BACK			
25	Cody Kirk	5-10/214	So
7	Tray Robinson	6-1/221	Jr
X RECEIVER			
1	Elvis Akpla	6-1/190	Sr
4	John Ellis	5-10/180	So
Z RECEIVER			
86	Tanner Bleskin	6-3/215	So
84	Brian Flotkoetter	6-2/205	Fr
W RECEIVER			
14	Everett Gilbert	5-9/195	Jr
10	Kruiz Siewing	5-11/189	Jr
TIGHT END			
89	Steven Foster	6-5/260	Jr
88	Shane Robison	6-5/260	Sr
KICKER			
15	Jason Cunningham	6-1/180	Sr

Minot State

Defense

END			
54	Zack Robinson	6-1/240	Sr
90	Ben Pease	6-5/230	Jr
NOSE GUARD			
50	Luke Artz	6-2/284	Sr
57	Josh Zimmer	6-0/265	So
LINEMAN			
94	Ryan Rauhauser	6-4/331	Fr
91	Joel Deckert	6-3/230	Fr
END			
93	Gino Maxi	6-1/255	Sr
51	Kris Strang	6-1/201	Sr
OUTSIDE LINEBACKER			
5	Levi Freidt	6-2/207	Fr
2	Brian Sorensen	6-3/217	Jr
INSIDE LINEBACKER			
40	Chad Marshall	6-2/215	So
42	Casey Weinmann	6-0/203	Fr
OUTSIDE LINEBACKER			
38	Blair Dinsdale	5-11/203	Sr
24	Brett Mohr	6-1/195	Jr
LINEBACKER			
11	Josh Weidler	6-3/200	Fr
95	Cameron Stone	6-3/230	So
BOUNDARY CORNER			
14	Eric Henke	5-9/177	Sr
30	Eric Kuntz	6-9/160	Fr
STRONG SAFETY			
27	John Denne	6-4/192	Jr
29	Ben Van Wallegheem	6-0/179	Jr
FIELD CORNERBACK			
31	Mike Hickman	5-11/164	Fr
3	Laron Peoples	6-3/195	Jr
PUNTER			
16	Andrew Walker	6-3/175	Fr

Defense

END			
11	John Laidet	6-5/255	Sr
34	Preston Gale	6-3/252	Fr
TACKLE			
96	Zach Minter	6-1/285	Jr
99	Brian Bignell	6-2/255	Jr
NOSE TACKLE			
98	Christian Keli'i	6-0/305	Jr
97	Zach Logan	6-4/295	Fr
BANDIT			
49	Caleb Schreiber	6-3/253	Jr
41	Brad Daly	6-1/232	So
SAM LINEBACKER			
9	Roger Trammell	6-0/215	Sr
29	Cole Moore	6-2/221	Fr
MIKE LINEBACKER			
42	Clay Bignell	6-2/240	Sr
51	Michael Foster	6-1/232	Fr
WILL LINEBACKER			
23	Jody Owens	6-1/221	Jr
2	Na'a Moeakiola	5-11/220	So
BOUNDARY CORNER			
13	Darius Jones	5-10/179	Jr
8	Zach Coleman	5-10/172	Jr
ROVER			
5	Joel Fuller	6-0/200	Jr
31	Robert Marshall	6-0/202	Fr
FREE SAFETY			
28	Steven Bethley	5-11/210	So
6	Heath Howard	5-10/190	Jr
FIELD CORNER			
17	Sean Gords	5-10/188	So
37	Deonte Flowers	5-11/168	Fr
PUNTER			
18	Rory Perez	6-3/179	So

Offense

LEFT TACKLE			
79	Matt Callan	6-5/285	Jr
71	Bobby Bartz	6-3/275	So
LEFT GUARD			
69	Mitch Haugeberg	6-3/293	Jr
60	Adedamola Sobande	6-1/301	Jr
CENTER			
64	Jacob Everson	6-3/294	Fr
73	Sergio Magana	6-2/265	Jr
RIGHT GUARD			
70	Kyle Stein	6-5/265	So
75	Kristopher Firey	6-0/276	Jr
RIGHT TACKLE			
76	Habeeb Rafiu	6-6/341	Sr
69	Mitch Haugeberg	6-3/293	Jr
QUARTERBACK			
4	Bryce Jorgenson	6-1/207	Fr
15	Andrew Torgerson	6-2/201	So
RUNNING BACK			
28	Tyson Schatz	5-8/191	Sr
21	Nico Youngren	5-11/195	Jr
Z RECEIVER			
6	Jabari Taylor	5-11/180	Sr
10	Nate Christianson	6-3/182	So
X RECEIVER			
18	Zac Rudolph	5-8/175	Sr
13	Oz Reinholz	6-5/179	Jr
B RECEIVER			
1	Brent Sorensen	5-8/173	Fr
81	Josh Taylor	5-10/175	Fr
TIGHT END			
89	Kirk Mason	6-2/213	Jr
99	Bobby Bartz	6-3/275	So
KICKER			
23	Nick Phillips	5-10/170	Fr

MINOT STATE NOTES

A Homecoming of Sorts

The Minot State football team carries several strong ties with the state of Montana. Of the 18 Beavers that hail from the Treasure State, five enter Saturday's game on the team's two-deep depth chart ...
8 CJ Evans, QB Havre
10 Nate Christianson, WR Havre
12 Chistian Ker, QB Bigfork
13 Ozzie Reinholz, WR Molt
15 Andrew Torgerson, QB Colstrip
30 Mike Hickman, DB Havre
39 Tyler Molyneaux, LB Chinook
43 Zac Haskell, LB Florence
57 Josh Zimmer, DL Great Falls
58 Ethan Hall, LB Potomac
65 Jordan Sampleton, OL Missoula
67 Chad Sickles, OL Missoula
81 Josh Taylor, WR Fairview
82 Porter Sturm, WR Roy
83 Drew Baldry, WR Scobey
90 Ben Pease, DL Hardin
95 Cameron Stone, DL Great Falls
98 Bryan Howard, DL Great Falls

Famous Beavers

The most famous MSU alum of all is likely Dale Brown, the long-time LSU men's basketball coach, who played hoops at Minot State. Former Eastern Washington head coach Ray Giacoletti, now an assistant at Gonzaga, also played for the Beavers. Actor Josh Duhamel, who starred in all three Transformers movies and in the NBC series Las Vegas, played quarterback for the Beavers. He may be most famous for being married to Stacy Ferguson, known as "Fergie" of the Black Eyed Peas.