

GAME DAY CHRONICLE

SATURDAY, SEPT. 24
AT E. WASHINGTON

BOZEMAN DAILY



NO. 4 MONTANA STATE AT NO. 21 EASTERN WASHINGTON, ROOS FIELD, 5:05 P.M.

75¢

NUMBERS CRUNCHER

A self-proclaimed stat geek, Terrien returns to Washington for final time

By COLTER NUANEZ
Chronicle Sports Writer

Alex Terrien loves numbers. He fawns over numbers, studies numbers, analyzes numbers. Because of his dedication to digits, he may seem like a walking contradiction at times.

The Montana State University senior is an accounting major on track to graduate next spring. He's a baseball nut, a fantasy guru who loves to dissect batting averages, on-base percentages and sabermetrics. His love of diamond statistics is what first led him to the world of numerals.

But as the anchor of the Montana State football team's offensive line, Terrien doesn't get to put up any numbers of his own. Instead, he must live vicariously, taking pride in the stats racked up by the skill players in Montana State's explosive offense. Each time running back Cody Kirk plunges into the end zone, Terrien shares in the joy. Each time quarterback DeNarius McGhee threads a touchdown pass, Terrien feels a sense of self-accomplishment.

While rushing yards or touchdown receptions may never be correlated with his name, there's one number Terrien hopes he can always be linked to: 61.

Terrien started wearing that number in 2009 to honor former MSU offensive lineman Jim Verlanic (who played from 2004-08). During Terrien's redshirt freshman season in 2008, he served as a backup at all five offensive line positions. Six games into that season, Verlanic went down with an injury and offensive line coach Jason McEndoo shifted Terrien to center.

Throughout the 2008 season, Verlanic tutored Terrien in the nuances of the Bobcat offense, helping the pupil prepare each week and grow. Verlanic was also a shining example of a student-athlete, double-majoring in biomedical science and ecology and evolution in preparation of medical school. Verlanic was an ESPN the Magazine Academic All-America via his 3.71 grade point average as a senior.

Hard-working, dedicated, a strong moral compass; each were characteristics Terrien wished to embody.

"Jim never felt threatened by me, but instead he helped me out a lot," Terrien said. "Jimmy was a guy who got great grades, didn't do anything stupid socially and really helped players out. When they asked me if I wanted to move to center, I said yes and decided to wear No. 61 because I wanted to carry on Jimmy's legacy. That's what I want to instill in younger guys like he instilled upon me: do things right, help others and people will notice it."

As Terrien is in the midst of his third season sporting No. 61 and his final season wearing the blue and gold, his versatility continues to be tested. After parts of two seasons as MSU's starting center, Terrien is now the

Bobcats' starter at right guard. Regardless of position, he hopes the fledgling tradition of his jersey is something that continues long after he's gone from the Gallatin Valley.

"I'd like to pass it on to somebody here," Terrien said. "It would be great to pass it on to somebody who knew Jim, or at least somebody I could tell about him that would feel the same sort of responsibility I feel."

The legacy Verlanic left behind was of a player who took care of business, an academic who truly embodied being a student-athlete off the field and was a leader on it. Terrien has embraced a leadership roll, serving as one of MSU's three captains this season. Leading the Bobcats has been a humbling experience for the Auburn, Wash., native.

"The more I thought about it, the more I realized all the guys who are on this team that weren't named captains, guys that I have so much respect for," Terrien said. "They voted for me. It means a lot to be their captains. Guys like (senior tackle) Leo Davis, a guy who inspires everyone, I respect him so much and I get to be his captain. It's an incredible honor."

"Alex learned great lessons from the two previous offensive line captains we had in this program, Jeff Hansen two years ago and Mike Person last year," said MSU head coach Rob Ash. "When he was named captain and those guys graduated, he decided it was his turn. He has really stepped up to the plate and done a tremendous job all through the spring and summer into this season of taking his job seriously and really becoming a leader. He has really embraced the leadership off the field, but he is also a tough, hard-working player on the field."

More TERRIEN | G5

SEAN SPERRY/CHRONICLE

Bobcat starting right guard Alex Terrien is a senior majoring in accounting.

INSIDE

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Defending champ Eagles enter today's game at 0-3 | G2



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NO. 1?

Bozeman football goes for season's first victory | SPORTS

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BOBCAT GAME DAY MONTANA STATE AT EASTERN WASHINGTON

5:05 P.M. ROOS FIELD



PSU plays TCU; Kramer, Souers meet

By COLTER NUANEZ
Chronicle Sports Writer

The first week of league play in the Big Sky Conference was a week filled with extremes. Portland State and Weber State rode smash-mouth running games to victories over Northern Arizona and Sacramento State, respectively. On the other side of the spectrum, Idaho State didn't dress a single running back, yet still managed to earn its first Big Sky win since 2009, defeating Northern Colorado by throwing the football without restraint. The University of Montana used an extreme defensive effort complete with a goal-line stand and a last-minute inception to put defending national champion Eastern Washington in extreme situation with an 0-3 record following UM's 17-14 win.

This week, the Eagles will look to rebound against Montana State. Montana takes a two-game winning streak on the road to play a Sac State team in desperate need of an identity. Weber State will look to continue its ground game success with a trip to Northern Colorado. ISU will look to extend its first win streak in six seasons with a trip south to face NAU.

Portland State is the lone BSC member not playing a conference game. The Vikings travel to Forth Worth to take on Texas Christian, the No. 23-ranked team in the FBS.

Idaho State at Northern Arizona

Between the two of them, Mike Kramer and Jerome Souers have coached in more than 300 games while heading up Big Sky Conference programs. During Kramer's five-year absence from the profession following his firing at Montana State in 2007, the former Bobcat coach spent some time in Flagstaff, Ariz., trading ideas with the longest-tenured coach in the league.

"Being a part of this amazing fraternity is an amazing honor," said Souers, who is in his 14th season at NAU. "Mike's circumstances were very difficult with what he went through. At the end of the day, we are all in it together. To share ideas with a guy who I've gone head to head with was a great opportunity. To share some of our memories was great. To have him back in the conference I think is huge. It's not like the conference needs to get any tougher, but it just did with his return."

The two face off with Souers and NAU looking to rebound from last week's heart-breaking 31-29 loss at Portland State and Kramer's troops looking to put together three straight wins for the first time in years.

"This program has been devoid of in-game success and we desperately, desperately needed a taste of it to know what it feels like," said Kramer, whose team defeated UNC 50-20 in Pocatello, Idaho last week.

Against Portland State, NAU struggled to stop the run. Vikings senior running back Cory McCaffery had 222 rushing yards and four touchdowns en route to earning the league's co-Offensive Player of the Week award.

This week, the Lumberjacks must switch gears and try to slow down ISU quarterback Kevin Yost, who shared the POW award with McCaffrey. Last week, Yost tied a league record with 47 completions for 508 yards. He threw four touchdowns.

"To play at home and to play at well at home felt pretty good," Kramer said. "It was a really nice job by our quarterback Kevin Yost. We played the whole game without a running back in uniform. Our receiving corps continues to mature



COURTESY PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY

Portland State's Connor Kavanaugh ran for a career-high 134 yards last week vs. NAU.

— not a lot, they aren't where they need to be — but enough and their quarterback is a vibrant force who is waiting for those wide receivers to catch up."

"We are going from extreme run to extreme pass," Souers said. "Every man on the board is going to be tested. You have to be consistent, you have to play great team defense. We are looking forward to the challenge."

Weber State at Northern Colorado

Against Sac State, Weber had an afternoon of two distinctly different halves.

The Wildcats clung to a 13-10 lead at intermission, then decided to put the plow to the ground. Following halftime, the hosts ran for 306 of the team's 318 rushing yards. The dominating ground attack led to a 49-17 win over the Hornets.

"We got on track in the second half with what we wanted to do and so we played a little more up-tempo type offense and schematically, we picked up the movement well, which created creases for the runners," said Weber State head coach Ron McBride of his team's first win. "That was the difference."

McBride said the approach this week against Northern Colorado will be a bit different as the Bears run different fronts and a different scheme than the Hornets. Against Sac, Tanner Hings had 104 yards, Josh Booker had 86, Barrington Collings 70 yards and C.J. Tucket 58.

UNC first-year head coach Ernest Collins Jr. said stopping the run will be a priority.

"No question, we want to focus on that," Collins said. "With them, they have that part of the game going so we have to take care of that first and foremost. Their quarterback is very good and he can step up and throw the ball. But any defense, we have to be able to stop the run first and foremost."

No. 10 Montana at Sacramento State

The Grizzlies held their own in their season-opening 42-16 loss at Tennessee. The Hornets built buzz heading into the league season with a 29-28 overtime win over Oregon State in their opener.

Since the pair of FBS showdowns, UM has won two straight, while the Hornets have been defeated twice handily. UM has relied on a consistent defense led by the nation's leading tackler, middle linebacker Caleb McSurdy. Sac State has struggled in nearly every aspect, losing 35-17 to Southern Utah before getting run over by Weber State. Today, the Hornets must try to right the ship against a team they've never defeated in 16 tries.

"We are still trying to put it together

here, find out what we do well and develop some consistency, which I think is the biggest thing we are struggling with right now," said Sac State head coach Marshall Sperbeck. "If we can play with more consistency, we can get ourselves back on track."

Weber State rushed for 318 yards on Sac a week ago. Montana used a pounding rushing attack to rack up 316 yards on the ground in the team's 17-14 win over Eastern Washington, the most rushing yards a Grizzly squad has compiled in 98 games.

"The flip side of that is I think that's the least Montana has ever thrown in yardage too," said UM head coach Robin Pflugrad, whose team threw for just 34 yards. "You want to have a balanced attack."

Pflugrad said after looking at last year's tape of the Grizzlies' 28-25 homecoming win over Sac, that his team was lucky to come away with the victory. The Griz are on upset alert once again this week.

"Looking at Sac State last year, they came to Missoula and played a pretty darn good game and probably, if you look at the video close, could have come out with a victory. That's what we are attempting to sell our players," said Pflugrad, who is in his second year at UM. "Look at everything close, look at the cake under the frosting so to speak because there's a lot of things we should have done better last year. They are a capable program and we need to be very prepared for their personnel."

Portland State at No. 23 Texas Christian

Simply put, the Vikings are facing as steep a mismatch as perhaps any team in the league has or will face this fall. The Horned Frogs finished No. 2 in the AP poll last season. TCU has a stout defense, which has ranked in the top five in the nation in each of the past five years.

"Where we are at right now, we are always the underdog so I don't think it affects our team," said PSU head coach Nigel Burton. "We will prepare the same. We want to focus on execution and not worry about who is across the line."

The Vikings run an option attack flush with many variations of the pistol running attack. Last week, McCaffery ran wild on the NAU defense. Burton said his team won't abandon its rushing attack even with the likes of TCU All-America linebacker Tank Carder across the line of scrimmage.

"The one thing you do is you realize the fact that you're not going to out-run anybody to the sideline," Burton said. "Whatever you do with the run game has to be quick-hitting plays. We have to adjust and take advantage of the things you can take advantage of."

BIG SKY CONFERENCE

Standings		
Team	Conf.	All
Montana	1-0	2-1
Idaho State	1-0	2-1
Portland State	1-0	2-0
Weber State	1-0	1-2
Montana State	0-0	2-1
Sacramento State	0-1	1-2
Northern Arizona	0-1	1-2
Northern Colorado	0-1	0-3
Eastern Washington	0-1	0-3

Today's Games

Portland State at TCU, 12 p.m.
Weber at Northern Colo., 1:35 p.m.
Idaho St. at Northern Ariz., 4:05 p.m.
MSU at E. Washington, 5:05 p.m.
Montana at Sacramento St., 7:05 p.m.

Dumas/from G1

At least we're not asking the same questions each week.

Media: *How important is this game?*
Bobcats: *They're all important.*

Media: *What are you most concerned with?*
Bobcats: *We're only concerned with ourselves.*

Last week, Minot State was here. The result was an expected easy victory. That was Division II. Now, it's on the road to play ... see above. There has got to be a little more on the table for this one, a little more excitement, a little more ... something.

"It's always business, it's never personal," Robinson said. "We just have to do what we've got to do."

Sighhhhhh.

Montana State was the only team not to play its Big Sky Conference opener last week. Thus, the Cats are the only team in the middle of the pack at 0-0. Everyone else is either above (1-0) or below (0-1). This is a chance to join the frontrunners and knock last year's FCS champs out of the top 25.

On we trudged. We prodded. Still nothing. Then an important finding: the problem isn't the ones asking the questions (well, not completely), it's the day of the week.

Enter linebacker Jody Owens. He's a fiery guy. He'll have something juicy to give us.

It took awhile, but Owens eventually said on Tuesday that indeed the Bobcats will be sky high; it'll just have to wait until late Saturday afternoon when his team takes the Roos Field turf. Owens didn't come up with anything original, instead channeling his position coach, Kane Ioane.

"Let it build up," Owens quoted Ioane. "By the time we kick off, that's when you want to be amped up. We can't be all geeked out on Tuesday. Once the ball is kicked off, it'll be on."

Okay, we can wait.

But surely, even midweek, this has to be looked at as a biggy. A barometer; a hint to how MSU stacks up in the Big Sky.

"This will be a big game, an emotional game," Ash said Tuesday.

Now you're talking. Gimme more.

"Both teams will come out really inspired, there will be a big crowd," Ash continued.

On a roll now.

"It will be a great college football environment," Ash went on.

This is where he explained the need to stay even-keeled. Even after the ball is kicked off.

"Being up higher emotionally than the other team isn't going to win the game. We have to play a smart game. We have to do all the fundamental things right. We have to play sound on our assignments."

Makes sense. The emotions are sure to die down and whoever plays the smartest game will win. Then maybe some steam will be let off and this won't feel like "just another game."

Okay, back to Eastern's turf. It was a topic of conversation at MSU's press conference this week. Yes, it's bright. But I doubt it will have any affect on the outcome, although it may feel like a real "Inferno" in Cheney with a high temp expected near 90.

Can you imagine DeNarius McGhee in his postgame interview if the 'Cats lose?

"We had 'em right where we wanted 'em, but that turf, it just was too much."

The conference season opens at the defending national champ's home field in a matchup of top-25 teams with a crowd of nearly 10,000 looking on in said team's home opener.

Other than that, there's nothing to get excited about.

Terrien/from G1

Terrien is an elected leader on a roster stocked full of them. He may not be as vocal as Davis or McGhee, but his cerebral ability and impressive durability help to fortify the legacy he hopes No. 61 represents.

As Terrien returns home to his native Washington today, he will make his 30th consecutive start as MSU takes on defending national champion Eastern Washington in Cheney.

Terrien brings skill and tactical trickery to the Bobcat offensive front, but he also brings a quick wit that endears him to teammates.

"(Terrien) brings a sense of humor, he is kind of our light-hearted guy, always cracking jokes," said Davis, MSU's starting right tackle. "He helped me out a lot when I made my transition (from defensive line to offensive line). He is a guy my age that I could look up to and I still do. He helps me out with

a lot of my calls and he is my wingman most of all."

The 2011 version of the MSU offensive line is an unlikely collection of patchwork.

Terrien switched positions before the season. Davis was once a defensive lineman. Senior guard Casey Dennehy has seen running back, linebacker and defensive lineman listed next to his name on the MSU roster during his five-year career. Junior center Shaun Sampson is a former walk-on who lettered for the first time last fall.

Throughout Terrien's four years as a starter, skeptics have been in abundance concerning the unit. Each year, adjectives like under-sized and under-manned are commonplace in describing the MSU offensive front. Each season, it seems the Bobcats offensive line ignores the critics and performs.

Last season, Orenzo Davis spearheaded a rushing attack that ran for 175 yards per game. In 2009, MSU led the Big Sky Conference in least sacks al-



CHRONICLE FILE PHOTO

Alex Terrien rarely takes himself seriously. "He's always cracking jokes," says fellow lineman Leo Davis.

lowed. In 2008, Demetrius Crawford rushed for more than 1,300 yards.

"It's a unifying thing," said Terrien of the constant doubt of his unit. "Coach Mac picks out all the inspiring stuff that people

are saying about it. When no one believes in you, that's when you play your best. It's a great accomplishment to exceed expectations even when we are undersized, under-strong. We come out, scrap, and compete."

As Terrien's senior season approaches its midpoint and he plays his last regular season game in his home state, his path to this point could have been different.

But he's glad he chose the road he did.

As a senior at Auburn Riverside High School in 2006, Terrien was offered a scholarship by today's opponent. He made a trip to Cheney and was on the brink of becoming an Eagle. But one of Terrien's neighbors had been a Bobcat football player in the early 1980s and he encouraged him to send game film to Bozeman. Soon after MSU received his film, McEndoo called Terrien.

"I came out here and saw how many people love MSU and how many people wanted to see MSU

win," Terrien said. "I wanted to be a part of that."

Today, Terrien will have a slew of fans in the stands to cheer him on. Back in Bozeman, he hopes his love of numbers can continue with a tradition he hopes flourishes. While the custom is in its infancy, Terrien is honored to have been a part of helping another tradition grow: the tradition of Montana State football.

"It's cool to be a part of it. It was cool to watch the stadium being built. It's cool to see how much the students are involved now. It's going to be a great honor to come back and tell my family that I was a part of that," Terrien said. "I can show them the (Big Sky Conference Championship) banner in the field-house that I helped win. It makes you feel good inside. Everyone wants to leave a situation they come to better than they find it. I'm going to be lucky enough to say I did that while I was here."

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



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BOBCAT GAME DAY

MONTANA STATE AT EASTERN WASHINGTON

5:05 P.M. ROOS FIELD



Sideline Briefing

Records
 Montana State 2-1, 0-0 Big Sky
 Eastern Washington 0-3, 0-1

Series
 35th meeting, EWU leads 25-9

Weather forecast
 Sunny, high 89

Crowd
 9,000 expected

TV
 ABC (Chris Byers, Mike Callaghan, AJ Donatoni)

Radio
 KXLB-FM (100.7), Jeff Lasky, Dan Davies, Tyler Wiltgen



ROB ASH
 MSU, 5th year
 32nd year overall
 31-18 at MSU
 207-117-5 overall

BEAU BALDWIN
 EWU, 5th year
 4th year overall
 27-14 at EWU
 37-17 overall

Schedules

Eastern Washington

27	Washington	30
17	So. Dakota	30
14	Montana	17
Today	Montana St.	5:05 p.m.
10/1	Weber St.	1:35 p.m.
10/8	@ No. Arizona	4:05 p.m.
10/15	No. Colorado	5:05 p.m.
10/22	@ Sacramento St.	7:05 p.m.
11/12	@ Cal Poly	7:05 p.m.
11/19	@ Idaho St.	3:05 p.m.

Montana State

10	at Utah	27
38	UC Davis	14
43	Minot St.	7
Today	@ Eastern Washington	5:05 p.m.
10/1	Sacramento St.	1:35 p.m.
10/8	@ Portland St.	2:05 p.m.
10/15	Northern Arizona	1:05 p.m.
10/22	@ Northern Colorado	1:35 p.m.
10/29	Idaho St.	12:05 p.m.
11/5	@ Weber St.	1:35 p.m.
11/19	Montana	12:05 p.m.

Players to watch

EASTERN WASHINGTON: WR Brandon Kaufman caught three game-winning touchdown passes last year, but has yet to reach the end zone this season despite 23 receptions.

MONTANA STATE: WR Everett Gilbert is a big-play guy. He's 100 percent now and could help MSU silence a big crowd.

Injury report

MONTANA STATE
OUT: DE Preston Gale (knee); WR Kerry Sloan (knee).
PROBABLE: DE Sean Gords (knee).

EASTERN WASHINGTON
OUT: OL Steven Forgette (leg), OL Ashton Miller (Achilles).
QUESTIONABLE: WR/PR Tyler Hart (knee); OL Jase Butorac (knee).

Game notes
 ■ **Denarius McGhee's** 28 career TD passes are fifth in MSU history
 ■ **Steven Bethley** became the first Bobcat in three seasons to pick off two passes in one game, intercepting a pair last week against Minot State
 ■ **Cody Kirk** has 218 rushing yards in the last two games; he's second in the Big Sky with 278
 ■ **Rory Perez** averaged 44.4 yards per punt last week, booming one 64-yarder, and now leads the Big Sky in punting
 ■ **Jason Cunningham's** 51 career field goals rank him seventh on the Big Sky career list. NAU's Robbie DeHaze is sixth with 56.

Eagles eye first win in home opener

EWU 'hungry' to meet MSU after suffering 30-7 loss last season

By COLTER NUANEZ
 Chronicle Sports Writer

A pair of defending champs will rematch on the "Inferno" this evening, but the story line is even juicier than that. Montana State and Eastern Washington tied with 7-1 league records last season to share the Big Sky Conference title. EWU is undefeated on its blood-red turf in Cheney, Wash., a town MSU has won just one time in 10 tries. MSU smacked EWU in Bozeman last fall with a 30-7 win. But the most compelling story line may be that, despite reeling off 11 straight wins following the MSU loss and winning the first national championship in program history, the Eagles are still winless in 2011.

A loss today by the Eagles could mean doom. It's unlikely a four-loss EWU squad could qualify for the FCS playoffs. But Eastern doesn't want to look to the future in search of a vision for playoffs. After an 0-3 start, EWU is simply trying to take it one game at a time, beginning with the Bobcats. "You have to approach it like every game is its own game," said EWU senior quarterback and captain Bo Levi Mitchell. "What coach (Beau) Baldwin keeps reiterating to us is you can't win eight games this week. You have one game this week, and that's all you can win. It's about going out there and playing every down like it's our last, fighting and scratching for a win."

Although his team is still looking to fill the win column, Baldwin isn't pushing the panic button just yet. Last year, the Eagles started 2-2 and one of the victories was a 35-32 nail-biter against Division II Central Washington.

"Whenever you start out and you've lost a few and you still haven't had that first victory, it intensifies the situation a little bit," Baldwin said. "Guys, maybe they're that much more hungry, however you want to look at it. Truly, regardless of our record at this point, this game was gonna be amplified anyway. It's a team that beat us handily last year, it's a team that was co-champs with us last year and it's our first home game."

Montana State earned the Big Sky's automatic playoff bid and a bye in the first round courtesy of its waxing of the Eagles in 2010. But the Eagles were the playoff Cinderella, meaning the rematch with the champions has been circled on the Bobcats' calendars too.

All week, the Bobcats focused on harnessing their intensity, hoping to release it on the "Inferno" as the team opens league play.

"(Linebackers' coach Kane Ioane) always tells us 'just let it build up,'" said MSU junior linebacker Jody Owens Tuesday.

Key to MSU's success will be the play of the Bobcat defense, particularly the performance of the team's youthful secondary. Sophomore cornerback Sean Gords sat out last week's 43-7 win over Minot State, but is expected to play. Still, true freshmen Jamarcus Darden and Deonte Flowers will see plenty of snaps against the Eagles' pass-happy offense.

Eastern enters with the fourth-ranked passing offense in the nation. Mitchell's 357 yards per game through the air are tops in the Big Sky. Wide receiver Nicholas Edwards is averaging 10 catches and 114 yards per game, each top-four in America. Despite the youth in the secondary, the 'Cats lost three starters from last season and start a pair of sophomores, but there's no lack of faith in MSU's young defensive backs.

"We all have to come in with confidence



Nicholas Edwards and the Eagles hope to stay unbeaten on their red turf. They are 8-0 thus far. COURTESY OF EASTERN WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY

THE LAST TIME

SEPT. 25, 2010 IN BOZEMAN

Bobcats 30, Eagles 7

EWU	0	7	0	0	—	7
MSU	13	7	3	7	—	30

First Quarter

MSU: Gilbert 4 yd run (J. Cunningham kick), 11-80 4:04, **MSU 7, EWU 0** - 7:42
MSU: Minter 53 yd int. return (kick failed), **MSU 13, EWU 0** - 5:57

Second Quarter

EWU: Edwards 9 fr Mitchell (Jarrett kick), 6-50 2:22, **MSU 13, EWU 7** - 7:58
MSU: Haluszka 4 yd run (J. Cunningham kick), 12-78 6:14, **MSU 20, EWU 7** - 1:44

Third Quarter

MSU: J. Cunningham 23 yd field goal, 8-70 2:36, **MSU 23, EWU 7** - 12:24

Fourth Quarter

MSU: Palmer 1 fr McGhee (J. Cunningham kick), 8-80 2:52, **MSU 30, EWU 7** - 13:48

"They were a great team last year and they handled us. We just have to go out there and out-compete them."

— Bo Levi Mitchell, Eastern quarterback

In other words, the balance has been nearly perfect. Last week, the University of Montana rumbled to 316 yards on the ground against the Eagles defense in the Grizzlies' 17-14 win. But UM's success pounding the football won't influence MSU's approach today.

"Our game plan has nothing to do with Montana's game plan," Ash said. "We are going to run our offense, not theirs. We like to be balanced, that's our formula."

Montana State has 2010 BSC co-Offensive Player of the Year quarterback DeNarius McGhee under center, yet the Eagles think slowing down running backs Cody Kirk and Tray Robinson will be the most important aspect to slowing the MSU attack.

"Having success against (MSU's) offense, you want to be able to stop the run first in most situations. But Montana State has a quarterback who can do great things no matter what the situation," Baldwin said. "He can play from behind and make plays, he can do great things in play-action, he's an all-around great player."

"They are good at both running and passing, so you just have to stop the run first," said EWU senior defensive tackle Renard Williams. "Every team tries to establish that run, so there's a lot of pressure on the defensive line and the defense as a whole to take that away, make them one-dimensional."

Eastern may be winless, but Mitchell said the team has done an admirable job maintaining its swagger. After three weeks on the road, the Eagles finally return home to play in front of what is expected to be a sold-out crowd. School started this week at EWU, and the students are expected to be out in full force. The stage is set. Now all Mitchell and his team desires is revenge and to taste victory once more.

"If you lose to somebody a season ago, they have a year of bragging rights and you always have a bitter taste in your mouth," Mitchell said. "We are looking forward to playing Montana State again. They were a great team last year and they handled us. We didn't play as hard as we should have. We didn't put out the effort we needed to. We just have to go out there and out-compete them and hopefully come up with a win."

Bobcats should be getting fired up at about ... 5:04

Forget about the blood-red turf. Forget about the fact that Eastern Washington is the defending national champion. And that this is Montana State's conference opener. And that Eastern has yet to lose on its Vampire Turf. And that a sellout crowd is expected in Cheney today. And that EWU is 0-3.

And, finally, forget that MSU handed Eastern a 30-7 trouncing a year ago.

Put it all out of your mind. Montana State has. "It's just another game," Bobcat running back Tray Robinson dead-panned on Tuesday. "It's a big game for them, but for us, it's just another game."

Another fact to disregard: this is Eastern's home opener. They must be desperate for a win, right? "We really don't pay any attention to that," MSU head coach Rob Ash flatlined. "We have to take care of what we can take care of."

Nurse, defibrillator. STAT!



TIM DUMAS
 Chronicle Sports Editor

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