

FCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW



MONDAY, JANUARY 5

5:30PM (MST)

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ESPN



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Butte Chamber of Commerce/Visitor Information Center: Mon-Fri, 8:30am to 5pm
Clark Chateau: Mon-Sat, Noon to 4pm
Montana Tech Mineral Museum: Mon-Fri, 9am to 4pm
World Museum of Mining: Wed-Sat, 11am to 3:30pm



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The Covellite

January 1-31 - Cora Brown Reception
(stained glass exhibit all month)
January 7 - The Shining (movie)
January 10 - Northside Nasty Rap
Showcase (live music)
January 16 - Off in the Woods (live music)
January 21 - Misery (movie)



buttearts.org
406.723.3602
316 W. Park

Mother Lode

January 10
Toast: The Best of Bread (live music)
January 22
Dirty Dancing in Concert: a cinematic
live-to-film concert event (live music)
January 25
Grand Kyiv Ballet: Giselle (ballet)



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January 30 – February 1

FRIDAY

- **Opening Ceremonies**
5:00 PM–9:00 PM
Butte High Altitude Skating
Center

SATURDAY

- **Oula**
9:00 AM–10:00 AM
Cleveland Market
- **Thompson Park Experience**
9:00 AM–3:00 PM
Thompson Park

- **Open Ski at Homestake Lodge**
9:00 AM–4:00 PM
Homestake Lodge
- **Montana Tech Ski Club
Ski Swap**
9:00 AM–4:00 PM
HPER Complex
- **Skate Ski Lesson**
9:30 AM–11:00 AM
Homestake Lodge
- **Classic Skiing Lesson**
9:45 AM–11:15 AM
Homestake Lodge
- **Frosty 5K Fun Run/Walk**
10:00 AM–11:30 AM
Original Mine
- **Ski & Board Tune Party**
11:00 AM–4:00 PM
5518 Designs
- **Slow Flow Yoga**
11:30 AM–12:30 PM
Yoga Cooperative
- **Kids SNoDay**
12:00 PM–2:00 PM | Stodden Park
- **Polar Plunge**
3:00 PM–4:00 PM | Stodden Park
- **Outdoor Hockey
Showdown — Providence V.
MT Tech**
4:00 PM–7:00 PM | Leonard Field
- **Enchanting M**
6:00 PM–8:30 PM
Big Butte Parking Area
- **All Ages After Party**
8:00 PM–11:00 PM | Covellite Theatre

SUNDAY

- **Skate Ski Lesson**
9:30 AM–11:00 AM
Homestake Lodge
- **Classic Skiing Lesson**
9:45 AM–11:15 AM
Homestake Lodge
- **Figure Skating: Basic Skills**
10:15 AM–11:30 AM
High Altitude Skating Center
- **Restorative Yoga**
12:00 PM–1:00 PM
Yoga Cooperative
- **Figure Skating: Basic Skills**
12:15 PM–1:30 PM
Community Ice Center
- **Skate Ski Lesson**
1:00 PM–2:30 PM
Homestake Lodge
- **Classic Skiing Lesson**
1:15 PM–2:45 PM
Homestake Lodge
- **Learn to Snowskate**
1:30 PM–3:30 PM
Homestake Lodge
- **Try Hockey**
2:00 PM–3:30 PM
Community Ice Center
- **Fat Bike Poker Run & Bonfire**
2:00 PM–6:00 PM
Big Butte Parking Area
- **Learn to Curl**
4:00 PM - 6:00 PM
Community Ice

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'The King of Bozeman'

Eiden turned promise into polish with Bobcats

VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — Everyone assumed Kenneth Eiden IV would play football at Montana State, but he wasn't dead set.

Eiden was born and raised in Bozeman, and his father played at MSU. As he neared the end of a prolific career at Bozeman High in 2020, MSU was high on his college list. So were North Dakota State, South Dakota State and UC Davis.

Eiden took a visit with then-SDSU offensive coordinator Jason Eck, a former MSU offensive line coach who became the head coach at Idaho and New Mexico. Then-NDSU OC Tyler Roehl, who recently left the Detroit Lions to become Iowa State's OC, recruited Eiden to be an H-back. UC Davis piqued Eiden's interest because of its engineering program and proximity to family members in the Bay Area.

He also considered those programs because playing for his hometown team wasn't as attractive as many assumed.

"I kind of wanted to build my own name and my own legacy," Eiden told 406 MT Sports on Dec. 10. "I wanted to make sure I looked at all my options and saw what was out there for me. Then, if I did decide on MSU, I knew I was choosing it because I wanted to go here."

Like UC Davis, MSU has a renowned engineering school. That contributed to Eiden's commitment to the Bobcats in August 2020, and following in his father's footsteps for the team he grew up rooting for became more of pro than a con.

Five years later, Eiden has made a name for himself. The "King of Bozeman," as MSU defensive coordinator Shawn Howe calls him, has been a key contributor at MSU since 2022 and one of the best



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State defensive end Kenneth Eiden IV, left, looks on next to Dominic Solano during the Gold Rush game against South Dakota State on Sept. 7 at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

FCS defensive ends the last two seasons, both of which resulted in trips to the FCS title game. The 6-foot-1, 250-pound senior hopes to burnish his legacy with a national championship crown in the final game of his college career.

"I'm excited I came here," Eiden said. "I was looking for the place that fit me best, and it really worked out that this was the place that fit me best."

Thanks in part to his father Ken Eiden III, who played on the O-line at MSU, Eiden developed a love for football from an early age. He often travelled around the country as a kid, attending foot-

ball camps hosted by universities such as Oklahoma State.

"Early on, he said, 'Yeah, I want to do this,'" Eiden III said. "He was thinking, like all kids do, 'I'm playing for Alabama.'"

The Crimson Tide didn't extend an offer, but Eiden did receive interest from other FBS programs: Nebraska, Oregon State, Washington and Utah State. Colleges took notice as early as his sophomore year, when he set the Bozeman High single-season record with 21 sacks.

He led the Hawks to a 2019 State AA championship victory and was named Class AA defensive player

of the year after totaling 94 tackles, 41 tackles for loss and 15.5 sacks that fall. On the other side of the ball, he caught 31 passes for 512 yards and eight touchdowns while rushing for 155 yards with six TDs. He earned first-team all-state honors again after the pandemic-shortened 2020 season.

While redshirting, Eiden watched the Cats beat SDSU at Bobcat Stadium in the 2021 FCS semifinals and lose to NDSU in the subsequent national title game. The following season, he recorded 38 tackles, eight TFLs, five sacks, two quarterback hurries and a forced fumble as a backup (MSU

ended 2022 with a semifinal loss at SDSU).

Eiden's athleticism obscured some holes in his game.

"In high school, as Coach Howe described, it was, 'Kenny, go make the play, and everyone else cover him up,'" Eiden said. "Now it's, 'We need 11 guys doing their job, in their gap every single time. You don't have to make every single play in college. We have all-conference guys all around us on the defense.'"

"That was a big transition for me, something I had to learn."

Please see **EIDEN**, Page 8



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Eiden

From 6

Howe likes to use the phrase, “watering the bamboo,” when talking about player development. Like bamboo, some athletes shoot up quickly but take time to reach their full potential. Eiden was one of them.

“I was frustrated. He was frustrated. We were both pounding our head against the wall, it felt like, for a while,” Howe said. “We just kept watering the bamboo, and once it hit, it really hit.”

Eiden had another five-sack season in 2023, which ended with an overtime loss to NDSU in the second round of the playoffs. It was his second straight season backing up Brody Grebe and Ben Seymour, both of whom he regularly shared the field with in MSU’s DE-heavy “Cheetah” package. Last season, Eiden started on the opposite end of the defensive line from Grebe, who was named the 2024 Big Sky Conference defensive player of the year.

Grebe and Seymour helped Eiden learn how to watch film and how to spend each day of the week preparing for the upcoming opponent, he said. They also taught him how to spend his free time, whether that was doing homework, using saunas/cold tubs or meal prepping.

“Prioritize being a good athlete and a good football player over being a regular college kid that might go out and have some fun,” Eiden said, echoing Grebe’s and Seymour’s advice. “Winning on a Saturday night in front of 22,000 people is way more fun and way cooler than anything I’ve ever done as a regular college student on a Saturday night.”

He also credited MSU’s nutrition and strength programs for his improvement.

Before college, he trained at the Pitt Training Facility under now-MSU strength and conditioning coach Sean Herrin, who has made his mark not just in the weight room but also with mental preparation and with “prehabbing,” which helps players prevent soft tissue issues and other potential injuries, Eiden said.

Both Howe, who spent the previous four seasons as MSU’s D-line coach, and the Cats’ current DL coach Nick Jean-Baptiste praised Eiden’s improved maturity.

“When he was a young guy, the older guys were like, ‘What in the heck, Kenny?’” said Howe, who gave Eiden the nickname “Ken Dog” in addition to “King of Bozeman.” “Now he’s coaching the younger guys, and he’s a mentor to those guys. He’s evolved in every phase.”

Eiden received an All-Big Sky honorable mention in 2024, which he finished with 32 tackles, 10.5 TFLs, nine sacks and five QB hurries. The Cats didn’t lose last season until the FCS title game, 35-32 to NDSU.

Eiden was named a team captain before this season, forming the second father-son set of MSU captains on record (Eiden III received the honor in 1991). Through 15 games, he’s racked up 50 tackles, 16 TFLs, 8.5 sacks, eight hurries and two forced fumbles (both in the FCS quarterfinal win over Stephen F. Austin). Six of those sacks and 9.5 of those TFLs came in the last five games, including one sack in a win at rival Montana on Nov. 22 and two TFLs in the FCS semifinal win over the Grizzlies about a month later.

Eiden earned an All-Big Sky first-team selection and multiple All-America honors this season largely because he improved the nuances of his technique, such as hand placement, footwork and “fixing my eyes,” he said.

“It sounds like a really



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State defensive end Kenneth Eiden IV, second from right, celebrates with teammates Hunter Parsons and Zac Crews after sacking Montana quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat during the 124th Brawl of the Wild Saturday, Nov. 22 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

simple thing, but guys get lost a little bit trying to see the ball and get the ball,” he added. “Making sure you’re getting in the right stance every single play, you’re getting your pre-snap reads, you’re diagnosing what’s coming, aligning yourself for success.”

Most of the praise Eiden gets centers on his pass rushing, but his run defense has been excellent this year, too, said Jean-Baptiste, who called Eiden one of MSU’s best D-linemen at taking on blocks.

“Teams think they’re going to sit there and be able to kick Kenny out. Kenny does such a good job, technique-wise, and runs through these guys,” Jean-Baptiste added. “He ends up taking two (blockers) on and still making the play. To me, those are as big of plays as the sacks and the TFLs.”

The Cats made the FCS semis in four of Eiden’s five seasons in the program, and they’re preparing for their third FCS championship game since 2021. Second-seeded MSU (13-2), which hasn’t lost since a Week 2 thriller against SDSU, will try to send Eiden and its other seniors out on the

master’s degree in accounting (his undergraduate major). Earlier this season, he was named a semifinalist for the William V. Campbell Award (aka the Academic Heisman).

He hopes to play football professionally, but he’s already got a job lined up with a Bozeman accounting firm if his ultimate goal doesn’t come to fruition.

“You got to fill up all your buckets,” he said. “Can’t put all your eggs in one basket.”

After winning the 124th Brawl of the Wild in Missoula, Eiden hugged his parents and joined the Great Divide Trophy parade. Following the triumphant march around Washington-Grizzly Stadium, he went to the middle of the field and took everything in. It was a moment he’ll never forget, he said.

His father felt the same way. Eiden III played at

MSU during the early portion of the “The Streak,” as UM’s 16-game Brawl winning streak is commonly referred to. The Cats finished below .500 in all of his seasons with them.

MSU also beat the Griz in 2022 and 2024 to clinch at least a share of the Big Sky title. Watching his son help his team do that again in November made Eiden III think back to the previous two Cat-Griz wins, both in Bozeman.

“I remember being like, ‘He just accomplished what I never accomplished,’” Eiden III said. “You want your kids to do better than you, and that’s what he did. Just so proud of him.”

Victor Flores is the Montana State Bobcats beat writer for 406 MT Sports. Email him at victor.flores@406mtsports.com and follow him on Twitter/X at @VictorFlores406



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'Brotherly bond' has sweetened return to championship

VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — Near the end of Montana State's 2024 FCS semifinal win, South Dakota fumbled a lateral, and MSU defensive end Brody Grebe jumped on it. The Melstone native hugged Rylan Ortt after the play, and the pair of senior captains ran toward the sideline pretending to play fiddles — an homage to the Alabama song "If You're Gonna Play in Texas (You Gotta Have a Fiddle in the Band)," which boomed through the sound system whenever a semifinal host secured a trip to Frisco, Texas, for the FCS title game.

Coaches and teammates mobbed Brody as reached the sideline following his fumble recovery. One of those Bobcats was linebacker Bryce Grebe, Brody's younger brother. Bryce watched Brody's semifinal-sealing turnover from the sideline, around the 30-yard line on the north side of Bobcat Stadium.

Almost exactly a year later, Bryce was on the field toward the end of another MSU semifinal win. He intercepted a pass from Montana quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat and returned it for a touchdown. Brody was sitting right behind the Bobcats' sideline, almost parallel with the 30-yard line on the south side of the stadium.

Brody, the 2024 Big Sky Conference defensive player of the year, saw MSU was in zone coverage and knew Bryce was in position to make a play on the ball as it flew over the middle. He could tell early in Bryce's return that it would be a pick-six.

"It went from me hooping, hollering and jumping around to dropping to my knees," Brody told 406 MT Sports a couple days after the semifinal Brawl of the Wild. "Just a super proud, emotional moment."

Brody's tears continued after the game when he embraced Bryce, whose jersey is No. 10, the same number Brody wore his first three

seasons at MSU.

"It was sweet," Bryce said in his post-Super Brawl press conference. "He's my best friend."

Bryce is one of several 2025 Bobcats whose brother is a former or current MSU player. Those familial connections have made the Cats' second straight trip to the national title game (third since 2021) feel extra special to those siblings.

"MSU does a great job of recruiting within families and pulling in brothers," said Wilson Brott, a former tight end and one of three brothers who've played for the Cats. "Forming a brotherly bond within the team, then also having actual families of brothers there, I think that helps bring in a bunch of cohesiveness within the whole unit."

'So much pride'

Wilson overlapped with his brother Mitch Brott, an offensive lineman, last decade. Their younger brother, Paul, is in his senior season

as an interior defensive lineman for the Cats. Earlier this year, Paul formed the fourth set of brothers in MSU history to be named team captains (Mitch received the honor in 2019). He also received MSU's legacy No. 41, which Brody Grebe donned last season.

Before each game at Bobcat Stadium, at least one former player hands off the Montana flag to a current one. Mitch, Wilson and Paul partook in that ceremony before the Gold Rush game against South Dakota State in September.

"That was a once in a lifetime opportunity," Paul told the Bozeman Daily Chronicle earlier this season. "I felt so much pride being out there with them and us getting recognized."

One of Paul's primary goals in his college career was to get his name on the Bobcat Athletic Complex wall that honors MSU All-Americans. After helping the Cats beat Montana and win the Big

Sky Conference title in November, he made the Associated Press and Stats Perform All-America second teams and the FCS Football Central third team.

"I don't think there are many siblings that had their name next to each other on a wall like that, All-American wise. It's pretty sweet," Mitch said. "I'm proud of him. It was a long time coming. He worked really hard for it."

Paul found Mitch during the post-Super Brawl celebration and told him, "I freaking got you, dude," referring to the new Brott spot on the All-American wall.

"It's a very cool opportunity to be on the wall with my brother and with all the other great players that have played here," Paul said Monday, adding, "My mom, she said she was praying for me to get it, and her heart dropped. Same with my dad. ... It was sweet."

Please see **BROTHERS**, Page 13



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Super Brawl draws record viewership

VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — The 125th Brawl of the Wild drew the most TV viewers for an FCS playoff game on record, according to HERO Sports.

Montana State's 48-23 win over rival Montana in the semifinals Dec. 20 at Bobcat Stadium, televised on ABC, averaged 2.8 million viewers. That's almost as high as the combined viewership of the 2024 semifinal games (both on ABC): an average of 1.58 million for South Dakota State at North Dakota State and 1.37 million for South Dakota at Montana State, per HERO Sports.

The other 2025 semifinal game, which Illinois State won 30-14 at Villanova, on ESPN2 averaged 400,000 viewers.

This year's FCS semifinals happened on the same day as a pair of NFL games and three College Football Playoff games. Those FBS games averaged about 8.5 million viewers (9.9 million with Friday's Alabama-Oklahoma game included).

Last season's FCS title game between MSU and NDSU on ESPN averaged 2.41 million viewers. The most-watched FCS championship game since 2012 was NDSU versus James Madison in 2019: 2.68 million on ABC.

Victor Flores is the Montana State Bobcats beat writer for 406 MT Sports. Email him at victor.flores@406mtsports.com and follow him on Twitter/X at @VictorFlores406

Bobcats hope for 'Dixieland Delight'

VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — Two songs played over the Bobcat Stadium sound system during the fourth-quarter two-minute timeout of Montana State's FCS semifinal win over Montana on Dec. 20.

The second was Billy Idol's "Mony Mony," which got the blue-and-gold crowd jumping and singing.

The spectators were more subdued — maybe a little confused — during the first tune: "Dixieland Delight" by Alabama.

Bobcat fans had become familiar with a different Alabama song: "If You're Gonna Play in Texas (You Gotta Have a Fiddle in the Band)". That played at the end of MSU's semifinal wins in 2021 and 2024, as it did at most (if not all) of the other stadiums when the home teams punched their FCS title tickets over the previous decade and a half.

"If You're Gonna Play in Texas"

represented the previous host of the FCS championship: Toyota Stadium in Frisco, Texas. The game relocated to FirstBank Stadium in Nashville, Tennessee, for the next two years because of Toyota Stadium renovations.

FirstBank Stadium, where Vanderbilt plays, won out over several other "high-level venues" and "high-level cities," NCAA director of championships Ty Halpin said during a pre-FCS title game media availability at Toyota Stadium last January. The atmosphere at FirstBank Stadium on Monday for the national title game between MSU (13-2) and Illinois State (12-4) — as well as the festivities leading up to it — might play a role in the NCAA's decision to stay in Nashville, return to Frisco or go elsewhere after 2027.

"The kids, the coaches that work so hard, the ADs that work so hard to get here, we want to make sure whatever that experience is gives you chills, memories

for life," Halpin said. "We've got to replicate that in Nashville or wherever it is every year."

While Nashville has never hosted an FCS championship before the upcoming one, Tennessee has. The game was played in Chattanooga (about 140 miles southeast of Nashville) from 1997 to 2009. Huntington, West Virginia, hosted it for five years before Chattanooga, and it was held at several different locations the previous 13 seasons (Montana played in the final two games in both Huntington and Chattanooga, winning the first one and losing the final three).

The game moved to Frisco in 2010, the last year a Big Sky Conference team was crowned FCS champion (Eastern Washington over Delaware). North Dakota State won the subdivision's next five titles and eight of the next nine. A 35-32 win over MSU at

Please see **NASHVILLE**, Page 27



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TV: ESPN**

Staying hungry, humble and focused will be critical for the Montana State football team heading into the FCS title game Monday.

After an impressive win in the Biggest Brawl of Them All two weeks ago, the Cats are no doubt feeling on top of the world. And for good reason.

But Illinois State is no slouch and will provide a tough test in Nashville, Tennessee. Remember, the Redbirds took out the top seed and defending national champion North Dakota State in Fargo in the second round of the playoffs on Dec. 3.

That result, in itself, should snap the Bobcats to attention. Illinois State is not afraid of anyone and proved it four weeks in a row with road playoff wins.

If Montana State plays the way it did in a pair of wins over

Montana, it will come away with its first national championship since 1984. Let's be clear about that fact.

It wasn't just the way the Bobcats performed two weeks ago that impressed me but the class coach Brent Vigen showed after the game. Vigen and his staff outcoached a mighty good, veteran Montana staff and afterwards the MSU skipper saluted his team's worthy foe.

I received a lot of texts and emails after the Super Brawl from fans bringing up the now-familiar claim Griz coach Bobby Hauck can't win the big one. He actually has won a lot of big ones, but you could argue he's lost the five biggest in 15 years as Montana's coach — four national championships and the Super Brawl last month.

My hunch is Vigen and Hauck will both get their FCS national titles in the near future. Either of the two could even go on a run of titles. But



Bill Speltz:
MSU 37,
ISU 27.

Overall Records: Speltz 86-14, Cashion 82-18, Gogola 80-20, Flores 79-21

for now, neither has a ring. Vigen will have his chance to be first on Monday.

The Cats and Grizzlies are both capable of dominant runs over the next decade with their climates of winning and impressive facilities. Part of the reason, sadly, is the FCS is not what it used to be.

There was a time when the FCS was much more than just a race to the title highlighting the Missouri Valley Football Conference and Big Sky Con-



Carson Cashion:
MSU 41,
ISU 24.



Frank Gogola:
MSU 41,
ISU 30.

ference. A time when teams like Appalachian State, James Madison, Richmond, Sam Houston State, Delaware and Georgia Southern made it awful tough to reach the chipper.

Now Treasure State fans expect either the Cats or Griz to make it every year, and for good reason. You won't see too many Montanans complaining about that and ESPN seems pretty enthusiastic about featuring the Cats and Griz on national television.



Victor Flores:
MSU 34,
ISU 24.


If perennial power North Dakota State opts to move up from the FCS to FBS, I predict MSU and UM will combine to claim multiple titles in quick fashion. The Bison haven't officially announced any move, but there's strong speculation they'll do so eventually. The Mountain West Conference is a possible landing spot and would fit with NDSU's hunger for higher competition and dedication to FBS-level facilities.

Montana State has a prime opportunity to end the Treasure State's 24-year dry spell without an FCS title. It's hard to imagine the Bobcats losing after all they've been through, but stranger things have happened. Here's hoping they're buckled up and ready for a tough test.

The reason Montana State is the clear-cut favorite to win the FCS title game is its consistency on both sides of the ball. Illinois State is dangerous on offense, just like Montana was, but not

as strong as the Bobcats on defense. And it really is true that defense wins championships. Montana State's defense ranks eighth in the country in points allowed at 18.0, and that number includes a blowout loss at FBS juggernaut Oregon. Illinois State has allowed roughly a touchdown more per game and surrendered 31 points in a playoff win at UC Davis on Dec. 13. That's the same Davis team that Montana State held to 17 points in a Nov. 15 victory in Bozeman (38-17). At last check, the Cats were favored by more than a touchdown over the Redbirds. Oddsmakers are not always right, but they certainly know their stuff. Montana State will win Monday if it can keep turnovers at a minimum. There's no reason to believe the Cats won't do that. The 406 MT Sports panel of prognosticators is in agreement the Cats will win in convincing fashion.

— Bill Speltz, 406 MT Sports



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2025 Montana State roster

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown (Previous)
0	Takhari Carr	DB	6-0	180	Jr.	Compton, Calif. (Dominguez)
1	Chris Long	WR	6-0	175	Sr.	Willingboro, N.J. (Rutgers)
1	Jhase McMillan	DB	5-9	170	RFr.	Fulshear, Texas (Katy Thompkins)
2	Taki Uluilakepa	DB	6-0	175	So.	Provo, Utah (Timpview)
3	Kory Boyd	DB	6-0	185	RFr.	Dallas, Texas (Wylie East)
3	Jared White	RB	5-10	205	Jr.	Frisco, Texas (Wakeland)
4	Jacob Trimble	WR	6-0	195	Jr.	N. Richland Hills, Texas (Ft. Worth Christian)
5	Caden Dowler	WR	6-0	205	Jr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings West)
5	Javonte King	WR	6-4	220	So.	Blackfoot, Idaho (Blackfoot)
6	Bryant Meredith	DB	5-10	175	So.	Concord, Calif. (Fullerton College)
6	River Warren	QB	6-3	205	Fr.	Edmond, Okla. (Del City)
7	Tayden Gray	DB	6-0	185	So.	Arlington, Texas (Trinity Leadership Acad.)
8	Justin Lamson	QB	6-2	210	Jr.	El Dorado Hills, Calif. (Stanford/Syracuse)
8	Carson Williams	DB	5-11	170	RFr.	Houston, Texas (Westfield)
9	Seth Johnson	DB	5-10	180	RFr.	Frisco, Texas (Reedy)
9	Ryan King	WR	6-4	216	Sr.	Loganville, Ga. (East Carolina)
10	Bryce Grebe	LB	235	6-2	So.	Melstone, Mont. (Melstone)
10	Jabez Woods	WR	5-11	180	RFr.	Spanaway, Wash. (Graham-Kapowsin)
11	Kenneth Eiden IV	DE	6-1	250	Sr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
11	Maxwell Hendrick	WR	5-11	190	Fr.	Tomball, Texas (Klein Cain)
12	Ryan Bowles	LB	6-2	225	RFr.	Woodinville, Wash. (Woodinville)
12	Jordan Reed	WR	6-6	228	Jr.	El Centro, Calif. (Central Union)
13	Jackson Harmon	DB	6-3	215	Sr.	Anchorage, Alaska (South)
13	Chance Wilson	QB	6-3	205	So.	Owasso, Okla. (Rejoice Christian)
14	Taco Dowler	WR	5-9	170	Jr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings West)
15	Patrick Duchien	QB	6-2	215	So.	Florence, Mont. (Florence-Carlton)
15	Ife Ohalete	DB	5-11	185	Jr.	Austin, Texas (Blinn)
16	Brendon Ross	DB	5-10	173	RFr.	Rockwall, Texas (Lake Travis)
17	Hayden Gunlock	DB	6-1	178	Fr.	Meridian, Idaho (Rocky Mountain)
17	Grant Vigen	QB	6-6	211	Fr.	Bozeman Mont. (Bozeman Gallatin)
18	Parker Mady	WR	5-10	173	Fr.	University Place, Wash. (Curtis)
18	Tim Thomas II	DB	5-9	170	Fr.	Houston, Texas (College Park)
19	Tom Carter	WR	6-0	180	So.	Helena, Mont. (Helena Capital)
19	Neil Daily	LB	6-3	230	Jr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings West)
20	Kee Christiansen	WR	6-0	190	RFr.	Dillon, Mont. (Dillon)
22	Marcus Coleman II	CB	5-11	155	Fr.	Spring, Texas (Klein Cain)
22	Shanko Kornachuk	RB	5-11	170	Fr.	Lake Oswego, Ore. (Lakeridge)
23	Adam Jones	RB	6-1	200	So.	Missoula, Mont. (Missoula Sentinel)
24	Colter Petre	DB	6-1	205	So.	Helena, Mont. (Helena Capital)
25	Cale Breslin	RB	5-11	205	Fr.	Las Vegas, Nev. (BYU)
25	Luke Oxarart	DB	5-11	177	Fr.	Montana City, Mont. (Jefferson)
26	Malachi Claunch	RB	6-1	195	Fr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings West)
27	Brock Steel	LB	6-1	220	Jr.	Sheridan, Wyo. (Sheridan)
28	Colson Coon	RB	5-11	195	So.	Sheridan, Wyo. (Sheridan)
29	JJ Dolan	DB	6-0	185	So.	Missoula, Mont. (Missoula Sentinel)
30	Colby Frokjer	P	6-3	185	Fr.	West Haven, Utah (Roy)
31	Vinnie Souza	LB	6-2	197	Fr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings Central)
32	Julius Davis	RB	5-10	210	Sr.	Menomonie Falls, Wisc. (Wisconsin)
33	Mason Dethman	DB	6-4	205	RFr.	Brockton, Mont. (Froid-Lake)
34	Cole Taylor	LB	6-3	230	So.	Great Falls, Mont. (Great Falls CMR)
35	Tommy Springman	TE	6-0	210	Fr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman Gallatin)
36	Zac Crews	DE	6-4	240	Jr.	Missoula, Mont. (Missoula Sentinel)

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown (Previous)
37	Josh Woodberry	LB	5-11	215	RFr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman Gallatin)
38	Michael Rubich	K	6-0	190	Fr.	Rock Springs, Wyo. (Rock Springs)
39	Myles Sansted	K	6-3	188	So.	Alexandria, Minn. (Alexandria)
40	Brody Johnson	LS	6-1	204	Fr.	Peoria, Ariz. (Liberty)
41	Paul Brott	DT	6-3	300	Sr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings West)
42	Ryan Krahe	LB	6-2	230	Jr.	Great Falls, Mont. (Great Falls)
43	Xavier Ahrens	LB	6-2	220	Fr.	Tacoma, Wash. (Curtis)
44	Jake Vigen	DE	6-2	240	Jr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman Gallatin)
45	Hunter Parsons	DE	6-4	245	Sr.	Sparks, Nev. (Spanish Springs)
46	Logan Fredericksen	DE	6-4	240	So.	Rigby, Idaho (Rigby)
47	George Helms	RB	5-11	200	RFr.	Big Sky, Mont. (Elon)
48	Blaine Downing	DE	6-3	215	Fr.	Saco, Mont. (Saco)
49	Zac Waible	LB	6-2	215	So.	Lake Oswego, Ore. (Lakeridge)
50	Zack Black	DT	6-4	275	Jr.	Meridian, Idaho (Rocky Mountain)
51	Dalton Noble	OL	6-4	285	RFr.	Clancy, Mont. (Jefferson)
53	Nicholas Maloff	OL	6-2	307	Fr.	Meridian, Idaho (Meridian)
54	Zac Nyland	C/OG	6-4	300	RFr.	Meridian, Idaho (Owyhee)
55	JT Reed	OG	6-3	290	Sr.	San Jose, Calif. (San Mateo College)
55	AJ Tanupo	DT	6-2	280	RFr.	Tacoma, Wash. (Eastside Catholic)
56	Samora Ezekiel	OL	6-2	295	Jr.	Fort Worth, Texas (North Texas)
57	Everett Carr	OL	6-4	305	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
58	Dominic Solano	DE	6-4	250	So.	Glendale, Ariz. (Cactus)
60	Tommy Nilson	OL	6-3	300	Jr.	Missoula, Mont. (Missoula Hellgate)
61	Aiden Kaplan	OL	6-3	277	RFr.	Montgomery, Texas (Lake Creek)
63	Dylan Rollins	OL	6-6	300	So.	Missoula, Mont. (BYU)
64	Burke Mastel	OL	6-4	315	So.	Red Lodge, Mont. (Red Lodge)
65	Vaughn Wirkus	OL	6-5	260	Fr.	Helena, Mont. (Helena Capital)
66	Titan Fleischmann	OT	6-4	300	Jr.	Pocatello, Idaho (Century)
68	Nate Thornton	OL	6-4	276	Fr.	Poulsbo, Wash. (North Kitsap)
69	Jaren Perkins	DT	6-1	265	Jr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
72	Braden Zimmer	OL	6-6	285	RFr.	Billings, Mont. (Billings West)
73	Cedric Jefferson	OL	6-5	300	So.	Temecula, Calif. (Chaparral)
75	Ben Winters	OL	6-3	326	Fr.	Kalispell, Mont. (Kalispell Glacier)
79	Jonathan Luhmann	OL	6-4	295	So.	Florence, Mont. (Florence-Carlton)
80	Luvens Valcin	TE	6-1	228	RFr.	Auburn, Wash. (Auburn)
81	Carter Cocke	TE	6-3	240	Fr.	Sumner, Wash. (Sumner)
82	Luke Smith	TE	6-5	230	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
83	Kash Embry	WR	5-11	175	Fr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
84	Dane Steel	WR	5-10	178	RFr.	Sheridan, Wyo. (Sheridan)
85	Carter Curnow	TE	6-4	235	Fr.	Dillon, Mont. (Dillon)
86	Hunter Provience	TE	6-5	245	So.	San Diego, Calif. (Christian)
87	Thomas Buchanan	TE	6-4	225	RFr.	Red Lodge, Mont. (Red Lodge)
88	Rylan Schlepp	TE	6-4	235	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
89	Rocky Lencioni	TE	6-3	240	RFr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
90	Hunter Sharbono	DT	6-2	280	So.	Fairview, Mont. (Fairview)
91	Seth Brock	DE	6-3	230	RFr.	Eagle, Idaho (Eagle)
92	Graysen Schneider	DT	6-3	255	Fr.	Stewartville, Minn. (Stewartville)
94	Josaiah Asuega	DT	6-4	305	Fr.	Port Orchard, Wash. (South Kitsap)
96	Major Thornhill	DE	6-3	210	Fr.	Gunter, Texas (Gunter)
97	Alec Eckert	DT	6-2	285	Sr.	Lewiston, Idaho (Washington State)
98	Hudson Wiens	DL	6-3	280	RFr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
99	Talon Marsh	DL	6-1	280	So.	Helena, Mont. (Helena Capital)

Brothers

From 9

Sibling support

Paul wasn't the only Bobcat from Billings to join his brother on the All-America wall this fall. Safety and fellow captain Caden Dowler earned multiple first-team All-America selections after being named Big Sky defensive player of the year. Caden's twin, Taco, was an All-American punt returner last season in addition to being MSU's leading receiver.

ACL tears ended Caden's 2023 and 2024 seasons early. He felt sorry for himself when he first got hurt, he said. Taco was one of the main people who pulled him out of the rut, both through his personal support and his playmaking ability.

"That was cool. It made Saturdays a little bit easier," Caden said in August. "You hope you're out there, but I

got my guy out there making plays, catching touchdowns. I'm running out on the field with a torn ACL. It was pretty fun."

MSU's semifinal Brawl victory on Dec. 20 felt bittersweet for the Dowlers. While Taco made one of the biggest plays (an 87-yard touchdown reception) in one of the biggest wins in program history, Caden stood on the sideline, nursing an arm injury he sustained in the first quarter.

"Similar to last year, Caden wasn't playing," Taco said after the game. "Gave him a big hug and shed a couple tears with him. Just super special."

Taki Uluilakepa can relate to the Dowlers. His older brother, linebacker Danny Uluilakepa, tore his ACL during an interception return about midway through the 2024 regular season, when Danny was a senior captain. Taki tore a knee ligament in

2023 (his first year in Bozeman) and suffered a leg injury that forced him to miss eight games this season. He's been one of MSU's most impactful defenders since his return, often playing alongside Caden at free safety.

Taki played a significant role last season as a backup and special teams player, occasionally sharing the field with his older brother the first two months.

"Being on the field with him, it meant a lot to me because we didn't really play that much in high school," Taki said in August. "He taught me so much. I tore my meniscus freshman year and was going through it. He kept pushing me and telling me how important I'm going to be one day."

From backyards to Bobcat Stadium

One of MSU's biggest breakout players this season

has been wide receiver Dane Steel. The Sheridan, Wyoming, native joined the Cats last season, two years after his brother Brock signed with them. Brock is an LB, but they've shared the field on MSU's kickoff team all season.

Both Steels said they've been more excited for their brother's highlights (such as Brock's first career INT and Dane's first career TD) than their own plays.

"It's really cool to see him succeed. He puts in a lot of hard work," Brock said in October. "It's pretty crazy to go here, playing here, from playing in our backyard."

Brock's and Dane's older brother, Coy, played WR for MSU from the end of last decade to the beginning of this one.

"Coy came in every single day being the same person," Dane said in September. "I tried to emulate a lot of things that he does, (like)

the sense of work ethic and being consistent."

Like Coy, Brock has dealt with injuries during his MSU career, such as a torn ACL that robbed him of the final 13 games of last season.

"A lot of people don't know the things that he's been through with injuries and the amount of time he's had to sit out," Dane said in early December. "Being able to watch him do the things he loves and seeing him have that success is super fun for me."

Another Sheridan native, Colson Coon, was on the MSU roster with his brother and fellow running back, Garrett, in 2023 (Garrett transferred to South Dakota after that season).

"To play on one of the top FCS teams in the nation is just incredible, and to be doing it with my family by my side, I feel like there's nothing better than that," Colson said when he com-

mitted to the Cats.

Byron Rollins, a key D-lineman for the 2021 FCS runner-up Cats, was "ecstatic" when his younger brother, Dylan, transferred from BYU to MSU prior to last season, he told 406 MT Sports in 2024. Byron and his father Josh, who also played at MSU, "don't let me forget" the Rollins family legacy with the Cats, said Dylan, an offensive lineman from Missoula.

"Watching my brother work through a lot of hard things in his time — injuries and stuff — and battling back, having the career that he did, continuing to fight and play hard, that's a big thing to look up to, something I want to embrace," Dylan added.

Redshirt junior D-lineman Jaren Perkins spent the previous two seasons at MSU with older brother,

Please see **BROTHERS**, Page 32

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Illinois State roster

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown (Previous)
0	Jamarcus Smith	LB	6-1	230	So.	Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (American Heritage)
1	Shadwel Nkuba II	DB	6-1	190	So.	Lewisville, Texas (Louisiana)
2	Daniel Sobkowicz	WR	6-3	205	Sr.	Arlington Heights, Ill. (Rolling Meadows)
3	Jordan Coleman	DB	6-0	190	Jr.	Saint Peters, Mo. (Ball State)
4	La'Shavion Brown	DB	6-2	215	Jr.	Fairhope, Ala. (Hutchinson CC)
4	Dylan Lord	WR	5-9	185	RFr.	Chandler, Ariz. (Hamilton)
5	Victor Dawson	RB	5-11	220	Sr.	Akron, Ohio (Cincinnati)
5	Trevell Mullen	DB	6-0	170	Jr.	Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (James Madison)
6	Tommy Donovan	DB	5-11	185	So.	South Lyon, Mich. (South Lyon)
7	Nick True	TE	6-5	240	So.	Carpentersville, Ill. (Illinois)
8	Christian Lorenzo	DL	6-3	305	Jr.	DeKalb, Ill. (Georgia State)
8	Beckham Pellant	QB	6-0	195	RFr.	Chandler, Ariz. (Hamilton)
9	Rylan Crawford	WR	6-3	205	RJr.	Leo, Ind. (Leo)
10	Reese Edwards	LB	6-3	230	Sr.	Springfield, Ill. (Sacred Heart-Griffin)
10	Kaevion Mack	WR	6-2	210	Sr.	Peoria, Ill. (Western Michigan)
11	Scotty Presson Jr.	FB	6-3	230	Sr.	Florissant, Mo. (East St. Louis)
12	Jashawn Echols	DB	6-1	155	RFr.	Frankfort, Ill. (Lincoln-Way East)
12	Mar'Quan Gary	WR	6-0	180	Fr.	Bloomington, Ill. (Normal Community)
13	Patrick Bauer	LB	6-3	235	So.	Mount Prospect, Ill. (St. Viator)
13	Eddie Kasper	WR	5-10	160	RJr.	Burlington, Wis. (Wheaton Academy)
14	David Connors Jr.	WR	6-3	195	Jr.	Brooklyn Center, Minn. (Robbinsdale Cooper)
14	Mason Kaplan	LB	6-2	230	Sr.	Peachtree Corners, Ga. (Valparaiso)
15	Chase Kwiatkowski	QB	6-2	205	Fr.	Dyer, Ind. (St. Laurence)
16	Rico Clay	DB	6-3	195	Fr.	Quincy, Ill. (Quincy)
16	Tommy Rittenhouse	QB	5-11	195	Sr.	Geneva, Ill. (St. Francis)
17	Cooper Kmet	QB	6-2	200	Fr.	Barrington, Ill. (St. Viator)
17	Christian LeBrun	S	6-0	215	So.	Cherry Hill, N.J. (UMass)
18	Gavin Camp	WR	5-11	190	RFr.	Bloomington, Ill. (Normal Community West)
18	Evan Sierra	DB	6-0	205	Jr.	Orlando, Fla. (Orlando Christian Prep)
19	Brett Kasper	WR	5-10	170	RFr.	Burlington, Wis. (Wheaton Academy)
20	CJ Richard Jr.	DB	6-1	190	RFr.	Houston, Texas (J. Frank Dobie)
20	Ian Willis	WR	5-9	175	Fr.	Naperville, Ill. (St. Francis)
21	Seth Glatz	RB	5-11	205	Sr.	Morton, Ill. (Western Illinois)
21	Kaden Lehw	LB	6-3	220	RFr.	Arlington, Texas (Grace Prep Academy)
22	Nio Espinoza	LB	6-2	215	RFr.	Charlotte, N.C. (Limestone University)
23	Ju'Maria Hamilton	DB	6-1	185	Fr.	Birmingham, Ala. (Fairfield Prep)
24	Doreon Dubose	DB	5-11	170	RFr.	St. Louis, Mo. (Christian Brothers College)
24	Andrew Rockford	WR	6-3	200	Sr.	Springfield, Ill. (Monmouth College)
25	Matt Lawson	RB	5-10	200	So.	Hoffman Estates, Ill. (Hoffman Estates)
25	Cam Wilson	DB	5-11	180	Sr.	Cedar Hill, Texas (Trinity Christian)
26	Jamaricus Thomas	LB	6-3	230	Fr.	Birmingham, Ala. (Pinson Valley)
27	Tyler Lofton	RB	5-10	220	Fr.	Crete, Ill. (Brother Rice)
28	Chris Taylor	DB	6-0	180	RSO.	Normal, Ill. (Normal Community)
29	Aidan Crews	DB	6-0	180	So.	Wildwood, Mo. (Eureka)
30	Emmanuel Ofosu	DB	6-1	205	RFr.	Chicago, Ill. (Loyola Academy)
31	Matt Maldonado	K	6-2	200	Sr.	Montgomery, Ill. (Murray State)
32	Wyatt Mueller	DB	6-2	205	Fr.	Quincy, Ill. (Quincy Notre Dame)
32	Wenkers Wright	RB	6-1	205	Sr.	Floyds Knobs, Ind. (Floyd Central)
33	Javien Jackson	DB	6-1	195	Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio (Princeton HS)
34	Dallas Amos	WR	6-0	165	Fr.	Evanston, Ill. (Evanston Township)
34	Jack Dwyer	DB	6-0	205	Sr.	Hawthorn Woods, Ill. (Lake Zurich)
35	Anthony Corona	LB	6-2	230	So.	Silver Lake, Wis. (Wilmot Union)
36	Stevan Gavric	WR	6-3	180	Fr.	Libertyville, Ill. (Libertyville)
37	Jack Oliver	DB	6-3	185	Fr.	Cincinnati, Ohio (Winston Woods)
38	Ben Cooper	LB	6-1	220	RFr.	Des Plaines, Ill. (Maine West)
39	Solomon Oduma	LB	6-3	225	So.	Fort Wayne, Ind. (Carroll HS)
40	Kayode Amusan	LB	6-3	250	So.	Woodbury, Minn. (Woodbury)
41	Hayden Futch	K	6-1	185	So.	Valdosta, Ga. (Berrien)
42	Dereon Crowe	LB	6-1	230	Fr.	Owensboro, Ken. (Owensboro Catholic)
44	Dexter Niekamp	LB	6-3	245	RFr.	Normal, Ill. (Normal Community)
45	Cal Martine	FB	5-11	230	Sr.	Appleton, Wis. (Appleton North)
46	Tye Niekamp	LB	6-3	240	Jr.	Normal, Ill. (Normal Community)
47	Mark Haering	LB	6-1	210	So.	Madison, Wis. (Edgewood)
48	Nate Kraus	LB	6-2	230	Jr.	Yorkville, Ill. (Yorkville)
49	Dylan Calabrese	LS	6-1	245	Sr.	Sugar Grove, Ill. (Western Michigan)
51	Wyatt Boals	DL	6-3	290	RFr.	Middlebury, Ind. (Northridge)
52	Kelly Mattox	DL	6-5	235	Fr.	Florence, Ken. (Beechwood)
54	Josh Gettemy	LB	6-2	220	So.	Yorkville, Ill. (Yorkville)
55	Cooper Monk	OL	6-6	280	Fr.	Manteno, Ill. (Manteno)
56	Garret Steffen	DL	6-4	275	Sr.	Altoona, Wis. (Western Illinois)
58	Mark Helm	OL	6-6	285	RFr.	Springfield, Ill. (Glenwood)
59	Ryan McGarry	OL	6-3	275	Fr.	Oak Brook, Ill. (Hinsdale Central)
60	Brandon Smith	OL	6-4	315	Sr.	Indianapolis, Ind. (Western Michigan)
62	Hunter Ducharme	OL	6-5	310	Jr.	Lockport, N.Y. (Iowa Central CC)
63	Chris Hill Jr.	OL	6-3	290	Sr.	Braidwood, Ill. (Millikin)
65	Jack McGarry	OL	6-4	285	Jr.	Oak Brook, Ill. (Missouri)
66	Brayden Jellison	OL	6-4	310	Jr.	Elkhart, Ind. (Elkhart)
67	Jake Pope	OL	6-7	300	Sr.	Ft. Lauderdale, Fla. (Kentucky)
68	Landon Woodard	OL	6-5	330	Sr.	Waukesha, Wis. (Waukesha West)
69	Micah Barnhart	OL	6-4	310	Sr.	Canton, Ill. (Wyoming)
70	Logan Brasfield	OL	6-3	315	So.	Yorkville, Ill. (Coastal Carolina)
71	Jacob Finley	OL	6-9	345	So.	Sherman, Ill. (Williamsville)
73	Gabriel Nege	OL	6-6	275	Fr.	Bloomington, Ill. (Normal Community)
74	Dominic McKibbin	OL	6-4	300	Fr.	Normal, Ill. (Bloomington Central Catholic)
75	Caiden Abbs	OL	6-3	310	Fr.	Fort Wayne, Ind. (Carroll HS)
76	Valentino Garcia	DL	6-3	335	So.	Orlando, Fla. (Orlando Christian Prep)
77	Jace Pankey	OL	6-3	315	So.	Onarga, Ill. (Iroquois West)
78	Ben Wallace	OL	6-5	325	So.	Germantown Hills, Ill. (Metamora)
79	Luke Johnsen	OL	6-4	285	So.	Geneseo, Ill. (Geneseo)
80	Nick Arogundade	WR	6-2	190	RFr.	Chicago, Ill. (Loyola Academy)
80	Michael Cosentino	K	5-7	160	Jr.	Northbrook, Ill. (Elon)
81	Luke Olson	WR	6-3	205	Fr.	Chicago, Ill. (Notre Dame College Prep)
82	Max Ziebarth	TE	6-5	235	Jr.	Hudson, Ill. (Normal West)
83	Jack Tippmann	TE	6-4	235	Sr.	New Haven, Ind. (Fort Wayne Bishop Dwenger)
84	Luke Mailander	WR	5-11	180	RFr.	Elmhurst, Ill. (York Community)
85	Javon Charles	TE	6-5	245	Sr.	Glenn Heights, Texas (DeSoto)
86	Brady Probst	TE	6-4	240	So.	Brownsburg, Ind. (Brownsburg)
87	Nick Kessler	DL	6-6	265	Sr.	Marysville, Ohio (Marysville)
88	Travis Stamm	WR	6-3	180	Fr.	Willow Springs, Ill. (Lyons Township)
89	Brady Goken	TE	6-3	230	Fr.	Wheaton, Ill. (Wheaton Warrenville South)
90	Greg Galloway	DL	6-2	295	Jr.	Oconomowoc, Wis. (Oconomowoc)
91	Ben Harman	DL	6-6	270	RFr.	Stoughton, Wis. (Stoughton)
92	Travis Jones	DL	6-3	285	RSO.	Herscher, Ill. (Herscher)
93	Jack Bochenczak	DL	6-5	265	RFr.	New Lenox, Ill. (Providence Catholic)
94	Ivan Erickson	DL	6-6	275	So.	Batavia, Ill. (Marmion Academy)
95	Casey Roney	K	5-11	170	Fr.	Aurora, Ill. (West Aurora)
96	Bryce Waszczyk	LS	5-11	185	Fr.	Park Ridge, Ill. (Maine South)
97	Jake Anderson	DL	6-5	295	RJr.	Davis, Ill. (Durand)
98	Ari Daniels	K/P	6-2	185	Fr.	Frankfort, Ill. (Lincolnway East)
98	Logan Jellison	DL	6-5	265	RFr.	Elkhart, Ind. (Purdue)
99	Donovan McBride	DL	6-2	300	Sr.	Grain Valley, Mo. (Murray State)

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MONTANA STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

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Aug. 30: No. 7 Oregon 59, No. 2 Montana State 13

EUGENE, Ore. — Coming off a 2024 FCS runner-up finish, the Bobcats opened their 2025 season at the defending Big 10 champions and then seventh-ranked FBS Oregon Ducks.

Justin Lamson made his debut for the Bobcats after transferring in from Stanford and finished 23 of 31 for 193 yards. Wide receiver Taco Dowler finished with a then career-high 107 yards and 12 catches. Running back Adam Jones had 15 yards on nine carries and scored the Bobcats' lone touchdown. Kicker Myles Sansted made a couple of 42-yard field goals.

The Ducks scored on all nine trips to the red zone as the 46-point deficit was the largest defeat for Montana State since 2008, when it fell at Kansas State.

Sept. 6: No. 2 South Dakota State 30, No. 3 Montana State 24 (20T)

BOZEMAN — The Bobcats tied it up at 17 with 6:37 left in regulation when Seth Brock returned a botched Jackrabbits punt for a touchdown to force overtime.

Adam Jones scored first in overtime, but SDSU responded to send it to double overtime. The Jacks scored on the first play, but Alec Eckert thwarted the mandatory two-point try by sacking Chase Mason to give the Bobcats a chance to respond. The Bobcats got one first down, but on the next set of downs, on fourth and 1, Julius Davis came up just inches short after a measurement and the Jacks left Bozeman with the double overtime win in an early season top-3 matchup.

The Bobcats took the first lead early in the second quarter on a 7-yard touchdown run from Justin Lamson, but the Jackrabbits came back to go up 10-7 after Mason responded with an 8-yard rushing TD. Myles Sansted brought the Cats back even as the first half expired with a 33-yard field goal.

The second half featured both teams losing a fumble and missing field goals before the late scoring fireworks.

The Bobcats finished with 349 yards of total offense (210 rushing, 139 passing). Quarterback Justin Lamson had a team-high 96 yards and one touchdown. Davis had 76 yards on 12 carries.

The Cats held SDSU to 297 yards of total offense and 1 for 13 on third downs. Linebacker Cole Taylor led the defense in his first start with 13 tackles and forced a fumble.

It was the Bobcats' first overtime game since 2023 (FCS playoff loss to North Dakota State) and their first in the regular season since 2019 (loss at Cal Poly). It was also the second matchup — and the first since 1984 — in Bozeman between top three nationally ranked teams.

The loss dropped the Cats to 0-2 for the first time since 2017.

Sept. 13: No. 4 Montana State 41, San Diego 7

BOZEMAN — Montana State posted 539 total yards of offense (321 passing,

218 rushing) as Justin Lamson had a then career-best day by completing 23 of 26 passes for 293 yards and three touchdowns against the Toreros to get the Cats in the win column for the first time in 2025.

Taco Dowler set a new career-high of 116 receiving yards and scored a 45-yard touchdown on the opening drive as well as a 16-yard touchdown to open the second half. But he wasn't the only Dowler with a highlight after his twin brother Caden got his first career sack.

Lamson also threw a 17-yard touchdown to Adam Jones in the second quarter and scrambled for a 24-yard touchdown himself to put the Bobcats up 24-0 by half-time.

Ten Bobcats caught a pass and Julius Davis led the rushing attack with 83 yards and a touchdown.

Kicker Myles Sansted kicked a pair of field goals from 43 and 40 yards out.

The Bobcat defense forced the Toreros to punt on all but one of their drives and the lead allowed many of the reserves to get into the game.

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MONTANA STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

Sept. 20:

No. 4 Montana State 17, Mercyhurst 0

BOZEMAN — The Bobcats improved to 2-2 with a shutout of Mercyhurst at home as they finished nonconference play. It was their first shutout since 2023.

The defense kept the Lakers out of the end zone all game in spite of multiple long sustained drives down to the red zone. Paul Brott forced a fumble recovered by Takhari Carr and Carr tipped another pass which led to a Ryan Krahe interception in the end zone. As a team, the Bobcats finished with 10 tackles for loss with two each from Caden Dowler and Cole Taylor.

Montana State put up 354 total yards, 233 of those rushing, on just six offensive possessions. Justin Lamson completed 12 of 17 passes for 121 yards and Colson Coon rushed for 71 yards on five carries. Julius Davis scored a three-yard rushing touchdown in the first quarter and Adam Jones added another from five yards in the second.

Myles Sansted converted a 22-yard field goal in the second quarter and both PATs.

Sept. 27:

No. 4 Montana State 57, Eastern Washington 3

BOZEMAN — The Cats jumped out to a 24-0 lead before the first quarter ended. They extended that momentum to notch their highest scoring game since 2023 and tied the mark for the fewest points allowed against the Eagles in the 47-game history between the two.

Offensively, they ran 70 plays and piled up a season-high 580 yards. Justin Lamson completed 13 of 20 passes for 270 yards, three touchdowns and rushed for 29 yards. He also threw to five different receivers for gains of 25 yards or more.

Adam Jones rushed for two touchdowns and 72 yards on 10 carries. Taco Dowler caught three passes for 64 yards, including a 45-yard touchdown. Hunter Provience caught a 43-yard touchdown and Jabez Woods caught a 28-yard touchdown.

Myles Sansted kicked a 43-yard field goal, but had a 42-yard attempt blocked and two missed PATs before making his final three PATs to finish 6-for-8.

Holder Colby Frojker scored on a fake field goal for a 26-yard touchdown and Colson Coon and Chance Wilson each added their own rushing touchdowns before the day was done.

As a team, the Bobcats finished with season-highs in rushing yards (293) and yards per carry (6.7).

Defensively, even with backups in for the fourth quarter, MSU limited Eastern Washington to 3.1 yards per play over-all and only let them reach the red zone twice. In the first quarter, they held the Eagles' offense to minus-1 total yards. Hunter Parsons got a sack and Dominic Solano forced a fumble that Jhase McMillan recovered. As a team, they had four tackles for loss and batted down or tipped four EWU passes.

The Bobcats earned Brent Vigen's 50th win as MSU head coach on homecoming against the Eagles as they opened Big Sky play with a win.

Oct. 4:

No. 5 Montana State 34, No. 13 Northern Arizona 10

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — The Lumberjacks earned an early lead, but Taco Dowler's 90-yard school record punt return touchdown sparked a 34-0 run for the Bobcats to claim the victory and move to 4-2.

Dowler's punt return touchdown was the fourth in his career and broke Sean Hill's school record from 1991 of 86 yards.

Jabez Woods caught a 79-yard touchdown from Justin Lamson and Julius Davis hurdled a defender on his way to a 13-yard touchdown run. Lamson threw a 3-yard touchdown to Rocky Lencioni and rushed for a 19-yard touchdown.

Lamson completed 13 of 19 passes for 213 yards and two touchdowns, and he rushed for 35 yards on seven carries. Woods had 100 yards on three catches, Dowler finished 45 yards on two receptions and Davis rushed for 73 yards on 10 carries.

Defensively, they held NAU to 296 total yards. Bryce Grebe led the Cats with 11 tackles and one tackle for loss, Caden Dowler had 11 tackles and a pass breakup, Kenneth Eiden IV had seven tackles, 3 TFLs and a sack, Zac Crews tallied six tackles and a sack, Hunter Parsons finished with five tackles and a TFL, and Bryant Meredith (who began his career at NAU) had five tackles and an interception.

The Bobcats earned their first road win of the season and their third straight win over NAU.



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MONTANA STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

Oct. 11: No. 5 Montana State 48, Idaho State 14

BOZEMAN — The Bobcats rushed for a season-high 384 yards behind running backs Adam Jones (173) and Julius Davis (65) on a rainy afternoon at Bobcat Stadium.

Jones finished with a rushing touchdown and 16 carries while piling up the most rushing yards for a Bobcat since the 2024 Brawl of the Wild.

Justin Lamson completed 17 of 21 throws for 184 yards and a career-high four touchdowns, two to Rocky Lencioni. He also rushed for 60 yards and a touchdown. Taco Dowler led the MSU receivers with six catches for 45 yards and both Dane Steel and Julius Davis caught touchdown passes.

Backup quarterback Patrick Duchien scored his first career touchdown on a rushing attempt late in the fourth quarter.

Montana State forced three turnovers: two interceptions by Tayden Gray and Brock Steel and a fumble forced by Carson Williams and recovered by Cole Taylor. They also held a Bengals offense that had been averaging 38 points per game to less

than 22 points for the first time this season. Caden Dowler led the the Cats with seven tackles.

The Bobcats improved to 5-2 overall and 3-0 in the Big Sky ahead of their bye week.

Oct. 25: No. 5 Montana State 34, Cal Poly 17

SAN LUIS OBISPO, Calif. — Julius Davis piled up 175 rushing yards on 19 carries and one touchdown in the third quarter to lead the ground attack as the Bobcats totaled 466 yards of offense, with 290 of those and three touchdowns rushing, against the Mustangs.

The Bobcats forced four straight three-and-outs to open the game and forced a field goal on the fifth. They held the Mustangs to 241 total yards and 50 yards rushing in the first half before the Mustangs opted to change quarterbacks. Cole Taylor grabbed his first career interception and Bryce Grebe and Neil Daily had four tackles each.

Justin Lamson completed 19 of 30 passes for 176 yards and a touchdown. He rushed for another, but the running back trio of

Davis, Adam Jones and Jared White all added touchdowns.

Myles Sansted made field goals of 25 and 37 yards as well as four PATs to put up the first clean kicking performance since Mer-cyhurst.

Nov. 1: No. 4 Montana State 55, Northern Colorado 7

GREELEY, Colo. — Justin Lamson called Talon Marsh's 90-yard pick-six "the coolest thing I've ever seen in sports."

In the fourth quarter, Dom Solano batted a pass up in the air that Marsh grabbed and rumbled back the other way for his first touchdown and gave the Bobcats a 55-0 lead with just over nine minutes remaining in the game.

Offensively, the Bobcats piled up 532 yards while defensively they held the Bears to just 261.

Justin Lamson threw two touchdowns to Taco Dowler as the Bobcats cruised past the Bears behind big plays. Lamson went 16 of 22 for a new career-high of 321 yards with three touchdowns, rushed for another and even was on the receiving end of a touch-

down pass from wide receiver Dane Steel.

Dowler had receptions of 138 total yards (a new career high for the third time this season) on five catches and touchdowns on 67 and 18, both of which came in the third quarter.

After forcing the Bears to punt on their opening drive, Rocky Lencioni scored a touchdown on the Bobcats' first drive off a 3-yard pass from Lamson. Running backs Adam Jones and Jared White added touchdowns to the day.

Takhari Carr recovered a fumble on a kickoff that Colter Petre forced.

Myles Sansted made all seven PATs and made field goals of 26 and 24 yards in the second quarter.

Nov. 8: No. 3 Montana State 66, Weber State 14

BOZEMAN — The Bobcats put up their highest scoring total since 2022 and the most points at Bobcat Stadium since 1998 even after they pulled the starters partway through the third quarter.

The defense had four takeaways and two interceptions by Caden Dowler and Takhari



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MONTANA STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

Carr. Dowler also forced a fumble, recovered by Neil Daily, and added seven tackles along with a pass breakup. Montana State held the Wildcats to just seven until part-way through the fourth quarter.

Offensively, they totaled 452 yards (269 rushing, 183 passing).

Julius Davis rushed for 114 yards and two touchdowns. Adam Jones rushed for 42 yards and a touchdown.

Justin Lamson threw 12 of 16 passes for 117 yards and two touchdowns to Rocky Lencioni and Ryan King. Lamson also rushed for another two touchdowns and three Bobcat quarterbacks scored against the Wildcats. Backup quarterback Patrick Duchien threw his first career touchdown pass to Jordan Reed and third-string QB Chance Wilson capped the scoring with a 15-yard rushing touchdown.

Myles Sansted converted a 48-yard field goal to send the Bobcats into halftime with a 31-7 lead and made all nine PATs.

Nov. 15:

No. 3 Montana State 38,

No. 9 UC Davis 17

BOZEMAN — Caden Dowler's pick-six



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State defensive end Kenneth Eiden IV (11) sacks UC Davis quarterback Caden Pinnick on Nov. 15 at Bobcat Stadium.

for 83 yards sparked a 24-point run for the Bobcats as they earned a top-10 win against the Aggies in front of a national ESPN audience.

Two drives later, Dowler again snagged an interception to return it to the UC Davis 20 and give the Bobcats the chance to go up 31-10.

In addition to his two interceptions, Dowler led MSU with 12 tackles, one tackle for loss, one forced fumble and one pass breakup. Kenneth Eiden IV added two sacks and two hurries, Zac Crews had a strip sack and a forced fumble and Dom Solano finished it off with his second sack to end the game. As a team, the Bobcats earned six sacks including Eiden, Crews, Solano and Talon Marsh's efforts getting to the Aggies' quarterback.

Justin Lamson completed 10 of 18 passes for 144 yards and a 25-yard touchdown to Chris Long. Lamson also rushed for 97 yards and two touchdowns. Taco Dowler caught five passes for 78 yards. Julius Davis added 70 yards and a touchdown. Chris Long caught his first touchdown of the season.

Myles Sansted was 5-for-5 on PATs and after missing an early 44-yard field goal attempt, came back to hit a 28-yard field goal in the third quarter.

They finished with 377 yards (233 rushing, 144 passing) as a team to maintain their unbeaten record in the Big Sky going into the regular season finale rivalry matchup with the Grizzlies to determine the Big Sky Conference championship.

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MONTANA STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

Nov. 22: No. 3 Montana State 31, No. 2 Montana 28

MISSOULA — In the highest ranked matchup in the series to date, the Bobcats became the first visiting team to win the Brawl of the Wild since 2018 and captured their second straight Big Sky Conference title as they finished the regular season 10-2 overall, 8-0 in the Big Sky.

The Cats took a 17-7 lead in the first half, but the Griz came back to take a 21-17 lead. The Bobcats reeled off 14 straight, but the Griz drew within three with about seven minutes remaining. However, the Bobcats ground down the final drive and never let the Grizzlies a chance after that as they took the final 6:59 off the clock and left Missoula with the victory.

Justin Lamson completed 18 of 20 passes for 175 yards with one touchdown and ran for another along with 80 yards. Dane Steel caught four passes for 54 yards and a touchdown. Julius Davis led the rushing attack with 106 yards. Adam Jones scored a touchdown, rushed for 48 yards, caught 31 yards and earned the final

first down to eliminate the Griz's chances at getting the ball back in his return to his hometown.

Montana State had two sacks and six tackles for loss and Caden Dowler pulled down a 34-yard pick six that bounced off a Griz receiver's hands. Dowler ran it back to the north end zone to give the Bobcats a 24-21 lead late in the third quarter. As the fourth quarter opened, the Griz had a chance to tie it up, but Zac Crews blocked the 44-yard field goal attempt in his hometown.

Lamson then scored a 23-yard touchdown on the next drive and the Griz answered back to draw back within three.

The game-clinching drive began at MSU's 9-yard line when Lamson led the Bobcats down the field draining time off the clock. He threw to Jones for a 9-yard gain, Julius Davis rushed for 14 and then 11 yards before Lamson was sacked. He passed to Chris Long for six and then got another seven yards with his own legs. Davis got two yards on a fourth-and-one, followed that up with another nine yards and Jones provided the first down at the two-minute mark. Lamson then gained

another five yards after the timeout on third-and-four before Jones gained three more yards and then finally a 15-yard run to get to the Griz 17 and allow Lamson to kneel it out.

Myles Sansted made a 39-yard field goal in the first quarter and missed a 58-yard attempt to go into halftime, but made all four PATs.

The victory gave MSU the Great Divide Trophy for the second straight season and also earned the Bobcats the second seed in the playoffs along with home field advantage throughout.

FCS PLAYOFFS

Dec. 6: (second round) No. 2 Montana State 21, Yale 13

BOZEMAN — The Bobcat defense forced four turnovers and Montana State scored two touchdowns to advance to the quarterfinal round of the playoffs.

The Bobcats gave up 24 first downs and 353 yards, but found a way as they began their postseason run hosting the unseeded Bulldogs who made their first playoff

appearance since the Ivy League opted to return to postseason play.

The Bobcats held a 7-0 lead at halftime and were up 14-0 at the start of the fourth quarter. Yale drew within 21-13 after recovering a Justin Lamson fumble and got the ball back after MSU recovered the onside kick with 2:08 remaining in the game. But the Bobcat defense came up with a sack and a fumble recovery of their own to close it out.

Adam Jones led Montana State with 107 rushing yards and the deciding 33-yard touchdown to go over 2,000 career rushing yards. Julius Davis rushed for 63 yards and a touchdown and Justin Lamson had 56 yards. Lamson also completed 10 of 16 passes for 92 yards. Chris Long recovered a Lamson fumble in the end zone for a touchdown.

The defense forced four turnovers, three of them on interceptions by Big Sky defensive player of the year Caden Dowler, Cole Taylor and Tayden Gray.

It was announced midgame that Illinois State had upset No. 1 North Dakota State which left the Bobcats as the highest remaining seed in the field.

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MONTANA STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

Dec. 12 (quarterfinals): No. 2 Montana State 44, No. 7 Stephen F. Austin 28

BOZEMAN — In a matchup featuring the Bobcats' fourth-best in the FCS rushing attack against the Lumberjacks' third-best rushing defense, the Bobcats found a balanced attack again. They finished with 227 yards and three rushing touchdowns on the ground and 246 with two touchdowns through the air.

Adam Jones had nine carries for 114 yards and three touchdowns, one of them receiving. Julius Davis added 196 yards. Justin Lamson completed 20 of 26 for 246 yards, two touchdowns throwing with one rushing, and an interception. Luvens Valcin caught his first career touchdown. The Bobcats had to overcome 12 penalties costing them 100 yards and Lamson's first interception in over two months, just his third of the season.

Defensively, the Bobcats had three takeaways. Caden Dowler secured his sixth interception in five games and had eight tackles. Kenneth Eiden IV finished with

three sacks, including two strip sacks, and Zac Crews and Carson Williams each recovered a fumble. Williams returned his to the three-yard line leading to the Valcin touchdown and Crews finished off the Lumberjacks' offensive day with a fourth-down sack allowing Montana State to kneel it out in the red zone.

Myles Sansted made all three field goal attempts from 47, 38 and 23 yards and five PATs.

The closest the Lumberjacks got was 24-14 in the third quarter.

The Bobcats secured their fourth trip to the semifinals in the past five seasons by defeating the Lumberjacks at home.

Dec. 20 (semifinals): No. 2 Montana State 48, No. 3 Montana 23

BOZEMAN — After the Bobcats' regular season finale win over the Grizzlies in Missoula, all eyes turned to the possibility of a rematch with home field advantage shifting to Bozeman. When both teams navigated their way through the next two

rounds, the first postseason matchup between the two teams became a reality.

They delivered a classic in front of a national television audience on ABC.

In the third quarter, Taco Dowler caught an 87-yard touchdown on a third-and-20 as Justin Lamson rolled right out of the pocket in what became one of the marquee moments of the 2025 season. Dowler caught the ball midstride at the midfield logo, caused a pair of Grizzly defenders to collide and then raced past multiple others on his way to the end zone in what coach Brent Vigen argued might be "the best play ever in the history of our program."

The Bobcats took a 20-3 lead off a Justin Lamson rushing touchdown and a 54-yard touchdown from Adam Jones, but the Grizzlies drew back within 20-16 by halftime.

The Griz went up 23-20 midway through the third quarter, but the Cats answered with a pop pass touchdown to Rocky Lencioni to cap a 14-play, 75-yard drive that lasted 6:40.

MSU forced a punt after Dowler's 87-yard touchdown and Lamson rushed in

another touchdown after completing a 34-yard pass to an outstretched Lencioni that was just short of the end zone that left Jones looking on in shock. Lamson finished with 43 rushing yards and two touchdowns while throwing for 209 yards and two scores. Dowler had 125 yards on five receptions to go with his touchdown. Jones rushed for 131 yards and two touchdowns on 16 carries.

Bryce Grebe sealed it with a 40-yard pick-six on a Griz fourth-and-seven in the fourth quarter to cap a 28-0 run by MSU to end the game, secure a trip back to the FCS championship and earn one of the biggest victories in the 125 games between the two teams.

Cole Taylor had seven tackles, Kenneth Eiden IV had two tackles for loss, Tayden Gray added two tackles for loss and a sack, Zac Crews had a sack and Colter Petre added six tackles with a pass breakup.

The Bobcats have now made the FCS title game three times in coach Brent Vigen's five seasons. They hold a 40-2 record at home and are 60-12 overall under Vigen.



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ILLINOIS STATE'S 2025 SEASON IN REVIEW

Aug. 30: No. 18 Oklahoma 35, No. 6 Illinois State 3: NORMAN, Okla. — Playing in front of the largest crowd in program history, the Redbirds opened their season against the Sooners who jumped out to an early lead and cruised.

Oklahoma made it a three-touchdown lead with under a minute left in the first half.

Following an interception by Shadwell Nkuba II, the Redbirds got on the board when Matt Maldonado connected on a 33-yard field goal with 6:26 remaining in the third quarter to cut the Sooners' lead to 21-3. The Sooners scored twice more to pick up the win.

The Redbird defense forced a pair of turnovers in the game: A forced fumble by Jack Dwyer that was recovered by Tye Niekamp and the interception Nkuba in the third quarter.

Wenkers Wright was the leading rusher for the Redbirds, with 50 yards on seven carries with a long run of 24 yards.

Linebacker Tye Niekamp led the Redbird defense with 10 tackles, and half a TFL. Nkuba finished the game with six stops, a half TFL and the interception in his first contest as a Redbird.

Sept. 6: No. 7 Illinois State 41, Morehead State 13: NORMAL, Ill. — After Morehead State drove for a touchdown on their opening drive, the Illinois State defense regrouped to record six sacks, nine tackles-for-loss and three turnovers the rest of the contest as the No. 7 ranked Redbirds flew away for the win in front of a home-opening crowd of 9,671.

The Redbirds got on the board as Matt Maldonado connected on a 27-yard field goal before ISU took the lead when Daniel Sobkowicz hauled in a 25-yard touchdown pass from Beckham Pellant. He finished the game 4-for-9 with 61 yards and a touchdown in his first career start at quarterback for ISU. Sobkowicz finished with a team-leading 87 yards receiving

on five receptions.

Tommy Rittenhouse threw a touchdown to Nick True, rushed for a touchdown and caught a 32-yard touchdown from Luke Mailender. Maldonado also hit an additional career-long 45-yard field goal.

The final score of the game came from the Redbird defense, as Solomon Oduma forced a fumble, and Cam Wilson scooped up the football and returned it 27 yards for a touchdown.

Transfer safety La'Shavion Brown led the team with eight total tackles, while Patrick Bauer added seven stops, with a sack and 2.5 tackles-for-loss.

Shadwel Nkuba II recorded his second interception in as many weeks with his pick in the third quarter.

Sept. 13: No. 7 Illinois State 42, Eastern Illinois 30: CHARLESTON, Ill. — The visiting Redbirds pulled away late with two touchdowns in the final six minutes to

defeat the Panthers.

Wenkers Wright rushed for a career-high three touchdowns and 94 yards on 14 carries. Tommy Rittenhouse found Daniel Sobkowicz twice and Luke Mailander once for three touchdowns. Mailander finished with a career-high 109 yards and five receptions.

Nkuba II picked off his third interception in as many games to give ISU the ball back late in the fourth quarter. Tye Niekamp recorded a career-high 14 tackles in the win over the Panthers and was credited with two tackles-for-loss to lead the way for the Redbird defense.

Sept. 20: No. 6 Illinois State 38, North Alabama 36 (2OT): NORMAL, Ill. — A pair of hour-plus long weather delays plus double overtime led to an over six hour game.

The Redbirds went up 17-0, but North Alabama trimmed that deficit to 17-7 before halftime.

Illinois State built up a 10-point


advantage by the end of the third quarter, but the Lions came back to tie the game with 33 seconds left with a chance to take the lead before the extra point dinked off the left upright.

The Lions scored first on a 42-yard field goal in the first overtime, but Matt Maldonado answered with a 38-yard field goal to send it to double OT. Tommy Rittenhouse threw his second touchdown of the day to Daniel Sobkowicz with the first possession of the second overtime and then the duo came back for the two-point conversion.

North Alabama also scored in the second overtime period, but the two-point conversion failed to secure the Redbirds victory.

On the day, Rittenhouse threw a touchdown to Mailander and two to Sobkowicz. Wenkers Wright rushed for a 38-yard touchdown and 77 total yards. Mailander finished the game with a career-high


Please see **ILLINOIS STATE**, Page 24




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109 yards and a score on five receptions. Rittenhouse led the Redbirds rushing with 89 yards.

Maldonado connected on field goals of 42, 51 and 38 yards.

Niekamp once again led the Redbird defense with 13 stops on the day. Nkuba II was right behind with a career-high 10 stops, to go along with a sack, 1.5 TFLs and the interception.

Oct. 4: No. 1 North Dakota State 33, No. 6 Illinois State 16: NORMAL, Ill. — The Redbirds trailed by two points going into the fourth quarter, but the Bison scored 15 unanswered in the final frame to pull away.

Illinois State got on the board first when Tye Niekamp tackled the NDSU ball carrier in the Bison end zone to score a safety in the first quarter.

Wenkers Wright scored a 6-yard rushing touchdown in the second quarter and Tommy Rittenhouse threw a 3-yard touchdown to Daniel Sobkowicz.

But from there, the Bison pulled away for the win.

Shadwel Nkuba II led the Redbird defense with seven tackles, while Patrick Bauer added four with a sack and 1.5 tackles-for-loss.

Oct. 11: No. 9 Illinois State 46, Murray State 32: MURRAY, Ky. — The Redbirds scored 21 points in the first quarter to bounce back.

Daniel Sobkowicz finished the game with eight catches for 162 yards with both a rushing and receiving touchdown.

Tommy Rittenhouse started the game 10-for-10 and went on to finish the contest 21-for-25 (.840) with 338 yards and a career-high four passing touchdowns to Sobkowicz, Dylan Lord, Javon Charles and Seth Glatz.

Matt Maldonado hit field goals of 37 and 26 yards.

Doreon Dubose recorded his first career interception to seal the win for the Redbirds and he finished the game with four total tackles and a pass breakup. Tye Niekamp led the way for the Redbird defense with eight tackles, while Reese Edwards

and Patrick Bauer each contributed sacks for the defense.

Oct. 18: No. 25 Youngstown State 40, No. 10 Illinois State 35: NORMAL, Ill. — After falling into an early 12-0 deficit, the Redbirds came back to take their first lead with under a minute to go in the first half. They built a seven-point lead at the end of the third quarter before the Penguins retook the lead with three scoring drives.

The Redbirds closed the deficit to five with three minutes remaining, but the Penguins ran out the clock to give ISU their third loss.

Tommy Rittenhouse threw a career-high five touchdowns: two to Wenkers Wright and one each to Javon Charles, Eddie Kasper and Luke Mailander. Rittenhouse finished with 206 yards on 16 completions with two interceptions.

Mason Kaplan led the defense with 11 tackles.

Oct. 25: No. 18 Illinois State 21, No. 21 South Dakota 13: Vermillion, S.D. — The Redbirds took the lead just before halftime and never relinquished it as they took down the Coyotes in the DakotaDome.

Tommy Rittenhouse threw two touchdowns to Scotty Presson Jr. and rushed for another. Rittenhouse finished with 141 yards on 18 completions.

Presson's two touchdown receptions were the first two of his career at Illinois State, as he finished the game with three catches for 30 yards and the two scores. Wide receivers Dylan Lord (8) and Rylan Crawford (6) each set career highs in receptions in the contest for the Redbirds, as Lord led all receivers with 8 catches for 82 yards in the victory.

Tye Niekamp tied his career high with 14 stops against the Coyotes to lead the way for the Redbird defense, and he was credited with a TFL in the contest. CJ Richard Jr. tallied a career-best nine tackles in just his second start.

Nov. 1: No. 17 Illinois State 31, Northern Iowa 16: NORMAL, Ill. — The Redbirds scored 21 unanswered to start the game as they cruised past the Panthers.

Tommy Rittenhouse rushed for a touchdown and threw for another to Javon Charles, but Seth

Glatz and Victor Dawson added rushing touchdowns of their own before Matt Maldonado put the finishing offensive touches on the win with a 32-yard field goal.

The Redbird offense racked up 430 yards of total offense in a balanced effort, that features 202 yards rushing and 228 yards passing. Rittenhouse finished with 228 yards on 28 completions.

Luke Mailander caught 4 passes for 72 yards. Dylan Lord caught a career-high 10 passes for 50 yards, breaking his career-high for the second week in a row.

Cam Wilson's interception sealed the victory, but Garret Steffen had a big day for the Redbird defense, as he tied for the team lead with seven tackles and added two sacks. The Niekamp brothers both had great days on the defense, as Tye recorded seven tackles and 1.5 TFLs and Dexter finished with three tackles, a sack and 1.5 TFLs.

Nov. 8: No. 16 Illinois State 52, Indiana State 20: TERRE HAUTE, Ind. — A 28-point second quarter propelled the Redbirds to the road victory.

The 52 points scored by the Redbirds were their most since scoring 67 against Morgan State in a win on Sept. 12, 2015 and were the most points scored in a MVFC contest since scoring 55 against the Sycamores in 2013.

Max Ziebarth caught his first reception and touchdown of the season in the first quarter on a two-yard pass from Tommy Rittenhouse.

Victor Dawson opened the second quarter with a 6-yard touchdown for his third of the season and second in two weeks. He finished the game with a career-high 116 yards on 21 carries to go over 100 yards rushing for the second-straight game.

Dylan Lord caught a three-yard touchdown and Seth Glatz caught a 20-yard TD from Rittenhouse before Rittenhouse tackled on a rushing touchdown to close out the second quarter.

Lord ended the game with a career-high 87 yards on nine receptions with the touchdown.

Rittenhouse accounted for five touchdowns (4 passing, 1 rushing) and finished 29-for-34 for

314 yards on the game with 19 yards rushing.

In the second half, Rittenhouse threw two more touchdowns to Daniel Sobkowicz and Glatz before Matt Maldonado hit a 49-yard field goal to conclude the scoring.

Tye Niekamp led the Redbirds with 10 tackles, a TFL and two pass breakups, while Christian Lorenzo had a sack and 1.5 TFLs on the contest.

Nov. 15: No. 14 Illinois State 35, No. 15 South Dakota State 21: BROOKINGS, S.D. — The Redbirds put up a 35-0 lead partway through the second quarter and then held on to stun the Jackrabbits on the road.

The Redbirds took their opening drive of the game 62 yards in seven plays to find the endzone, as Tommy Rittenhouse found Daniel Sobkowicz for a big fourth-down conversion and the two later connected on an 11-yard touchdown to put the Redbirds up 7-0.

On South Dakota State's first drive, a tackle-for-loss by Patrick Bauer on second down put the Jackrabbits behind the sticks and Bauer came right back on the next play and intercepted a pass at the 5-yard line and ran it in for a touchdown to put the Redbirds up 14-0.

A muffed fair catch attempt on the ensuing Illinois State kickoff was recovered by Dereon Crowe and the Redbirds took over at the SDSU 28-yard line and needed just five plays to score again, as Rittenhouse and Sobkowicz connected on a 2-yard touchdown pass on fourth-and-goal to ball on the lead to 21-0.

The Redbirds forced another big play on the next SDSU drive, as the snap on the punt attempt was bobbled and the Redbirds took over on downs at the SDSU 25-yard line. That led to a two-yard touchdown run by Rittenhouse as he dove just inside the far pylon to make it 28-0 with 6:26 remaining in the opening quarter.

Sobkowicz caught his third touchdown pass of the game, this one from nine yards out, to extend the Illinois State advantage to 35-0 with 10:15 remaining in the second quarter before the Jackrabbits finally scored.

The Redbird defense came away with big stops in the fourth quarter that allowed them to take a knee

with under two minutes remaining to ice the game at 35-21.

Sobkowicz became the school's all-time receiving touchdowns leader in the game with his three scores, giving him 33. His three TD receptions also tied a single-game high for the senior wideout.

Rittenhouse accounted for four touchdowns (3 passing, 1 rushing) and scored on the ground for the fourth-straight game.

Bauer's interception was his second in as many weeks for the Redbirds and his pick six was the second of the year for the Redbird defense. Bauer would also record the game-sealing tackle-for-loss to finish the contest with three tackles, two TFLs and the pick six.

Dexter Niekamp's interception was the first of his Redbird career, as he finished the game with two sacks, five tackles and the pick. His older brother Tye Niekamp led the Redbirds with a career-high 16 tackles in the win against South Dakota State, as he was credited with nine solo stops, a forced fumble and a pass breakup against the Jack.

Doreon Dubose also had a career-high in tackles with 11 in the victory for ISU.

Nov. 22: No. 24 Southern Illinois 37, No. 11 Illinois State 7: NORMAL, Ill. — The Redbirds fell in their regular season finale as the Salukis held them to just 217 total yards and 12 first downs.

Tommy Rittenhouse scored the lone Illinois State touchdown on a one-yard run in the first quarter. He finished with 134 yards on 12 completions with one interception.

Tye Niekamp recorded 16 tackles to tie his career-high, which he set in the win at South Dakota State. The junior middle linebacker was also credited with a sack and three tackles-for-loss to lead the way for the Redbird defense.

Nov. 29: Illinois State 21, No. 16 Southeastern Louisiana 3 (first round): HAMMOND, La. — Illinois State started their playoff run by snagging four interceptions against the Lions in their first-round game.



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Illinois State

From 24

The Redbirds went 80 yards in six plays that concluded in a 6-yard Tommy Rittenhouse rushing touchdown to score first.

Following an interception by Shadwell Nkuba II, the Redbirds had the ball at 1st-and-Goal, but the Southeastern Louisiana defense held strong to force a fourth-down play for the Redbirds who went deep into their bag of tricks as Wenkers Wright took the handoff, pitched to Daniel Sobkowicz who then tossed a pass to Rittenhouse who was wide open for the touchdown as the ISU lead moved to 14-3 with 8:48 left in the third quarter.

After Mason Kaplan's second interception of the contest, the Redbirds took a 21-3 lead with 2:30 left in the game on a Seth Glatz

1-yard touchdown run to ice the win for ISU.

Tye Niekamp's interception was his first of the season and fifth of his career after leading the team with four in 2024. Niekamp led the way for the Redbird defense with 13 tackles, to go along with a sack and an interception. The double-digit tackling effort was his fourth in a row and his eighth of the season.

Dec. 6: Illinois State 29, No. 1 North Dakota State 28 (second round): FARGO, N.D. — In an upset that shocked the FCS, Illinois State erased a 14-point deficit in the fourth quarter at the Fargodome to topple the defending national champions and top-seeded Bison.

A touchdown pass from Tommy Rittenhouse to Daniel Sobkowicz with 1:00 minute remaining

in the game pulled ISU within one. Rittenhouse then found Scotty Presson Jr. for a two-point conversion to put ISU up by one and the defense held on for a thrilling 29-28 win.

The Redbirds found themselves in an early 14-0 hole before Victor Dawson scored a season-long 69 touchdown run early in the second quarter. Dawson rushed for a season-high 137 yards.

Rittenhouse, who also threw five picks that day, connected with Sobkowicz on an 8-yard touchdown with just 50 seconds remaining before halftime to cut it to 21-14. The two connected again with 2:44 left in the game to again, cut the Bison lead to 28-21.

The Redbirds forced a fumble for positive field position and Rittenhouse bootlegged to his right and threw back across his body to find the crossing Sobko-

wicz in the endzone for the final touchdown. Rittenhouse found Presson for the game-winning two-point conversion.

The victory snapped a 14-game losing streak to the Bison and Rittenhouse's three touchdown passes put him atop the ISU single-season list with 31.

With his two sacks, Garrett Steffen tied a career high and his 3 tackles for loss were a new personal best.

Dec. 13: Illinois State 42, No. 8 UC Davis 31 (quarter-finals): DAVIS, Calif. — The Redbirds and Aggies traded punches in the first quarter as ISU took a 21-17 lead before a scoreless second quarter. The Redbirds came back to score 14 in the third quarter to pull away for their third road win of the playoffs.

Chris Taylor returned a kickoff 91 yards on the Red-

birds' first possession and then Tommy Rittenhouse threw a 37-yard touchdown to Dylan Lord on the next to take a 14-10 lead.

After UC Davis went for a fake field goal and did not make the line of gain, the Redbirds took over on downs and on the first play from scrimmage Rittenhouse found Daniel Sobkowicz for a 93-yard touchdown, the longest of the season for ISU and career longs for both players, to make the score 21-10 with 4:21 left in the first.

Seth Glatz rushed for a 14-yard touchdown in the third quarter and following a forced fumble forced by Shadwell Nkuba II, the Redbirds got the ball back at their own 20 yard line. They went on a methodical 11-play scoring drive that took 6:50 off the clock and was capped off by a 17-yard touchdown pass from Rittenhouse to Sobkowicz

that made the score 35-17 with 2:06 remaining in the third quarter.

Following a converted fake punt attempt by Hayden Futch that moved the sticks, Seth Glatz ripped off a 58-yard touchdown run to make the score 42-17 with 3:35 left in the contest.

UC Davis cut into the Redbird advantage at 42-23 with 2:11 to play and after falling on the on-side kick attempt, they scored on a 24-yard pass from Caden Pinnick to Stacey Dobbins with 47 seconds left to cut it to 42-31.

The Redbirds fell on the final on-side attempt and then took a knee to close out the victory and advance to the semifinals for the first time since 2014.

Victor Dawson led the Redbirds rushing with 148 yards. Sobkowicz had 150 yards receiving and two touchdowns.

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Solomon Oduma and Patrick Bauer led the Redbird defense with seven tackles each.

Dec. 20: Illinois State 30, No. 12 Villanova 14 (semi-finals): VILLANOVA, Pa. — The Redbirds capitalized on an early lead to earn their fourth-straight road game in the 2024 playoffs and advance to just their second national title game in program history.

The Redbirds took the first lead of the game when Tommy Rittenhouse connected on a 53-yard touchdown pass to Daniel Sobkowicz.

Illinois State extended the advantage to 14-3 in the

second quarter as Victor Dawson powered his way in for a 1-yard touchdown run.

Following a 68-yard pass from Rittenhouse to Seth Glatz that put the Redbirds inside the Villanova 10-yard line, Rittenhouse connected again with Sobkowicz on an 8-yard touchdown pass on a slant route to make the score 21-6 by halftime.

A pair of field goals were the lone first-half points for Villanova.

Michael Cosentino connected on three second-half field goals, the first of his career at ISU, from 35, 29 and 30 yards to extend the Redbirds' lead to 30-6.

Villanova cut the lead to 30-14 with 3:18 to play on

a 16-yard touchdown pass from Pat McQuaide to Antonio Johnson, however, the Redbirds recovered the on-side kick attempt and held on for the victory.

CJ Richard Jr. intercepted his second pass in as many games for the Redbirds.

With his 155 yards, Dawson rushed for over 100 yards in three straight playoff games and for the fifth time this season.

Sobkowicz finished the game with a pair of scores and 97 yards on seven receptions.

Rittenhouse finished with 251 yards passing on 18 completions with two touchdowns and one interception.

Nashville

From 10

Toyota Stadium last January gave NDSU its 10th FCS title, all in Frisco over the last 15 years.

"When you have a fan base who has their favorite restaurant, bar, hotel at the site of the national championship, that means you've been here a few times," Matt Larsen, NDSU's athletic director and the 2024 FCS playoff committee chair, said Jan. 4 in Frisco.

MSU booked two trips to Frisco: last season and in January 2022 (when it lost to NDSU 38-10). UM got there two seasons ago, losing 23-3 to South Dakota State. The Griz's last national championship happened in 2001 in Chattanooga. The Bobcats are searching for their first national title since 1984, when they beat Louisiana Tech in Charleston, South Carolina.

Toyota Stadium is the home for FC Dallas and the National Soccer Hall of Fame, and it hosts the Frisco Bowl. Its capacity for football games is 20,500 but will be about half that for

the next two years, according to Halpin, who called the renovations "a major positive."

"We had no intention of looking (elsewhere), other than talking to Frisco about another extension to the agreement. It has worked very well. It's been great community here. That hasn't changed," Halpin added. "We just can't afford to tell both of our fan bases, whoever make it, 'We don't have tickets for you.'"

In addition to hosting Vanderbilt home games, FirstBank Stadium was the site of the Music City Bowl in 1998 (the FCS championship is "very akin to a bowl game," Larsen said). The 35,000-seat stadium underwent multi-year renovations that finished in September.

The city of Nashville was attractive to the NCAA and the FCS playoff committee.

"Selfishly, you want to have a place where it's not just the two teams participating. Fan bases are seeing other folks come in, and having a destination place provides that," Larsen said. "Nashville put together a really good presentation

from a team perspective, a fan perspective and then also from a financial perspective."

Representatives from Nashville and Vanderbilt traveled to Frisco in the days leading up to last season's FCS title game, according to Halpin. It was "premature to make any commitments" to a host site after the 2026 season, Halpin said almost a year ago, and the NCAA still hasn't announced where the game will be played beyond the next two in Nashville.

Halpin emphasized that the championship moved to Nashville solely because of the Toyota Stadium renovations, not because of anything wrong with that venue or Frisco.

"Absolutely it can come back here," he said. "The only reason we're leaving is because they're going to build a better arena for everybody."

Victor Flores is the Montana State Bobcats beat writer for 406 MT Sports. Email him at victor.flores@406mtsports.com and follow him on Twitter/X at @VictorFlores406



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ILLINOIS STATE VS. MONTANA STATE: HOW THEY STACK UP

Montana State earned the No. 2 seed and ranking after earning a second consecutive Big Sky championship with their victory in the regular season Brawl of the Wild. Illinois State finished third in the Missouri Valley, but caught fire in the playoffs and won four consecutive games on the road to earn their way to the FCS championship as an unseeded team. Here’s how the programs stack up based on this season’s results.

Illinois State	2025 STATS	Montana State
12-4 (5-3)	Record (Conf)	13-2 (8-0)
No. 17	FCS Coaches rank	No. 2
T-17	FCS STATS Perform rank	No. 2
30.6	Points per game	38.07
25.1	Points allowed per game	18
385.3	Yards per game	437.1
214.8	Pass yards per game	202.6
170.4	Rush yards per game	234.5
375.8	Yards allowed per game	319.9
243.3	Pass yards allowed per game	203.267
132.5	Rush yards allowed per game	116.7
QB Tommy Rittenhouse: 3,257 yds, 36 TDs, 12 INT	Passing leader	QB Justin Lamson: 2,892 yds, 24 TDs, 3 INT
RB Víctor Dawson: 1,251 yds, 5 TDs	Rushing leaders	RB Adam Jones: 1,069 yds, 15 TDs RB Julius Davis: 1,100 yds, 8 TDs
WR Daniel Sobkowicz: 78 rec, 1,089 yds, 18 TDs	Receiving leader	WR Taco Dowler, 69 rec, 914 yds, 6 TDs
LB Tye Niekamp: 78 tkl, 14.5 tfl, 8 pbu	Defense	LB Cole Taylor: 60 tkl, 2 Int, 7 tfl



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MONTANA STATE NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIP GAME HISTORY

2024 – North Dakota State 35, Montana State 32 (runner-up)

Location: Frisco, Texas

The Bison won their 10th FCS championship by defeating the Bobcats in Frisco, Texas.

Montana State quarterback Tommy Mellott, the 2024 Walter Payton award winner, brought the Bobcats back from a 21-3 halftime deficit, but after a 19-yard touch-down from Mellott to Taco Dowler with just over a minute remaining, the Bison (14-2) recovered the Cats' attempted onside kick to clinch the championship.

Mellott threw for two touchdowns on 13-of-24 and 195 yards, including a season-record 31 to break the mark previously held by Kelly Bradley (1984). He rushed for 135 and another touchdown.

The Cats set single-season pro-

gram records for total yards, rushing yards and points scored. Before 2024, they'd never topped 12 wins in a season. But the 2024 team reached 13 in its playoff opener and went on to reel off two more to finish 15-1.

In addition to his passing TD record, Mellott finished with the best completion percentage from a Bobcat in one season (67.7%).

Coach Brent Vigen won the Eddie Robinson award for coach of the year and Mellott, Brody Grebe, Marcus Wehr, Tommy Sullivan, Taco Dowler, Scottre Humphrey, Conner Moore, Titan Fleischmann, Rohan Jones and McCade O'Reilly all earned All-America honors. Adam Jones was the Big Sky Freshman of the Year.

JOSEPH SCHELLER, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Montana State quarterback Tommy Mellott dodges a tackle attempt by North Dakota State defensive end Loshiaka Roques (56) during the FCS championship game Jan. 6, 2025 at Toyota Stadium in Frisco, Texas.



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MONTANA STATE NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIP GAME HISTORY



MIKE CLARK, BILLINGS GAZETTE

Montana State's Callahan O'Reilly (47), Troy Andersen (15), David Alston (91), Ty Okada (7) and Sebastian Valdez (95) prepare for a play against North Dakota State during the FCS championship game on Jan. 8, 2022 in Frisco, Texas.

2021 — North Dakota State 38, Montana State 10 (runner-up)

Location: Frisco, Texas

In coach Brent Vigen's first season, the eighth-seeded Bobcats made it back to the FCS title game after 37 years. They faced his former team, the No. 2 Bison, after catching fire in the playoffs due to a quarterback change at the end of the regular season from Matthew McKay to freshman Tommy Mellott. They went on to earn playoff wins against UT Martin, upset top-seeded Sam Houston and then bouncing unseeded South Dakota State.

But the Bison (14-1) put up a 28-0 halftime lead after Mellott went out of the game with an injury on the first drive and NDSU cruised to their ninth overall FCS title. Tucker Rovig threw a 28-yard touchdown to Lance McCutcheon to get the Bobcats on the board in the

fourth quarter.

The Bobcats finished 12-3 overall. McCutcheon eventually finished the game with five receptions for 106 yards. His receiving day pushed him to 1,219 yards on the year, a new program single-season record and breaking the previous mark held by Joe Bignell from 1984.

Troy Andersen and Callahan O'Reilly each had 10 tackles for MSU. Andersen finished with Big Sky defensive player of the year and the FCS Athletic Directors Association defensive player of the year honors. He finished second in the voting for the Buck Buchanan Award and earned All-American honors next to Lewis Kidd, Daniel Hardy, Isaiah Ifanse and Chase Benson.



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MONTANA STATE NCAA DIVISION I CHAMPIONSHIP GAME HISTORY

1984 — Montana State 19, Louisiana Tech 6 (champion)

Location: Charles-ton, South Carolina

The Bobcats went from a 1-10 season in 1983 to national champions in 1984. They finished 12-2 overall and were Big Sky champions before defeating the Bulldogs in the I-AA championship game.

Kelly Bradley threw for 334 yards and two touchdowns to tight end Joe Bignell as the Bobcats did all their scoring in the first half. Mark Carter added two field goals.

The Bobcat defense notched 11 sacks, four interceptions and recovered three fumbles to overwhelm Bulldog quarterback Kyle Gandy.

Mark Fellows accounted for five sacks, five tackles for loss and recovered a fumble to lead the effort. The only score the Bulldogs managed came with 48 seconds left in the game.

Bradley, Fellows, Bignell, Dirk Nelson, Bill Schmidt, Lonnie Burt, Doug Kimball and Bruce Randall finished with All-American honors.

Dave Arnold was honored as the Coach of the Year and Bradley and Fellows were named the Big Sky Offensive and Defensive MVPs respectively.

It was Montana State's third overall national title, but their first at the NCAA Division I level.

Brothers

From 13

Justus, and twin Jaden (an O-lineman who retired after last season). Justus, a multi-season starting center and 2024 captain, got emotional during the senior day ceremony prior to the 2024 Brawl of the Wild.

"Love having my brothers out there, love having the whole family out there," Justus told the Chronicle. "It was a really sweet day."

QB Grant Vigen joined his brother, Jake, on MSU's roster this season. Jake is a red-shirt junior D-end who was a senior at Bozeman Gallatin when Grant was a freshman. They're the sons of MSU head coach Brent Vigen.

"Football has always been in my life, but (Brent) also wanted me and my brothers to actually love the game ourselves," Grant told the Chronicle after he committed.

Another true freshman, WR Nick Seymour, joined the Cats two seasons after his brother, Ben, exhausted his eligibility.

"I grew up wanting to be like my brother," Nick told 406 MT Sports in May. "Getting the opportunity to play with the Bobcats and follow in his footsteps is really cool."

Ben, who started at the other DE spot across from Brody Grebe in 2023, expressed pride and excitement that Nick took the same path from Southern California to Bozeman.

"There's such a history of brothers coming up and playing for the Cats, and obviously as an older brother, you want to see your brothers come play for the Cats as well," Ben said in May. "I want to thank the coaches and the Bobcats and the school for making this happen for my family because it does mean the world to us that Nick can come play for the Cats."

Lasting memories

Over the summer, Brody got married to Mackenzie Dethman, a Brockton native and former Rocky Mountain College basketball player whose last name is now Grebe. Her brother, Mason Dethman, is a redshirt freshman defensive back who's been one of MSU's best special teams players this season.

"I am very proud of my brother-in-law," Brody said, "and the way he's been able to progress since getting to MSU and stepping up with a critical role in special teams. Special teams is the best way to gain trust from the coaching staff to get your opportunity playing offense or defense."

An Alabama song played at Bobcat Stadium a handful of minutes after Bryce's pick-six Dec. 20, but it wasn't, "If You're Gonna Play in Texas." It was "Dixieland Delight." The FCS championship game moved from Frisco to Nashville, Tennessee, this year.

Brody will make the trip to Dixieland, hoping to see his brother help the Cats end their 41-year national title drought.

No matter what MSU (13-2) does Monday against Illinois State (12-4), the Grebes will forever cherish the cherry Bryce put on top of the Super Brawl.

"To have a huge, memorable play to go to a national championship game against your rival, there's nothing like it. Those are plays you dream of," Brody said. "It almost gave me chills from last year's semifinals against South Dakota, being able to make that play at the end of that game."

"To know what he was feeling like in that moment, it was pretty special."

Victor Flores is the Montana State Bobcats beat writer for 406 MT Sports. Email him at victor.flores@406mtsports.com and follow him on Twitter/X at @VictorFlores406



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NCAA DIVISION I-AA/FCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONS

2024	North Dakota State 35, Montana State 32	2008	Richmond 24, Montana 7	1992	Marshall 31, Youngstown State 28
2023	South Dakota State 23, Montana 3	2007	Appalachian State 49, Delaware 21	1991	Youngstown State 25, Marshall 17
2022	South Dakota State 45, North Dakota State 21	2006	Appalachian State 28, Massachusetts 17	1990	Georgia Southern 36, Nevada 13
2021	North Dakota State 38, Montana State 10	2005	Appalachian State 21, UNI 16	1989	Georgia Southern 37, Stephen F. Austin 34*
2020	Sam Houston 23, South Dakota State 21	2004	James Madison 31, Montana 21	1988	Furman 17, Georgia Southern 12
2019	North Dakota State 28, James Madison 20	2003	Delaware 40, Colgate 0	1987	Louisiana-Monroe 43, Marshall 42
2018	North Dakota State 38, Eastern Washington 24	2002	Western Kentucky 34, McNeese State 14	1986	Georgia Southern 48, Arkansas State 21
2017	North Dakota State 17, James Madison 13	2001	Montana 13, Furman 10	1985	Georgia Southern 44, Furman 42
2016	James Madison 28, Youngstown State 14	2000	Georgia Southern 27, Montana 25	1984	Montana State 19, Louisiana Tech 6
2015	North Dakota State 37, Jacksonville State 10	1999	Georgia Southern 59, Youngstown State 24	1983	Southern Illinois 43, Western Carolina 7
2014	North Dakota State 29, Illinois State 27	1998	Massachusetts 55, Georgia Southern 43	1982	Eastern Kentucky 17, Delaware 14
2013	North Dakota State 35, Towson 7	1997	Youngstown State 10, McNeese State 9	1981	Idaho State 34, Eastern Kentucky 23
2012	North Dakota State 39, Sam Houston State 13	1996	Marshall 49, Montana 29	1980	Boise State 31, Eastern Kentucky 29
2011	North Dakota State 17, Sam Houston State 6	1995	Montana 22, Marshall 20	1979	Eastern Kentucky 30, Lehigh 7
2010	Eastern Washington 20, Delaware 19	1994	Youngstown State 28, Boise State 14	1978	Florida A&M 35, Massachusetts 28
2009	Villanova 23, Montana 21	1993	Youngstown State 25, Marshall 17	*Stephen F. Austin's participation in 1989 championship vacated.	

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MONTANA STATE POSTSEASON AWARDS LISTS

The 2025 Montana State Bobcats won the Big Sky Conference for the second year in a row on their way to a second consecutive appearance in the FCS title game. Their dominance was recognized by multiple entities throughout the Big Sky Conference and FCS as Bobcats piled up postseason awards. Here's a look at the recognition listed by player in alphabetical order.

Montana State safety Caden Dowler (5) runs down the sideline on an interception return as Bobcats head coach Brent Vigen (left, in blue hoodie) looks on during a game against UC Davis on Nov. 15 at Bobcat Stadium.

SHAWN RAECKE,
FOR THE BOZEMAN
DAILY CHRONICLE



Paul Brott (DT, Sr., Billings West)

Second team All-American (AP, Stats Perform)
Third team All-American (FCS Football Central)
First team all-conference

Julius Davis (RB, Sr., Menomonie Falls, Wisc.)

Third team All-American (FCS Football Central)
Second team all-conference

Caden Dowler (DB, Jr., Billings West)

First team All-American (AP, Stats Perform, AFCA, FCS Football Central)
Big Sky Defensive Player of the Year
First team all-conference

Taco Dowler (WR, Jr., Billings West)

First team all-conference punt returner
Second team all-conference wide receiver

Alec Eckert (DT, So., Lewiston, Idaho)

Honorable mention all-conference

Kenneth Eiden IV (DE, Sr., Bozeman)

Second team All-American (FCS Football Central)
Third team All-American (AP, Stats Perform)
First team all-conference

Titan Fleischmann (OL, Jr., Pocatello, Idaho)

First team All-American (AP, Stats Perform, FCS Football Central)
First team all-conference

Tayden Gray (DB, So., Arlington, Texas)

Second team all-conference

Cedric Jefferson (OL, So., Temecula, Calif.)

Honorable mention all-conference

Adam Jones (RB, So., Missoula Sentinel)

Honorable mention all-conference

Justin Lamson (QB, Jr., Eldorado Hills, Calif.)

Second team All-American (Stats Perform)
Honorable mention All-American (AP)
Big Sky newcomer of the year
Second team all-conference

Burke Mastel (OL, So., Red Lodge)

Honorable mention all-conference

Hunter Parsons (DE, Sr., Sparks, Nev.)

Honorable mention all-conference

JT Reed (OG, Sr., San Jose, Calif.)

Honorable mention All-American (AP)
Honorable mention all-conference

Cole Taylor (LB, So., Great Falls CMR)

Second team all-conference

Carson Williams (DB, RS F., Houston, Texas)

Freshman All-American (FCS Football Central)

Braden Zimmer (OL, RS F, Billings West)

Freshman All-American (Stats Perform, FCS Football Central)
Honorable mention All-American (AP)

Brent Vigen

Big Sky coach of the Year



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MONTANA'S
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THREE LEVELS, THREE CHAMPIONSHIPS

1956

Wearing cowboy hats and bolo ties, the Montana State football team poses for a photo during the 1956 season. The Bobcats won the NAIA national championship that year despite tying St. Joseph's (Indiana) 0-0 in the Aluminum Bowl, a one-time postseason contest held at War Memorial Stadium in Little Rock, Arkansas, on Dec. 22. The 1956 Bobcats went 9-0-1 and won the Rocky Mountain Athletic Conference championship. The national championship was the first of MSU's three titles at three different levels of competition, and the Bobcats remain the only college football program with that distinction.

MONTANA STATE ATHLETICS



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THREE LEVELS, THREE CHAMPIONSHIPS

1976

The Bobcats were a Division II program in 1976, and Sonny Holland — the legendary former MSU lineman and coach — led them to playoff wins over New Hampshire, North Dakota State, and Akron in the championship game. Here, Holland and his team accept the title trophy in Wichita Falls, Texas. In the 24-13 win over Akron, MSU jumped to a 14-0 lead in the second quarter thanks to a 5-yard touchdown pass from Paul Dennehy to Ron McCullough. Tight end Butch Damberger caught a 3-yard TD pass from running back Don Ueland on a trick play. Running back Tom Kosterba, who had 1,083 yards rushing that year, added a 7-yard touchdown run. Holland, who was later honored with a statue outside Bobcat Stadium, died in 2022 at 84.

MONTANA STATE ATHLETICS



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THREE LEVELS,
THREE CHAMPIONSHIPS 1984



MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

In 1984, Montana State coach Dave Arnold orchestrated one of the greatest single-season turnarounds in college football history. Arnold’s Bobcats went 1-10 in 1983 but caught lightning in a bottle the following season by going 12-2 and beating Louisiana Tech 19-6 in the NCAA Division I-AA championship game in Charleston, S.C., seen here as Arnold accepts the 1984 NCAA Division I-AA national championship trophy while tight end Joe Bignell (86), defensive end Mark Fellows (68) and safety Joe Roberts (47) look on after the championship. The Bobcats won their third national championship, and first NCAA Division I championship. They also went 6-1 and won the Big Sky Conference in 1984 during that special season, but MSU went on to win just five games combined in the following two years. bookended by going 1-10 in 1983 and 2-9 in 1985.



VIEW: Open your smartphone camera and click the link for an interactive map of the 2025 Montana State Bobcats roster’s hometowns.



Go Cats!!



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