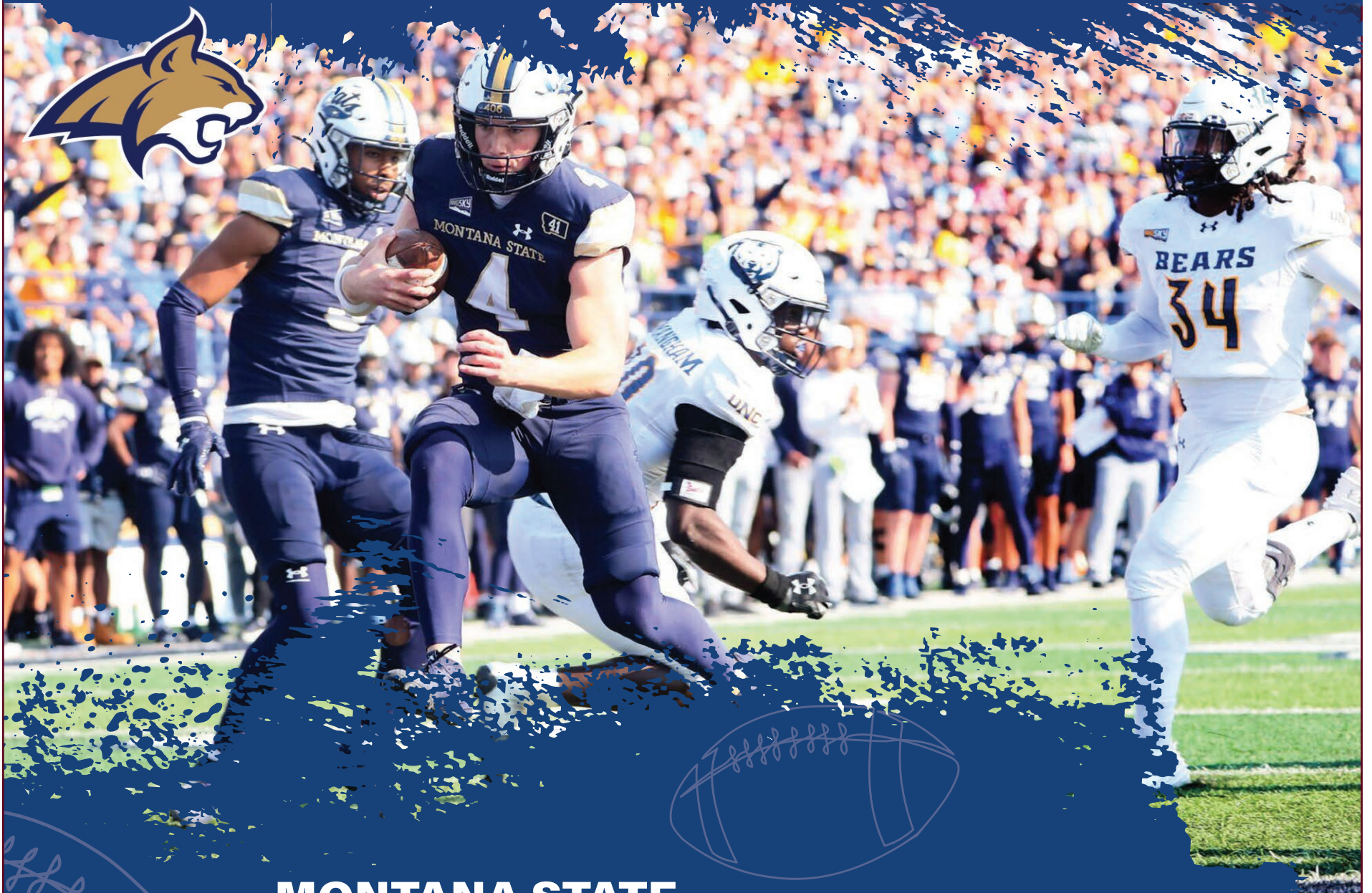


FCS NATIONAL CHAMPIONSHIP PREVIEW



MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY (15-0)



VS.



North Dakota State (13-2)

**5 P.M. (MST)
MONDAY,
JANUARY 6
FRISCO, TEXAS
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1/13/25

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7:30 pm

"A Rare Grand Alignment"

1/14/25

4:00 pm

"Space Cowboy"

6:00 pm

Bring On The Dancing Horses

1/15/25

6:00 pm

Comedian
Kevin Nealon

1/16/25

4:00 pm

"Peak Season"

6:30 pm

Napoleon Dynamite VIP Meet
and Greet with cast members

7:30 pm

Napoleon Dynamite
20th Anniversary
Screening/Event



COVELLITE THEATRE

215 W Broadway | Butte

1/13/25

7:00 pm

Comedy Showcase with Dr.
Nissi Hamilton

1/14/25

4:00 pm

"Stella Stevens" The Last
Starlet"

8:00 pm

"Flipside"

1/15/25

4:00 pm

"Into the Thorns"

6:00 pm

"Cold Wallet"

1/16/25

2:00 pm

"Art for Everybody"



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6:00 pm

"Every Little Thing"

7:30 pm

"The Sasquologist"

1/14/25

4:00 pm

"Thank You Very Much"

6:30 pm

"Paper Bag Plan" +Q&A

1/15/25

4:00 pm

"Ivan Doig: Landscapes
of a Western Mind"

6:00 pm

"Mavericks"

1/16/25

2:30 pm "So Shot"

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1/14/25

2:00 pm

Filmmaker Panel with Michael
Polish

1/15/25

Film and TV Today with Matt
Dearborn

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Music Closing Night
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Late Night Music with
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'One of the greats'

Well-rounded Brody Grebe prepares for final game of Montana State career

VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — Shawn Howe was intrigued but uncertain.

Howe inherited a talented freshman when Montana State hired Howe to be its defensive line coach in 2021. That freshman, Brody Grebe, was coming off a decorated multi-sport high school career in Melstone and a fall at a boarding school where he played football and basketball.

"He was a very athletic kid. But he was so green in the game," Howe told 406 MT Sports, adding, "When you don't have a background in doing something — especially D-line, as technical as D-line is — you start too far behind the eight ball. No matter how athletic you are, it's hard to get you to that level."

Four years later, Grebe has reached one of the highest levels of the FCS. He's a three-time All-American. He was named the 2024 Big Sky Conference defensive player of the year. He's a two-time team captain and the latest recipient of MSU's legacy No. 41.

Grebe showed flashes of the player he'd become during the 2021 season. His physical and mental improvement since then has turned him into one of the driving forces behind MSU's undefeated run to the national championship game this year.

"I've always been that same small-town guy that was willing to bet on myself," Grebe said. "Reflecting on everything that I've been through — a lot of adversity, a lot of good times and a bunch of great guys that I've met here — I'm thankful to be a



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State's Brody Grebe (41) pursues during a South Dakota handoff in the semifinals of the FCS playoffs at Bobcat Stadium on Saturday, Dec. 21.

part of this program. Helped try to raise it up and just give everything I've ever been able to give to this program." Grebe's nickname is also a description of who he is: the "Melstone Cowboy". He's worked on his family's ranch since he was a young boy, and he was a stand-out rodeo athlete in high school.

He also won state titles in track and field, played basketball at Melstone High and starred at quarterback and linebacker for the Roundup football cooperative.

Grebe couldn't decide whether to pursue basketball or football after high school, so he kicked the can 2,100 miles down the road to Choate Rosemary Hall in Wallingford, Connecticut.

"I loved basketball a lot, and to be honest, it was my main sport probably for most of my life,"

Grebe said. "It helped me as an athlete, just being able to move, change direction, be quick on my feet, reflexes, all that type of stuff — different movements that you might not get in football and single-sport athletes might not get." Grebe liked his Choate Rosemary coaches and many of the people he met during his semester there. But it was a culture shock. Melstone's population is under 200. Wallingford has more than 43,000 people, most of whom dressed, talked and acted differently than the Montanans Grebe grew up around.

"I'm thankful for that experience," he said, "but there's nothing like Montana, and that's why I came back."

A couple weeks into his time at Choate Rosemary, Grebe realized

football would be the sport he pursued in college. He had previously been recruited by MSU, which was coached by Jeff Choate at the time. Grebe signed with the Cats (the team he grew up rooting for) in December 2019 and returned to Montana a month later.

"The team camaraderie out there, just having a larger group of guys playing a little higher level of football, all that combined made me want to pursue football," Grebe said. In a more traditional path, Grebe would've played or redshirted in the fall of 2019 and — barring major injury issues — finished his college career in 2022 or 2023. But the fall at Choate Rosemary didn't count against his college eligibility. Neither did 2020-21 because of COVID-19, which led the NCAA to grant an

extra season of eligibility to every athlete. The Cats chose not to play the 2021 spring football season, after which Choate took the co-defensive coordinator/inside linebackers coaching job at Texas and MSU replaced him with Brent Vigen.

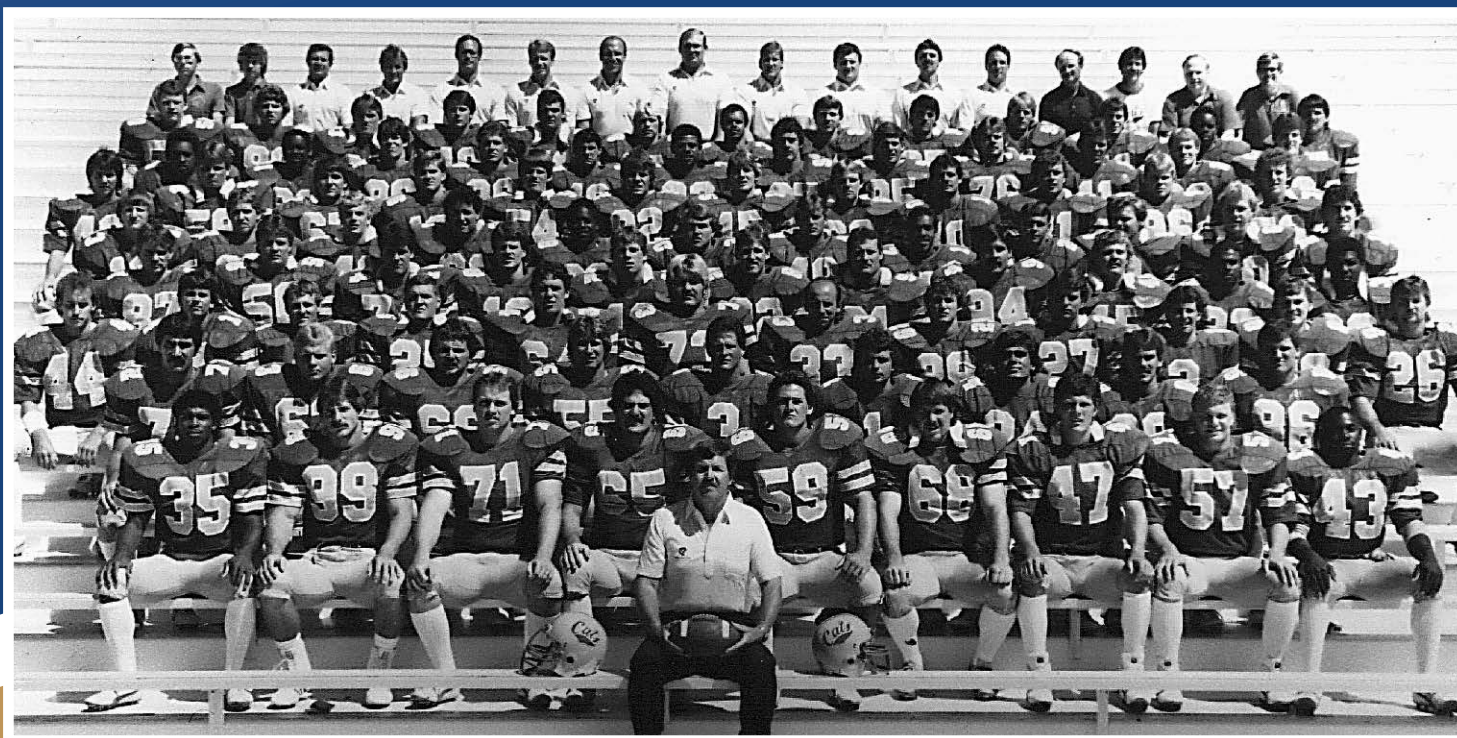
So Grebe entered 2021 as a freshman who was two years removed from his senior year of high school. Howe's questions about Grebe's ability to translate athleticism into production were quickly answered. Grebe played his way into a pass-rushing role on a D-line that featured then-No. 41 wearer Chase Benson, fellow captain Amandre Williams and future NFL player Daniel Hardy.

"Brody was a third-down player that first year, but you saw how intentional he was in making sure he was the absolute best at that one part of the deal," Howe said. "You realize, 'Well, if he could do that with everything, then he could be an All-American. He could be defensive player of the year.'" Grebe's stepmother, Ricki, suffered a serious accident in early December 2021. As she began her full recovery, the Cats advanced to the FCS title game. Grebe recorded at least one tackle in all four playoff games, with a sack in the quarterfinal win at Sam Houston and a tackle for loss in the FCS championship loss to North Dakota State.

Grebe became a starter the following year, and while his numbers didn't take a leap (three sacks and five TFLs compared to 5.5 sacks and 6.5 TFLs in 2021), he earned All-America third-team and All-Big Sky first-team honors because of his immeasurable growth.

Howe started calling Grebe "Landmark Larry" years ago because he excelled at getting to the landmark MSU's coaches

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Grebe

From M6

ask of their pass rushers. Grebe has spent hours of extra time in Howe's office over the years, Howe said.

"We'll be in a meeting, and Brody will be finishing my sentences almost. Or I ask a question of the group, and he knows the answer. He knows exactly how I speak it," Howe added. "What it really does is sets the tempo for a lot of the other guys in the room, like, 'Man, here's our top guy, he's on the exact same page as coach.'"

Grebe finished the 2023 season with 50 tackles, 13 TFLs, 9.5 sacks, six QB hurries and three forced fumbles to earn another first-team all-conference selection, along with several All-America honors and a tie for 16th in the voting for the Buck Buchanan Award (FCS defensive player of the year).

In October, Grebe was chosen as a finalist for the William

V. Campbell Trophy, also known as the "Academic Heisman." He boasts a 3.93 GPA in mechanical engineering. For his capstone project, which started as an idea to generate extra revenue for the Grebe ranch, he's worked on a bioreactor in which cow manure is mixed with water to create an energy source.

"This is a kid that knows how to turn cow poop into fuel," Howe said. "You say just that alone and that puts him light years ahead of any D-line coach in the world."

"You can't say enough for how smart the kid is, but really the thing that I respect the most about Brody is the work behind the intelligence. A lot of people are smart, a lot of people are athletic, a lot of people are gifted, but the work ethic that Brody mixes with that is I think what makes him elite."

True to his roots, Grebe wore a cowboy hat with his tuxedo during the Campbell Trophy ceremony in Las Vegas. His sack celebration is an ode to the move world class heeler Junior Nogueira makes

during team roping events. This season, Grebe has 35 tackles, 10 TFLs, 8.5 sacks, eight hurries, five pass breakups and two fumble recoveries, including a game-sealing one in MSU's semifinal win over South Dakota that mirrored Daniel Hardy's recovery in the 2021 semifinal victory. In addition to his All-America and Big Sky recognition, Grebe finished ninth in the 2024 Buck Buchanan Award voting.

MSU finished with six sacks in a 30-28 win at UC Davis Nov. 16. Grebe didn't record any of those sacks but still "played a hell of a game," all-time great MSU D-lineman Bill Kollar told Howe. Grebe's pressure and presence led to several QB takedowns.

"He is just a wrecking ball out there," said MSU QB Tommy Mellott. "When I watch from the sideline, they always have a guy chipping him in their pass setting. They do certain things just to make it extremely difficult on him. He's the focus of every single offense. It's a testament to how he

takes care of his body day in and day out so he can be out there on Saturday and be successful and just how he's prepared his entire life. "He's just a stud. I love that guy, and I'm excited to be able to play another game with him."

This past summer, Grebe got engaged to Mackenzie Dethman, a former Rocky Mountain College women's basketball player and oldest sister of current Bobcat freshman Mason Dethman. Their wedding is scheduled for this coming summer.

Grebe and Dethman live with Grebe's brother Bryce, a redshirt freshman linebacker at MSU.

"My family gets to come to every single game. I live with my family. There's nothing more I could ask for," Grebe said. "It's pretty special to have them in my life."

Grebe spent some of this fall trying to secure an agent for NFL purposes. He's in the preferred free agent range with a chance to move closer to an NFL Draft pick, according to The Athletic's Dane Brugler.

"Those opportunities I'm thankful for," Grebe said. "Football is not going to last forever, so I want to push as hard as I can, keep going for as long as I can until I can't play anymore." Before the quarterfinal game against Idaho on Dec. 13, Grebe received the Montana flag from Mark Fellows for MSU's runout. Like Grebe, Fellows starred at D-end for the Cats. The Choteau native played for MSU's last national championship team in 1984.

On Jan. 6 against NDSU, with Ricki and his family in attendance, Grebe hopes to become the latest small-town DE to become a national champion.

"His legacy will be felt for a long, long time,"

Vigen said. "He'll go down as one of the greats, I think, in this program. I have no doubt in my mind." 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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Passing improvement has lifted Tommy Mellott, Montana State Bobcats to upper echelon



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State quarterback Tommy Mellott eyes the South Dakota defense during an FCS semifinal game Saturday, Dec. 21 at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — There's a Bozeman Daily Chronicle photo from 2021 that shows Tommy Mellott — then a freshman at Montana State — wearing No. 16 and trying to tackle Montana's Junior Bergen on a punt return during the Brawl of the Wild in Missoula.

Mellott was listed at quarterback but rarely lined up behind center that regular season. In addition to a handful of reps at wildcat QB, he lined up at wide receiver and played on various special teams, including the punt coverage unit. The Butte native finished that regular season with as many catches and tackles (one each) as completed passes (two).

That 2021 Cat-Griz game was Mellott's last in a role other than

starting QB. He showed glimpses of passing acumen, but he looked like a run-first QB during the 2021 playoffs and as part of a two-QB system with Sean Chambers the next two seasons.

Entering this season, MSU's coaches wanted to limit the hits Mellott took, considering he battled injuries throughout the previous three years and Chambers moved on to an offensive analyst/assistant QBs coach role with MSU. They also believed Mellott could be a true dual threat.

On Jan. 4, Mellott will learn if he earned the Walter Payton Award (FCS offensive player of the year). Two days later, he'll try to lead the Bobcats (15-0) to their first national championship since 1984. Both are on the table because of his major im-

provements as a passer.

"Through hard work and experience, he's developed into a complete player," said MSU offensive coordinator/QBs coach Tyler Walker. Mellott's electric rushing ability spearheaded MSU's run to the 2021 FCS championship game, but it was a double-edged sword. He suffered an ankle injury on a run during the opening drive of the title tilt, and he didn't return.

Chambers transferred to MSU shortly after that 38-10 loss to North Dakota State. With several running backs hurt early in the 2022 season, MSU's coaches found creative ways to run the ball, including Mellott and Chambers in the backfield at the same

Please see **MELLOTT**, Page 10

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Mellott

From 9

time. Mellott attempted at least 18 passes in each of the first three games but maintained a heavy rushing load, averaging 13 carries per game.

That September at Eastern Washington, Mellott suffered a head injury that forced him to miss the rest of that game and the next two. It happened on a run after he slid to protect himself.

Mellott, who switched to No. 4 before that season, got banged up in the FCS semifinal loss at South Dakota State. He hurt his leg the following fall (again at SDSU) and missed the next three games. Maybe MSU wouldn't have lost in overtime to NDSU in the second round of the 2023 playoffs if Mellott didn't hurt his leg in the fourth quarter. The injury happened on a designed third-and-1 run, his 18th rushing attempt of the game.

"When you just catch it and run,

it can get very physical and there's a lot of impact," Mellott said Dec. 21. "That's ultimately why I haven't been able to finish the past three seasons." Mellott had four QBs coaches over the next five months. Taylor Housewright, who was also the OC, left for a different assistant job in January (first at Akron, then at Georgia Southern). MSU hired Chuckie Keeton as QBs coach later that month, but he left in April for a position with the Seattle Seahawks. MSU head coach Brent Vigen briefly led the QB room, then moved Walker from tight ends to QBs coach.

Keeton and Walker both helped Mellott develop as a passer in the offseason, per Vigen. The staff added a quick game package "to create more ordinary quarterback throws" for Mellott, Vigen said. "In the quick game, we have instant answers," Walker said. "It's high completion. You start stacking those together, you start feeling confident, you start building confidence. You start with the quick game to the drop back to the

play action. Then we develop it, and now we're throwing the ball down the field a little more, and he's in the zone."

MSU's coaches also wanted Mellott's mentality to become more ordinary, and he took that to heart.

"The easy thing for myself is to try to make every play, the biggest play, try to score on every play," Mellott said in July. "But obviously there are a lot of benefits to getting out of bounds instead of trying to get the extra 2 yards, or taking a checkdown immediately instead of sitting in there to try to see if the next read's going to be immediately open, and if it's not then you might be taking a shot.

"I think that it's going to be more like chess than it has been like checkers." Mellott completed 21 of 32 passes for 205 yards and two touchdowns in the season-opening comeback win at New Mexico. He looked like a grandmaster on the game-winning two-minute drill.

"We had done that two-minute

drive probably 100 times. Not the exact same plays in the exact order, but those plays. He feels confident. He knows where the ball is supposed to go," Walker said. "He has good feel, and things are slowing down for him. When they slow down for him, he can react faster, without thinking."

Mellott ran nine times in the New Mexico game, beginning a six-game streak in which he finished with more completions than carries. In the sixth game of that streak (against Northern Colorado), he threw for four TDs for the first time of his career.

"I've had to work really hard to try to improve my passing ability," Mellott said, adding, "There's the mental ability where you have to understand what's going on with protections, for one, so you obviously have guys blocked out the right way. But then it's knowing the combinations, knowing all the coverages. ... It's footwork, it's understanding how your body moves and being able to position it so you can get the throw out

the right way so you get the juice behind the ball." The Cats didn't feel like they needed Mellott to run those first six games, Walker said. That changed a bit when they hosted Idaho Oct. 13, and Mellott reminded everyone of his game-breaking ground ability. He rushed for 140 yards on 11 carries against the Vandals.

The Butte High graduate also showed significant "poise in the passing game" that night, Vigen said, finishing 11 of 15 for 121 yards, two TDs and no turnovers.

"I've always felt like he can do all the things that everybody doubts because I've seen him do it," Butte head coach Arie Grey said after the game, adding, "It's pretty cool to see how far he's come." Before the season began, MSU wide receiver Ty McCullouch said the two-QB system didn't allow either Mellott or Chambers to "get into the flow of the game." McCullouch predicted Mellott was "going to turn a lot of heads" as MSU's clear QB1.

Please see **MELLOTT**, Page M11

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Mellott

From M10

“I don’t even think (Mellott has) thought about it that way. I don’t think I’ve really thought about it that way. But it probably has helped,” Chambers said. “It probably helped him just get into a rhythm, knowing that he’s going to be the one going out there all the time.”

Walker isn’t as certain.

“If we were doing the two-QB system now, who knows?” Walker said. “He just got more snaps under his belt, is really what it is.” Mellott learned valuable lessons from all 25 of his starts from 2021-23, whether they were good or bad.

“We wear (non-contact) gold jerseys at practice and make it look like football, but when you’re out there and the bullets are flying and those guys in the other jerseys can tackle you, it’s a whole different world,” Vigen said. “Game experience I think at that position is so much dif-

ferent than any other position, and it accumulates.”

Two weeks after the October win over Idaho, MSU was locked in a battle at EWU. Mellott sprinted for a 76-yard TD to break a tie. He threw his first interception of the season a couple drives later, then responded with a 61-yard dagger to McCullough to cap a 13-of-20, 181-yard day. “He lives by the ‘good play, bad play, next play’ mentality,” Chambers said. “He’s looking forward to the next play he can make.”

Two weeks after the EWU game, Mellott finished with 4 yards on three carries at No. 4 UC Davis. He still played a key role in the 30-28 win, completing 18 of 25 passes for 174 yards, two TDs and no turnovers.

Mellott’s first college start came in the second round of the 2021 playoffs against UT Martin. Heavy winds plus Mellott’s raw passing ability led to an 8-for-20, 51-yard performance.

Three years later, the Cats again hosted UT Martin in the second round. This time, Mellott set sin-

gle-game career-bests in completions (22) and passing yards (300), and he threw for four TDs for the second time in his career. “We’ll signal a play or something on the sideline, and he’s already getting the whole entire play signal right as soon as we do one signal,” Chambers said. “He’s really dialed in. He knows the game plan in and out.”

Near the end of the quarter-final rout of Idaho, Mellott did the Stephen Curry “night night” celebration. After throwing a TD pass to Taco Dowler in the 31-17 semifinal win over South Dakota, he imitated a baseball player hitting a home run.

“At first, he wasn’t really like that,” Chambers said. “I’ve always kind of urged him to show some emotion out there, be excited a little bit. From the midpoint of the season to the end of the season here, he’s kind of shown some swagger and shown some emotion. ... He knows he’s playing pretty special right now, and he’s just having fun with it.” Mellott set a season-high with 17 rushes

against USD, half as many as he tallied in the 2021 semis against SDSU. Few of his 109 carries this season have ended in hard collisions.

“Early on this season, he was kind of getting a feel for how to be a smart runner. I think now he’s got that down pat,” Chambers said. “He’s still fighting for those extra yards, but he’s still being smart with it.”

“I think the way he’s playing football right now is kind of what he’s wanted to play football like for the last couple years.” Mellott relied on his pass catchers, mainly future NFL wideout Lance McCutcheon, to win jump balls throughout that 2021 playoff run. This fall, he’s spread it around with throws to every section of the field.

“The area I think he’s improved the most is down-the-field passing. I’m talking posts and things like that, stuff we didn’t do a lot with him the last couple years,” Vigen said. “I think the game is just continuing to slow down for him in the passing game, meaning,

‘OK, he’s going to actually take the time to maybe go through a couple reads.’” Mellott’s 68.8% completion percentage this season currently sits No. 1 in MSU history (minimum 100 attempts). His 29 TD passes are one off the single-season program record, set by Kelly Bradley in 1984 – the last time MSU won a national title. To end the 40-year drought, the Cats will have to beat NDSU Jan. 6 in Frisco, Texas.

Mellott’s evolution from raw special teams player to complete QB gives him a much better chance to stay upright and beat the Bison this time around.

“He’s developed. He’s become something different. He is playing at an elite level right now,” Vigen said before the USD game. “We wouldn’t be here without the way Tommy’s played.”

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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Montana State's semifinal win looks eerily similar to 2021, but 'this team is different'

BY VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — The moment was so familiar, it felt fictional.

On Dec. 18, 2021, a right-handed quarterback from a South Dakota football team (South Dakota State) completed a 9-yard pass going toward the north end zone at Bobcat Stadium, trailing 31-17 with 1 minute, 8 seconds left. The receiver lateraled the ball to a teammate, but the hook-and-ladder attempt fell to the turf. Montana State then-freshman defensive end Brody Grebe — wearing No. 14 instead of his usual No. 10 because of special teams number duplicate issues — had a beat on the fumble, but it was just out of his grasp. Daniel Hardy scooped it up to seal MSU's FCS semifinal win.

Three years and three days later, a left-handed QB from a South Dakota football team (this time South Dakota) completed an 8-yard pass going toward the south end zone at Bobcat Stadium, trailing 31-17 with 1:46 left. The receiver lateraled the ball to a teammate, but the hook-and-ladder attempt fell to the turf. Grebe — now a senior wearing MSU's legacy No. 41 — had a beat on the fumble. This time, he recovered it.

"As a freshman, being able to go in that game and feel like I have an impact and get to be a part of that moment with those guys, guys that I looked up to like crazy... for it to come around now to my senior year and be one of those guys making plays to finish a game and do it in Bobcat Stadium, that's special," Grebe said after the latest semifinal game. "There's nothing like that. I'm so happy that I was able to go out this way in Bobcat Stadium."

In both the 2021 and 2024 semifinal games, MSU built its 31-17 lead on the backs of Tommy Mellott and a defense that shut things down after allowing a couple early chunk plays. Just like three years ago, the Bobcats will face North



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State's Kenneth Eiden IV (11) and Paul Brott (96) celebrate a stop during an FCS semifinal game against South Dakota on Dec. 21 at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

Dakota State in the FCS championship game. As was the case in 2021, the team MSU beat in the semis was responsible for NDSU's only FCS loss.

That doesn't mean NDSU will remain unblemished. The semifinal win over South Dakota showcased the major improvements MSU (15-0) has made since that 2021 run to Frisco, Texas.

"I do think that (2021) team changed our expectations — that we can do it, we can make it all the way," said MSU head coach Brent Vigen. "But I think this team is different. I think this team is better equipped for this time of year."

When MSU hired Vigen in 2021, the Cats were coming off their first semifinal appearance since their 1984 national championship season. Vigen led them to a 9-2 regular season (7-1 in Big Sky Conference play), but not many were calling him the next Sonny Holland after a 29-10 loss at rival Montana. It was hard to foresee Mellott becoming one of the best — if not the best — quarterbacks in program history at that point either.

Vigen and his staff elevated Mellott over struggling starter Mat-

thew McKay before eighth-seeded MSU's first 2021 playoff game. The postseason legend of "Touchdown Tommy" began when he ran all over UT Martin. A week later, the Butte native passed for, ran and caught at least one TD each at top-seeded Sam Houston. In the semis against SDSU, Mellott rushed for 155 yards, passed for 233 and accounted for four scores to send the shorthanded Cats to the FCS title game.

In the final seconds of that SDSU win, Mellott sat on the bench and cried.

"Our defense was unbelievable. But on offense, it was like unrealistic, crazy plays were just happening over and over and over again, and somehow we were able to keep winning games," Mellott said. "I never really thought of what was beyond that semifinal game against South Dakota State back then, so when I sat there and I actually realized that we were going to a national championship game, it was overwhelming."

"It was overwhelming because I was just so happy. It was like, 'Wow, I want to do everything I possibly can to help those seniors get as many games they possibly

could.' So when we ultimately made it all the way, I just had a lot of love in my heart."

The game-ending injury Mellott suffered on the opening series of the national title game certainly hurt MSU's chances. So did an injury that made MSU nose tackle Chase Benson a shell of his All-American self. But it was hard to watch that 38-10 NDSU win and think two players were the difference.

MSU's semifinal victory over SDSU, which beat NDSU in the 2021 regular season, could be attributed to external factors. For one, SDSU played that Dakota Marker game at home. The Jackrabbits were also coming off a 10-game, pandemic-postponed spring season. The win over NDSU was their 19th game in about 10 months. Their loss at MSU, which opted out of the spring season, was their 25th in 11.

In 2022, SDSU earned a 39-18 semifinal win over the Cats in Brookings, South Dakota.

Those season-ending losses to Dakota State teams motivated the Cats to get stronger and deeper in the trenches. Their offseason work bore fruit in 2023, but improvements up front were overshadowed by four losses, especially three close ones: at SDSU, at Idaho and to NDSU in the second round of the playoffs. That season-ender remains MSU's only home defeat during Vigen's tenure.

"We're a different team in large part because of that (2021) team and what they went through," Vigen said. "Coming up short in Frisco that year, and then coming up short in Brookings the next year and coming up short last year, I think all those... We have plenty of ups, but those downs have put us in this position where this group is not going to leave any stone unturned."

This season might be over if the Cats didn't get some good fortune in their season-opening comeback

win at New Mexico. But luck often swings games. Just watch MSU's losses to NDSU, SDSU and Idaho in 2023. MSU was only able to benefit from breaks in Albuquerque, New Mexico, because it had enough talent and belief to shrink two 17-point deficits.

"That New Mexico game was a staple of what we're all about here and kind of got that ball rolling," Mellott said. "We finished last season with two losses. Being able to build up and grow the entire offseason, come back then go play New Mexico and be down 17 twice and to go find a way to win, it's just a testament to what we did in the offseason and how different we were this season."

The Cats have fallen behind one other time this season — for less than a quarter Nov. 16 at UC Davis. They turned that 8-0 deficit into a 30-8 lead and survived a late, luck-aided Aggie rally.

MSU also faced moments of doubt at Idaho State, at Eastern Washington, against Idaho in the quarterfinals and against USD in the semis. The Cats won all four games by at least 14 points.

"It's about the culmination of moments over the spring, over the summer, when we decided we're going to take it to another level, that we're not going to be the same team that we have been," Grebe said, adding, "We're not scared of a little adversity."

USD didn't have a 25-game year. In fact, the Coyotes played one game less than MSU in 2024 because their game at Portland State was canceled due to whooping cough. They beat NDSU and went to overtime at SDSU in the regular season largely because of good line play. MSU controlled the line of scrimmage on both sides of the ball for the bulk of the semifinal game.

The Cats needed to win three playoff games to reach 12 wins in

'A different cat'

Montana State's Marcus Wehr overcame doubts to become All-American

BY VICTOR FLORES
406 MT Sports

BOZEMAN — Montana State offensive lineman Marcus Wehr had chances to play at the FBS level after his junior season, but he never seriously considered them.

A bunch of family and friends from Wehr's hometown Billings come to cheer him on every time he suits up at Bobcat Stadium. Staying close to home mattered to Wehr, as did finishing his career with the team that fostered friendships and developed him into a star.

Another big reason Wehr remained in Bozeman: the Brawl of the Wild. An injury prevented him from playing in MSU's 55-21 home win over rival Montana in 2022, and the Bobcats surrendered the 306-pound Great Divide Trophy last year after their 37-7 loss "over the hill," as both sides cheekily call the rival town.

"I've never personally had that weight on my shoulder," Wehr said Nov. 12, "so I'm pretty excited to put that on."

His prediction came true Nov. 23, when MSU beat UM 34-11 to improve to 12-0 and earn the No. 1 seed in the FCS playoffs. Arguably the biggest play of the game — an 88-yard run from Adam Jones — happened largely because "Marcus made a really nice block," Jones said.

The 6-foot-4, 300-pound Wehr has delivered nice blocks consistently since he switched from defensive line in 2022. While he's quiet off the field, he's an all-business bulldozer with a nasty streak on it. That mindset combined with tire-forged strength turned the Billings Central graduate into one of the best O-linemen in the FCS.

"There's a whole lot of talent in this world not playing football or

doing anything meaningful because they don't have the desire to maximize who they are," said MSU O-line coach Al Johnson, adding, "He wants to be great, and he has the consistency to try to push himself to be great every day. That, to me, when you add those other abilities, is what gives you Marcus Wehr."

Wehr stood about 5-9 and couldn't have weighed more than 150 pounds as a high school freshman. As he got bigger, he began to look like a future Big Sky player in the eyes of Central O-line coach Casey McMillan, who played at Iowa.

Wehr was a smart, team-first player who was quiet and serious during his high school career, said Central head coach Jim Stanton. Competitiveness and a nasty streak bubbled to the surface when Wehr

put the pads on. Wehr credits McMillan for that mentality.

"I'm pretty even-keeled off the field," Wehr said. "Then I kind of turn on this different person on the field."

Wehr's father, Dave, spent many years as the president and CEO of the Billings Tire-Rama. Throughout high school, Wehr lifted in the morning and spent the rest of the day in the Tire-Rama warehouse, where he'd move semi-truck tires and others that weighed north of 100 pounds.

Stanton said there probably hasn't been a player in his 23 years as Central's head coach that has worked harder in the weight room than Wehr did.

Strength wasn't the only reason Wehr became an all-state lineman on Central's 2018 Class A state title-winning team.

"He was so quick and fast with



SHAWN RAECKE,
FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State offensive lineman Marcus Wehr looks on before a play against Sacramento State Saturday, Nov. 9 at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

his feet and hands, and understood the leverage and taking on blocks and defeating blocks. He was awfully good on the offensive side as well," Stanton said, adding, "You could just see some snap in him that was a little bit different than most kids."

Please see **WEHR**, Page 14

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Wehr

From 13

Central ran the Wing-T offense when Wehr played there. That scheme allowed him to succeed as an O-lineman despite weighing 225 pounds. Due in part to his relatively small size, he committed to MSU as a D-lineman.

“I thought I was a better offensive lineman in high school, but I obviously wasn’t big enough coming in here,” he said. “They wanted me to play D-end, and then I changed to a three tech (tackle). I thought I was going to stay at D-line forever.”

Wehr arrived at MSU brimming with confidence.

“From the first day when we first came in our freshman year of 2019, I could tell he was a different cat, just the way he approached everything,” MSU center Justus Perkins said in July. “He talked about all the time how he was going to play 30 to 40 snaps (per game) his redshirt freshman year.”

Right before that redshirt freshman year, in 2021, Wehr underwent shoulder surgery. He came into fall camp expecting to be in the mix for playing time at D-tackle, but he fell down the depth chart, probably due in part to his surgery, he believes. The then-255-pound Wehr appeared in three games that season, which ended with an FCS championship game appearance for the Cats.

As Wehr watched all those 2021 games from the sideline, he felt like an “eater”: a type of player who gets to call himself a Bobcat and eat the team-supplied food without doing much to help MSU win, as he defined it.

“That was a big mental let down,” Wehr said. “I felt like I wasn’t good enough to play here.”

He considered leaving the team after the 2021 season. Three years later, it’s hard for him to fathom what life would look like if he did. He might still be an MSU student. He might be back in Billings working at Tire-Rama.

His thoughts of quitting, however, didn’t come all that close to materializing.

“I felt like I owed it to my teammates, committing here, that I was going to stick it out,” Wehr said.



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State offensive tackle Marcus Wehr looks to block next to Titan Fleischmann (66) and Cole Sain (56) against Maine during the annual Gold Rush game Saturday, Sept. 8 at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

“That’s who I really played for.”

Shortly after MSU’s loss to North Dakota State in the 2021 FCS title game, Cats head coach Brent Vigen sat down with Wehr and asked if he’d be interested in moving to the O-line.

“There was enough to look at just his frame in general to say, ‘Boy, if we could put some more weight on him, with his strength levels where they were, we might really have something on the offensive side of things,’” Vigen said Monday. “Typically those conversations are more challenging than his was. ... He gravitated towards the switch immediately.”

A massive diet, including 2,000-calorie protein shakes before bed, helped Wehr bulk up to nearly 300 pounds in 2022. After lining up at both right tackle and right guard during 2022 fall camp, Wehr landed atop the season-opening depth chart at RT — one of four MSU O-linemen starting at their respective positions for the first time.

MSU’s O-line that season performed as well as, if not better than, the veteran unit of 2021, and Wehr made a strong case that he was the best of the five. He was probably on his way to an all-conference selection before sustaining a season-ending injury in Week 7.

“It was pretty clear that not only had we made the right move, but we

had a fantastic player as a sophomore,” Vigen said. “He’s mean and ornery, so that plays on both sides of the ball. But I think his understanding of angles and pad level... he’s as smart an offensive lineman that I’ve been around, as far as just getting it, getting the scheme, getting where he fits into it.”

Al Johnson replaced Brian Armstrong as MSU’s OL coach in February 2023. By then, Wehr had recovered from his injury, and he impressed his new coach with his strength, athleticism and “never having mental errors,” Johnson said.

Wehr played all 12 games of his junior season, made the All-Big Sky first team and earned All-America honors. Pro Football Focus rated him the top tackle in the FCS.

“He’s a quiet guy, but he’s definitely got some pent up aggression,” Perkins said. “You can see the way he plays, the way he comes off the ball, his snap, his hands, his finish. It’s all there.”

Wehr played right guard in the Cats’ season-ending FCS playoff loss to NDSU last season. His major contributions to MSU’s 278 rushing yards that day helped his coaches feel comfortable about moving him to RG full time this season. He told his coaches he’d play wherever as long as he got ample practice before the season started, per Vigen.

“I think it kind of plays more to my strength, the strength aspect

of guard,” Wehr said. “It definitely moves a lot quicker in there, a lot less space. But it’s been a good transition for me.”

Wehr’s weight room work ethic carried over from high school. That, combined with his athleticism and nasty streak, have allowed him to move defenders at an elite level since 2022. A merely good O-lineman might push a D-lineman six inches off his spot, while Wehr would shove that same defender three feet downfield, Johnson said.

The effort Wehr puts into the non-physical parts of his game has helped him climb to the top tier of FCS O-linemen.

“He can tell you about everyone, whether it’s pass protection, whether it is the running back’s job on the pass protection, whether it’s the tight end’s job in the run game,” Johnson said, adding, “Being in the system on top of being very smart and wanting to be great, those are the starting points to being who he has become.”

This season, the other 11 Big Sky head coaches made Wehr a unanimous first-team all-conference pick. If the Big Sky had an O-lineman of the year award, Wehr probably would’ve won it, Vigen said.

“His continued growth and embracing that (guard) position, embracing all that goes into it, has set himself up where, I would argue, he’s the best offensive lineman in

our league and likely in the country,” Vigen said.

Perkins called Wehr “a truly hard worker.” MSU redshirt freshman O-lineman Dylan Rollins referred to him as “a freak of nature.” The team captain is also “a tremendous leader,” said senior center Cole Sain.

Wehr sits firmly in the lead-by-example camp, and part of his greatness stems from his ability to “flip the page” quicker than most players, Johnson said.

“I’ll celebrate with him and try to give him a high-five, and he’ll look at me, like, ‘Get on the line. We’re doing the next play! I’m like, ‘Alright, dude, whatever you say,’” said Titan Fleischmann, who’s started every game at RT for the Cats this season. “He’s all business.”

Fleischmann talked about Wehr’s grumpiness — a term both Fleischmann and Johnson used — with a smile on his face. Perkins’ eyes lit up as he explained how much Wehr struggles to hear play calls coming in from the sideline (“I knew he’d say that,” Wehr said with a grin four months later, adding that he hears the calls just fine).

Wehr can be “very unintentionally funny,” MSU wide receiver Ty McCullouch said on an October episode of the Cats Pawd. MSU quality assistant coach Marcus Monaco told the same podcast Wehr is the funniest Bobcat “to laugh at.”

“I just say stuff and people laugh,” Wehr said. “I don’t know (why).”

A big smile formed on Johnson’s face as he talked about Wehr’s unintentional comedy.

“I love him for the person that he is, the willingness to always ask when he doesn’t know, always be a good leader, yet we can have fun with each other,” Johnson said.

Some people involved with FBS programs reached out to Wehr after last season, wondering if he’d be interested in transferring to the highest level of college football, he said.

His answer quickly became clear as he thought about the dozens of family members and friends who cheer him on at every MSU home game. He thought about the two-

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GO CATS!

Semifinal

From 12

2021. This year, they earned their program-record 13th victory in the second round of the playoffs against UT Martin.

“We’re more experienced, more balanced. I think we’re better up front,” Vigen said, adding, “That’s not to take anything away from that ‘21 team. It is not by any means. I just think we’re... You go in as the No. 1 seed and every opportunity in front of you, it’s a different world. It’s a different mindset than being the eight seed.”

Mellott will learn Jan. 4 whether he or NDSU QB Cam Miller is the 2024 Walter Payton Award winner. Mellott is only a top-three finalist for the award because he went from a run-first QB in 2021 to a true dual threat.

“If he’s not the most impactful player in our division... I know we’re going to see the other one down in Frisco, and we’ll get to settle it on the field,” Vigen said.

Vigen is now tied with Holland for second-most career wins from an MSU head coach. Vigen, who played and coached at NDSU, now has a 47-9 record since coming to Bozeman three years ago. That 81% winning percentage is nearly 100 points higher than the next-winningest MSU coach (71.4% from Tony Storti, who helmed MSU’s first national championship team in 1956).

Like this season’s Cats, the 2021 team was led by a group of legendary seniors, such as future NFL players Hardy, Troy Andersen, Lewis Kidd and Lance McCutcheon.

“We’re not having any quarterback issues, which is nice. We’ve got the best quarterback in the country, so that’s definitely helpful,” Grebe said. “And then Coach Vigen, the trust that we have in him and the gratitude we have for him.”

MSU carried belief into the 2021 FCS title game too, but part of Mellott thought, “I don’t know if we should really be here,” he said. The Cats were an eight seed

making their first national championship appearance since 1984, going up against a two seed that had won eight of the last 10 FCS championships.

The Bison are seeded second again this season, but in order to win their first FCS title since that 2021 blowout, they’ll need to fend off a team that has no doubt it should be there.

“Beating South Dakota doesn’t guarantee us anything going down and playing North Dakota State. But I do think, again, we are in a different place than we were back in ‘22 and ‘21,” Vigen said. “We’re going to have to play extremely well. We’re going to prepare like crazy over the next couple of weeks to put ourselves in position. But I think we’re going to go down there with a team that’s going to fight and be right in the fight.”

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

Wehr

From 14

hour drive from Bozeman to Billings too. He thought about the Brawl of the Wild.

“That’s the game I want to play in,” Wehr said. “I couldn’t care less about Michigan-Ohio State. That’s a big game, but Montana State-Over The Hill is a bigger game to me.”

Maybe moving up would’ve improved Wehr’s NFL chances. On the other hand, several O-linemen who never left the FCS – such as Cody Mauch (NDSU), Mason McCormick (South Dakota State) and Trevor Penning (Northern Iowa) – got drafted and went on to start in the NFL.

Before this season, Wehr appeared on the East-West Shrine Bowl 1000 and the watch list for the Senior Bowl. He’s currently projected to be a seventh-round NFL Draft pick or an undrafted free agent, per The Athletic’s draft expert Dane Brugler, and a good performance in one of those

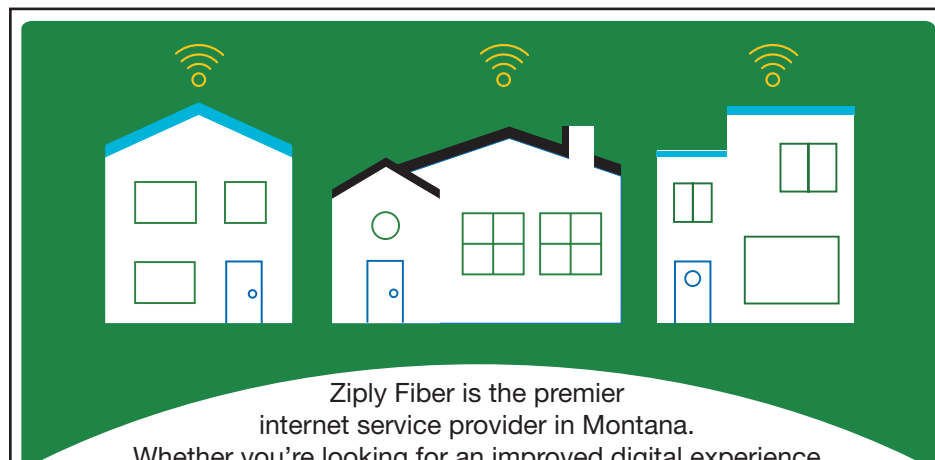
two all-star games could boost that stock.

“It’s definitely cool,” Wehr said. “But you’ve got to live in the right now. And right now, my goal is not to get a Senior Bowl invite or get a Shrine invite.”

Three of Wehr’s top goals entering this season were to beat the Griz, win the Big Sky title and capture the FCS title. The Cats secured the outright conference crown with their rivalry win Nov. 23, and they’ll face NDSU in the national championship game Jan. 6.

Wehr was one of the first Bobcats to pick up the Great Divide Trophy after that Cat-Griz victory. He placed his helmet on top of the trophy, then put that 306-pound weight on his shoulder and paraded it around the stadium for the first and final time.


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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'Iron' Ortt

Missoula native has gotten 'everything out of his ability' at Montana State

BY BRADEN SHAW
Bozeman Daily Chronicle

BOZEMAN — Football has permeated Rylan Ortt's life on and off the field.

Ortt and fellow Bobcat Simeon Woodard interned for local businessman Jon Knokey this past summer. During a meeting with a financial advisor, Knokey waxed poetic about the accomplishments of Ortt, a safety at Montana State, and Woodard, a cornerback. Tales included Woodard's pick against South Dakota State in the 2021 FCS semifinals and how Ortt "played like a missile," Ortt said.

According to Ortt, Knokey was later asked by the financial advisor what Ortt and Woodard's numbers were. With Ortt being No. 26, the realization was made that it coincided with the element Iron, which is No. 26 on the periodic table.

When Knokey joined Woodard and Ortt for lunch at Firehouse Subs, he had the Firehouse employee announce Ortt as "Iron Ortt." Woodard and Ortt were initially confused, but were soon told by a smirking Knokey where the nickname originated.

Woodard said the nickname was apt given how Ortt is a "hard-nosed player" that isn't afraid to tackle.

"Iron is one of the toughest elements, just like Iron Ortt," Woodard added.

The nickname soon reached MSU football broadcasts. Knokey is family friends with Ty Gregorak, former defensive coordinator for both MSU and Montana turned color commentator. Gregorak has worked it into various calls this season, including Ortt's blocked punt against Mercyhurst and his interception against Idaho State.

Fellow safety Dru Polidore called Ortt "an invaluable player" and defensive end Brody Grebe pointed to Ortt's toughness and inability to back down from a challenge. Running back Adam Jones said Ortt has been a role model and, as a fellow Missoula Sentinel graduate, followed in Ortt's footsteps to Bozeman.

Above all, though, Rylan "Iron" Ortt, the former walk-on from Missoula turned team captain, has gotten "everything out of his ability" during his time as a Bobcat, MSU head coach Brent Vigen said. He upholds a standard set by his predecessors and practices on a Tuesday how he would play in a game on Saturday.

"That's the intent that you got to have with the game of football," MSU safeties coach Jody Owens said. "That's how you separate yourself from good to great, from great to one of the best."

Ortt can't remember a time before



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State safety Rylan Ortt looks on during a game against Sacramento State on Nov. 9 at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

watching or being directly involved in sports. As soon as he could walk, he had a football in his hands.

He picked up baseball, basketball and soccer early on. But once he could play flag football in the second grade, that became his truest passion.

It helped that his father and grandfather both played football. Ortt also grew up watching any game he could, whether it be college or NFL. He grew up a New England Patriots fan, enamored with the playmaking ability of Hall of Fame wide receiver Randy Moss.

That made Ortt want to play WR when he reached the sixth grade. But his father, who was also the head coach, pushed him to play quarterback.

Ortt resisted. But he quickly grew to love QB.

"I feel like I was a natural leader when I was young, so it was a good spot for me and I enjoyed it," Ortt said.

He continued playing QB once he reached Sentinel. Ortt got his first varsity snap as a freshman late in a 56-8 blowout win over Missoula Hellgate.

Sentinel head coach Dane Oliver was impressed by Ortt's football knowledge immediately. He saw Ortt as a player the Spartans could build around. By the time he was a junior in 2017, Ortt became the starter.

Please see **ORTT**, Page 18



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Ortt

From 17

Ortt led Sentinel to a 6-5 record in 2017, throwing for 1,856 yards, 16 touchdowns and 13 interceptions, along with 510 yards and 10 rushing scores. The Spartans won their first playoff game in 30 years with a 26-6 win over Missoula Big Sky. Ortt helped ice the game with a rushing TD in the fourth quarter.

“The bigger the moment got, the better he played, even as a junior,” Oliver said.

The season ended the following week with a 49-7 loss to eventual Class AA champion Billings Senior.

Heading into the 2018 season, the Spartans had state championship aspirations. Oliver called that 2018 group one of the most talented teams he’s coached. Ortt was also given the green light to play on both sides of the ball.

“You get a bird’s eye view of everything (at safety),” Ortt said. “And playing quarterback, I feel like, built my football IQ and that helps as well playing defense.”

Oliver said one of Ortt’s best attributes was how he got into a great stance every time. That was most evident in an early game against Great Falls in 2018, when Ortt played a combined 130 snaps.

“He was a physical football player,” Oliver said. “He was very cerebral, and was willing to do whatever it took to have success.”

Still, Ortt was limited because Oliver didn’t think there was enough depth behind him if an injury occurred. Individually, Ortt finished with 2,098 yards, 18 TDs and seven interceptions, along with 738 yards and 14 TDs rushing. On defense, he added 20 total tackles, two interceptions and a forced fumble.

As a team, the Spartans finished 5-5. All five losses were by one score, including three in overtime. Oliver regrets not having Ortt on the field more that season, but commended Ortt for sacrificing playing time.

“It was just kind of an adverse year,” Ortt added. “It seemed like nothing was kind of falling our way.”

Both Ortt and Oliver found solace in that senior class laying the foundation for future teams. Sentinel later won back-to-back Class AA titles in 2020 and 2021. Oliver said he’s adjusted his philosophy in the years since Ortt, allowing a player

like Zac Crews, who is now a Bobcat, to thrive at both QB and DE.

Oliver even made sure Ortt was on the sideline for the first state title win over Billings West in 2020.

“I remember seeing him and saying, like, ‘Hey man, you helped create this experience for these kids,’” Oliver said. “He’s one of the greats to come through here. And we just owe him a debt of gratitude for all he did for all the kids and the impact he made.”

Ortt also excelled in other sports at Sentinel. Along with basketball, Ortt medaled in the javelin three times, winning a state title his senior year. His individual success helped Sentinel capture the 2019 Class AA boys track and field title.

One of Ortt’s rivals was Kalispell Glacier’s Evan Todd, a future Big Sky Conference champion at UM. By the end of their senior year, the two were tied for fifth in the United States among high school boys with a season-best throw of 208 feet, 8 inches.

Ortt was also named the Montana Gatorade Boys Track and Field Player of the Year in 2019.

“It kind of happened by accident,” Ortt said of throwing javelin. “But I enjoyed it, so I kind of committed to it in the spring and had a ton of fun doing it.”

The recruitment process for Ortt was relatively slow. He didn’t start talking to coaches until the summer before his senior year. He eventually sent his highlights to then-MSU assistant BJ Robertson via Twitter.

That formed a relationship with the Bobcats. Robertson texted Ortt during a basketball practice that December about extending a preferred walk-on opportunity. Ortt went on his official visit in January.

Ortt was also talking with Montana as a senior. He weighed the options of a grayshirt opportunity with the Grizzlies — meaning he couldn’t even practice as a freshman — or a redshirt at MSU.

Ortt called Oliver for advice. Oliver told Ortt to go where there’s a “sure spot” and do what’s best for him. Oliver added that other Class AA head coaches around the state had promoted Ortt to then-MSU head coach Jeff Choate.

Being a former UM player didn’t affect Oliver’s advice either, he said. No matter the player, Oliver said he

wants what’s best for each individual. Ortt added that Oliver runs his program like a college team built on relationships.

That helped Ortt take the next step and commit to MSU. He found support from his friends and family, who “flipped right away” to his new team.

“(MSU) felt like a great culture,” Ortt said. “It was definitely on the rise, and I felt like I was going to get a fair shot at coming and being able to put my head down and work and actually be recognized for that.”

Picking up a new playbook wasn’t an issue when Ortt joined the Bobcats in 2019. But he had to adjust to the speed of the game and the size of his new teammates.

He got an extended period to learn the ropes. Along with a redshirt in 2019, Ortt grew as a football player during the canceled 2020 season.

The one upside of being sidelined due to the COVID-19 pandemic was all his teammates working out together. That included one on ones with teammates Travis Jonsen and Lance McCutcheon on the nearby intramural field.

That prepared him for 2021, which ended in the Bobcats reaching the FCS national championship game. Ortt mostly played on special teams, but appeared in 14 games and got a shot on defense.

His first opportunity came in the second half of a 45-7 win over Drake in the annual Gold Rush game. The run out onto the field in Bobcat Stadium is something Ortt still cherishes.

“The first thing you see is the student section, and then the horses coming out,” Ortt said. “It’s always a nice night (for Gold Rush), it seems like. It’s definitely something special, and something that makes Bobcat football and Bobcat nation one of the best.”

Ortt finished with 27 total tackles and two tackles for loss in 2021. He loved playing alongside teammates like defensive back Tre Webb and linebackers Troy Andersen and Callahan O’Reilly. He got an opportunity to play at nickelback after starter Ty Okada went down in the FCS quarterfinals at Sam Houston State. Ortt finished with five tackles the next week against SDSU.

“I knew the defense fairly well and kind of knew all three (DB) positions a little bit, and then they said,

‘Go out there and play,’” Ortt said. “So I kind of just went out there and did my best.”

He missed the national championship game after failing an NCAA-mandated drug test. The suspension was initially a full season, but was knocked down to six games after an MSU appeal.

Ortt didn’t play until the ninth game of the 2022 season because of reinstatement issues on MSU’s part. Ortt later said a trace of the banned substance was still found in his system.

It helped having teammates and coaches support him during the process, Ortt said, and he was relieved to get a second chance.

“You’ve got to take advantage of your opportunities and really take nothing for granted,” Ortt added.

His first game back was at Northern Arizona, a difficult return at 7,000 feet of elevation. Ortt was especially excited for that game since it coincided with WR Coy Steel’s return from injury.

In six games, Ortt finished with 34 tackles, two pass breakups and a QB hurry. He also picked off a pass from UM QB Lucas Johnson in that season’s Brawl of the Wild.

That entire weekend consisted of some of Ortt’s favorite memories, he said. The environment in Bobcat Stadium and ESPN’s “College GameDay” being in town played roles. Ortt later found out his grandfather was on the sideline and had a perfect view of Ortt’s pick.

Being from Missoula, Ortt has been surrounded by the Cat-Griz rivalry his entire life. The annual game “just means more,” Ortt said, with the animosity between fan bases and that Saturday’s game being faster and more physical.

“It’s stuff you dream about as a kid,” Ortt said. “To play in that game has been my dream my whole life, and to carry that trophy around that field, that’s awesome.”

The 2023 season, in which MSU finished 8-4, was a learning experience. Ortt — who finished with 74 tackles, seven TFLs, two sacks, three interceptions and two pass breakups — said last year helped the Bobcats refocus, leading to the 1-0 mentality they have adopted in 2024.

Ortt was one of six seniors elected as a team captain during this past fall camp. At the time, Ortt said he never would have believed he could

become a captain when he first joined the Bobcats.

But Ortt has still felt a natural leadership role regardless of the team. He’s always felt comfortable building relationships with new people and upholding a program’s standard.

At MSU, he learned from older players like Andersen and O’Reilly, who would get in extra film sessions in 2021. Ortt has since led film sessions in the coming years, which have helped him see the game through his teammates’ eyes.

“And then when you’re on the field, you have a feel for how he’s going to react and they have a feel for how I’m going to react,” Ortt said. “I think the game is won Monday through Friday and it’s going out and proving it on Saturday.”

At Sentinel, Oliver noticed that attention to detail, along with Ortt’s ability to hold his teammates accountable. That has translated to MSU, where Ortt has become “another coach on the field,” Polidore said.

“He’s just somebody who works hard,” Woodard said, adding, “(He’s) on time to meetings, taking notes. Literally everything you could think of that’s good, Ortt possesses it.”

His current coaches agree. Vigen said Ortt has “earned the respect in front of the title” of captain. Owens — a former All-American LB at MSU — said Ortt is on his way to “legend status.”

“When you talk about elite Bobcats, he’s definitely one of those guys,” Owens added. “And that permeates throughout the whole team, what Ortt means and the spirit that he comes to practice with on a daily basis.”

The six years he’s spent in Bozeman have gone by quickly, said Ortt, and he feels blessed to be surrounded by lifelong friends who have put in the work to win consistently on Saturdays.

“That’s what the fun in playing college football is,” Ortt said, adding, “It’s not to do all these things and just have some fun and then be average on the football field. We want to be great here. So going out and having shared success has been super cool.”

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Montana State Bobcats 2024 football records watch

Program records the 2024 Bobcats have set

The Montana State football team has broken all sorts of program records during the 2024 season, and more could fall in the FCS title game against North Dakota State on Jan. 6 in Frisco, Texas.

Most wins in a season (15)	yard rushing games (9, Scottre Humphrey; tied for first with Troy Andersen in 2018)	(32, 1984; the Bobcats have 30 this season)	(347, 2022; the Bobcats have 337 this season)	Mellott, tied for No. 4 and two behind No. 1 Isaiah Ifanse and Ryan Johnson)
Longest winning streak (15)	Individual single-season punt return yards (652, Taco Dowler)	Individual single-season total offense (3,856, Travis Lulay in 2004; Tommy Mellott has 3,509 this season)	* Minimum 100 attempts	Individual career total offense (9,194 from Tommy Mellott, No. 3 and 3,142 behind No. 1 DeNarius McGhee)
Team single-season points scored (620)	Individual career punt return yards (1,055, Taco Dowler)	Individual single-season completion percentage* (66.0%, DeNarius McGhee in 2012 and 2013; Tommy Mellott is at 68.8% this season)	** Minimum 10 carries per game in at least 75% of team games	Individual single-season points scored (122 from Myles Sansted, No. 3 and 21 behind No. 1 Blake Glessner in 2022)
Team single-season total yards (7,262)	Freshman single-season rushing yards (1,134, Adam Jones)	Individual single-season yards per carry** (6.85, Troy Andersen in 2018; Scottre Humphrey has 7.2 and Adam Jones has 6.6 this season)	Notable non-records	Team single-season rushing yards per game (301, No. 4 and 23.1 behind the No. 1 1956 team)
Team single-season rushing yards (4,515)	Freshman single-season rushing TDs (14, Adam Jones)	Individual single-season receiving TDs (12, Sam McCullum in 1972; Taco Dowler has 10 this season)	Career head coach wins (47 from Brent Vigen, tied for No. 2 with Sonny Holland and 23 behind No. 1 Rob Ash)	Team single-season rushing attempts (686, No. 3 and 111 behind the No. 1 1976 team)
Team single-season rushing touchdowns (51)	Program records the 2024 Bobcats are close to breaking/matching	Team single-season first downs	Individual career rushing yards (3,389 from Tommy Mellott, No. 4 and 353 behind No. 1 Isaiah Ifanse)	Team single-season points scored per game (41.3, No. 3 and 1.6 behind the No. 1 2022 team)
Team single-game rushing TDs (7, vs. Sacramento State Nov. 9)	Individual single-season passing TDs (30, Kelly Bradley in 1984; Tommy Mellott has 29 this season)		Individual career rushing TDs (43 from Tommy Mellott, No. 2 and four behind No. 1 Cody Kirk)	
Team single-game home rushing yards (511, vs. Sacramento State Nov. 9)	Team single-season passing TDs		Individual career 100-yard rushing games (15 from Tommy	
Career head coach winning percentage (83.9%, Brent Vigen)				
Individual single-season 100-				

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FCS championship game moving to Nashville in 2025, 2026

BY FRANK GOGOLA
406 MT Sports

MISSOULA — The FCS national championship game will have a new home starting next season.

The 2025 and 2026 seasons will conclude with the title tilt being contested in Nashville, Tennessee, at FirstBank Stadium, the NCAA announced in December. Those championship games will take place on Jan. 5, 2026, and Jan. 4, 2027.

The site change to the Music City is due to a multi-year upcoming renovation to Toyota Stadium in Frisco, Texas, a suburb north of Dallas. Toyota Stadium was scheduled to host the championship game through January 2027.

This will be the 15th consecutive year the chipper will be played in the Lone Star State. Future bids will determine the site beyond the 2027 game.

Before Frisco, Tennessee had



ASSOCIATED PRESS

The sun sets over an NCAA college football game between Vanderbilt and Auburn, on Nov. 4, 2023, in Nashville, Tenn.

hosted the title game for the previous 13 years from 1997-2009 in Chattanooga. Nashville will be the

11th city to host the championship game since it was first played in 1978.

FirstBank Stadium has a capacity of approximately 35,000. Toyota Stadium, which is primar-

ily a soccer stadium, seats about 20,500 for football games.

The title contests on the campus of Vanderbilt University will be co-hosted by the Ohio Valley Conference and the Nashville Sports Council.

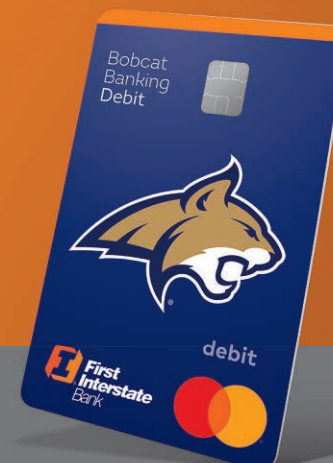
“On behalf of the committee, we are very excited to bring FCS football to Nashville,” Matt Larsen, FCS committee chair and North Dakota State athletic director, said in a news release. “We considered a number of finalists, but Nashville set themselves apart. The opportunity to continue to grow the game and our brand in a setting like this is something we know the FCS community as a whole will be excited about.”

Frank Gogola is the Senior Sports Reporter at the Missoulian and 406 MT Sports. Follow him on X @ FrankGogola or email him at frank.gogola@406mtsports.com.

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Montana State postseason awards lists

The 2024 Montana State Bobcats set a program record for wins in a season, racking up a 15-0 mark through the semifinal round of the playoffs. 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.

Paul Brott (DL, Jr., Billings West)	William V. Campbell Award finalist	Sentinel)	Big Sky offensive player of the year	Second team all-conference
Second team all-conference	Buck Buchanan Award finalist (FCS defensive player of the year)	Jerry Rice Award runner-up (FCS freshman of the year)	First team all-conference	Tommy Sullivan (LS, Sr., Everett, Wash.)
Taco Dowler (WR/PR, So., Billings West)	Second team All-America (Associated Press, AFCA, FCS Football Central, Stats Perform)	Stats Perform freshman All-America team	Conner Moore (OT, So., Millbury, Ohio)	First team All-America (AFCA)
Second team All-America (Stats Perform)	Big Sky defensive player of the year	Honorable mention all-conference	Second team All-America (Associated Press, AFCA, FCS Football Central)	Danny Uluilakepa (LB, Sr., Puyallup, Wash.)
Third team All-America (FCS Football Central)	First team all-conference	Rohan Jones (TE, Jr., Montreal, Quebec)	Third team All-America (Stats Perform)	Second team all-conference
Honorable mention All-America (Associated Press)	Brendan Hall (P/K, Sr., Springtown, Texas)	First team All-America (FCS Football Central, Stats Perform)	First team all-conference	Marcus Wehr (OT, Sr., Billings Central)
First team all-conference	Hula Bowl invite	Honorable mention All-America (Associated Press)	McCade O'Reilly (LB, Sr., Bozeman)	First team All-America (Associated Press, AFCA, FCS Football Central, Stats Perform)
Kenneth Eiden IV (DE, Jr., Bozeman)	Second team all-conference	First team all-conference	First team all-conference	East-West Shrine Bowl invite
Honorable mention all-conference	Scottre Humphrey (RB, So., Seattle, Wash.)	Tommy Mellott (QB, Sr., Butte)	Rylan Ortt (S, Sr., Missoula Sentinel)	First team all-conference
Titan Fleischmann (OT, So., Pocatello, Idaho)	Second team All-America (FCS Football Central)	Walter Payton Award top-three finalist (FCS offensive player of the year)	First team all-conference	Brent Vigen
Third team All-America (FCS Football Central)	Third team All-America (Stats Perform)	First team All-America (Associated Press, AFCA, FCS Football Central, Stats Perform)	Andrew Powdrell (DB, So., The Woodlands, Texas)	Eddie Robinson Award (FCS coach of the year)
Second team all-conference	First team all-conference		Second team all-conference	Big Sky coach of the year
Brody Grebe (DE, Sr., Melstone)	Adam Jones (RB, Fr., Missoula)		Cole Sain (OG/C, Gr., Darby)	

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Outgoing Montana State President Waded Cruzado leaves lasting legacy in Bobcat athletics

BY PARKER COTTON
Bozeman Daily Chronicle

BOZEMAN — Waded Cruzado had been in Washington, D.C., but she took a flight that got her to Seattle in time for the game.

Montana State University's President since January 2010, Cruzado took her seat in the University of Washington's arena ready to see the Bobcat women's basketball team play the Huskies in the first round of the 2017 NCAA Tournament. She saw the graphics and statistics on the scoreboard over the middle of the court and remarked to fellow MSU administrators that she wanted a similar one inside the Brick Breeden Field-house.

Montana State officials formed a plan and, in March 2018, received clearance from the state's Board of Regents to spend \$675,000 on a new scoreboard. It was in place later that summer.

Women's basketball head coach Tricia Binford loves telling that story because it shows how Cruzado operates as the university's figurehead.

"She just makes things happen," Binford said.

Cruzado announced on Aug. 12 that she would retire at the end of this academic year in June 2025 — a deserved conclusion to a lifetime dedicated to public education, but a severe blow to an athletics department that has thrived under her watch.

Athletics Director Leon Costello called Cruzado the most competitive person he has ever met and said he will miss partnering with her to make MSU's sports programs the best they can be.

"She wants to win at everything, and the great thing is she wants to do it the right way," Costello said. "She wants to build the foundation and win and have sustained success."

Binford said that aspect of Cruzado's personality has rallied the campus community toward common goals.

"She's always the most competitive person in the room," Binford said, "yet she has a grace about her as far as when she walks in a room everybody's inspired to do more, to strive for more."

Cruzado did not have much experience overseeing athletics when she arrived at MSU, but she learned quickly what Bobcat fans found important. Working closely with Costello, and former MSU AD Peter Fields



LAUREN MILLER, BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

Montana State President Waded Cruzado poses for a portrait in her office on Aug. 13.

before him, helped that process.

"When you reach out to athletics, they become part of the university, and there is not this division between, 'Oh, it's academics and it's athletics,'" Cruzado said, reflecting on her athletics legacy a day after announcing her retirement. "It's all the same. It's all Montana State, and it's one of the most wonderful assets that, as a president, I have found to galvanize that sense of authentic love for the university."

'A place that's changed'

The scoreboard in the Brick is not alone in physically signifying Cruzado's influence.

She has also been a driving force behind the addition of the south grandstands, lights and a larger video board at Bobcat Stadium; the construction of the Bobcat Athletic Complex; renovated locker rooms in the Brick; updates to the weight room, training room and academic center; and the eventual construction of an indoor football and track and field practice facility.

As much as the school has gained in terms of facilities and amenities, Costello believes Cruzado's biggest impact on athletics has been "the quality of people that we've been able to bring in." He noted the department's gains in academic advisors, nutritional staff, strength and conditioning personnel, a

Please see **CRUZADO**, Page 24

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Cruzado

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sports psychologist and a partnership with Bozeman Health.

“That all goes back to helping and supporting our student-athletes,” said Costello, who was hired in the summer of 2016.

Head football coach Brent Vigen, hired by Costello and Cruzado in 2021, remembers games in Bozeman as an assistant coach at North Dakota State in 2005 and 2010, when the visiting team’s locker room was still located in small cinder block buildings.

When he returned in 2021 to apply for the head coaching job, Vigen met with Cruzado in her suite in Bobcat Stadium. He found her quite personable, and he appreciated her approach to the athletics department.

“She made it clear that success in athletics and football was important,” Vigen said, “but it was obvious that the success of the entire university was paramount.”

And as he looked out the window of the suite, Vigen gained a sense of how much the campus — and Bobcat Stadium, with its Sonny Holland Zone and a few thousand new seats — had improved since he had last visited.

“It’s a place that’s changed,” Vigen said. “And obviously her fingerprints are all over those changes.”

Binford — who came to MSU in 2005, predating Cruzado by five years — credits much of Bozeman’s growth in the last two decades to MSU’s success in sports and academics alike, a testament to Cruzado’s initiative and “endless energy.”

“Her mark on this university is beyond the campus,” Binford added.

Costello is certain that Cruzado’s accomplishments from an athletics standpoint will not be soon forgotten.

“She has changed the face of this university for the absolute better,” he said. “Everything she touches seems like it turns to gold.”

'She's cheering'

Bobcat coaches often speak highly of the support they have



KELLY GORHAM, MONTANA STATE ATHLETICS

Cruzado celebrates with fans after MSU’s FCS semifinal win over South Dakota State on Dec. 18, 2021, at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman.

received from Cruzado as the university’s president.

When considering her upcoming departure, volleyball head coach Matt Houk was excited for Cruzado being able to retire but lamented the fact that her influence on athletics would be gone.

“What a phenomenal leader she has been to this university,” Houk said.

Only hired in 2023, Houk is one of the newest additions to the athletics department. In such a short period of time, he’s learned “how very unique and special she is.”

Houk was especially thankful for Cruzado organizing a send-off party for his team as it departed to play in the National Invitational Volleyball Championship in November. Faculty and staff lined the streets around campus to congratulate the Bobcats on their best season in school history.

“And she was right there at the forefront of it, waving the flag and cheering us on,” Houk said. “I don’t think that happens everywhere from the president of the university.”

Houk also respects that Cruzado has been attentive to athletics

in less public ways. He noted her presence at Faculty-Athletics Representative George Haynes’ recent retirement party, where she gave a speech thanking him for 13 years in that role.

“It’s the fact that she not only shows up, but she’s there leading,” Houk said. “She’s loud. She’s cheering.”

Men’s basketball head coach Matt Logie, also only hired last year, said it was meaningful that Cruzado hosted his team for a dinner after its NCAA Tournament appearance in March. Like Houk, he’s learned in short order how Cruzado affects the department’s prosperity.

“Obviously, athletics has been well supported, and we’re in kind of a golden era of success across many different sports,” Logie said. “I think a lot of that comes from the foundations and processes and people that she’s hired to align with her vision for this university.”

Vigen has seen Cruzado’s passion for athletics, particularly football, on two specific occasions: when the Bobcats played in the FCS National Championship game in January 2022 and when

Bozeman hosted ESPN’s “College GameDay” 10 months later.

“You think about the series of wins that means for our university,” Vigen said of getting ESPN’s pregame show, “and I think she recognized how impactful that day was, not only to our football program, but our university.”

Vision for the future

The end of June 2025 is both far away and right around the corner. MSU’s coaches want to soak up the time they have left with Cruzado, but have also started giving thought to what they would like to see in her replacement.

“You can’t fully replace somebody who’s been as transformational as Waded,” Logie said, “but when you leave a place better than you found it like she has, it creates a great opportunity to attract somebody who can not only continue those successes, but continue to lead into the next phase of not only higher education, but college athletics.”

Binford said the challenge for a new president will be “matching the energy that she has brought”

to the athletics department. Saying goodbye to Cruzado will not be easy.

“I’m grateful we got to keep her as long as we have,” Binford said.

Vigen understands that no replacement will have the exact same outlook on athletics as Cruzado, but he said the next president must have a vision for guiding MSU through a rapidly changing landscape of college sports.

“I think it’s clear there’s going to be continued movement on the college football side for sure,” he said, “but I think it’s going to spill over to all the sports, and I hope it’s a president that recognizes the impact athletics can have on a university’s success.”

In Costello’s eight years working with Cruzado, she has become somebody he “can tell anything to.” He wants the next president to be similarly easy to talk to and work with.

“I think (Cruzado) has done a very good job of including athletics in the mission of the university,” Costello said. “I think we are an integral piece, but we’re not it. There is this entire university that’s doing amazing things, and we want to be a key cog in that wheel.”

Cruzado said she has found it quite easy to be a fan, acknowledging her own competitiveness and MSU having a “fierce rivalry” with the University of Montana. But her love for sports is also born out of having a “profound sense of respect for athletes.”

“The hours that they invest is just amazing,” she added.

Cruzado has seen the power of Bobcat sporting events to be a “social network,” a glue that brings together different generations of fans. She wants that to continue under her successor.

“I hope that the next president will see athletics as an asset, as a force for good, as something that, if used correctly, can engender good faith for the university, but more importantly, prepare extraordinary individuals for the future,” Cruzado said. “The university is in a very sound and strong position, and athletics is in a beautiful position as well.”

Parker Cotton can be reached at pcotton@dailychronicle.com. Follow him on X/Twitter @ByParkerCotton.



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History of Montana State vs. North Dakota State

BY 406 MT SPORTS

Montana State and North Dakota State have become familiar foes, especially late in the season in recent history.

The Bobcats and Bison will meet in the FCS championship game for the second time in four years Jan. 6 in Frisco, Texas. The Bobcats own a 21-17 record all-time against the Bison. After not playing from 1980-2005 while they played in separate divisions, the two have met six times since the Bison joined Division I in 2004. During that time, the Bobcats are 1-5 versus NDSU and the Bison have captured nine FCS championships.

Dec. 2, 2023: NDSU 35, Montana State 34 (OT)

Location: Bozeman

Playoffs: Second round

What quickly became known in Fargo as the 'Bozeman Block,' is one many Bobcats fans would prefer to forget. Sixth-seeded Montana State was finally getting to host the Bison after multiple seasons had come to an end in Fargo. The Bobcats had a 28-21 lead going into the fourth quarter, but after the Bison scored with just two and a half minutes remaining, the game went to overtime.

The Bobcats won the toss and elected to play defense first. NDSU scored on their first possession with a 3-yard Cam Miller touchdown to go up 35-28, but it was the Bison defense that ultimately ended up walking it off. The Bobcats responded with a 25-yard Scottre Humphrey touchdown of their own to make it 35-34, but when Casey Kautzman attempted the extra point, NDSU's 6-foot-7 lineman Hunter Poncius blocked it as the Bison advanced to the quarterfinals and the Bobcats were left stunned. With the victory, the Bison took over the record for most FCS playoff wins by a single school (then 46) and ended a Montana State

26-game home winning streak. It's also the only loss at home for Montana State head coach Brent Vigen, who is a former Bison player and coach.

Jan. 8, 2022: NDSU 38, Montana State 10

Location: Frisco, Texas

Playoffs: Championship

Montana State made a quarterback change to begin its playoff run as starter Matthew McKay entered the transfer portal the Bobcats turning to then-freshman Tommy Mellott, who led them to victories against UT Martin, at Sam Houston and against South Dakota State in Bozeman in the semifinals as the eight seed before making the FCS championship for the first time since 1984.

Led by first-year head coach Brent Vigen and sparked by Mellott, the magic ran out in Frisco as Mellott suffered an ankle injury on the opening drive and was unable to finish the game. The Bison



SHAWN RAECKE, FOR THE BOZEMAN DAILY CHRONICLE

North Dakota State quarterback Cam Miller dives into the end zone in overtime during a second-round FCS playoff game against Montana State

jumped out to a 28-0 lead by halftime before MSU's Blake Glessner connected on a 26-yard field goal in the second half. The Bobcats added a 28-yard touchdown pass from Tucker Rovig to Lance McCutcheon in the fourth quarter.

The Bison earned their ninth FCS ti-

tle, all coming within the past 11 years, as the Bobcats finished 12-3. Seniors Troy Andersen, Lance McCutcheon, Daniel Hardy, Tre Webb and Lewis Kidd would all go on to the NFL the next season.

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Dec. 21, 2019: NDSU 42, Montana State 14

Location: Fargo, N.D.
Playoffs: Semifinals

For the second consecutive season, the Bobcats found the end of the road in Fargodome. The top-seeded Bison were the then two-time defending champions who would go on to win a third as the Bobcats were seeded fifth.

NDSU freshman Trey Lance threw for 223 yards and three touchdowns and set the tone by scoring on its first possession. The Bobcats tied it up early in the second quarter, but the Bison responded and took a 29-7 lead into halftime. They tacked on another 13 in the second half as MSU could only muster a 41-yard touchdown from Kevin Kassis on a pass from Tucker Rovig.

The 11-4 record in 2019, it was Montana State's most successful season since 1984. It also turned out to be the final game for coach Jeff Choate, who left to become an assistant at Texas after the pandemic-canceled 2020 season.

Dec. 1, 2018: NDSU 52, Montana State 10

Location: Fargo, N.D.
Playoffs: Second round

The top-seeded Bison scored on their first five possessions and added a field goal on the sixth as they rolled past Montana State. But it was the Bobcats who got the first points on the board. Troy Andersen found Kevin Kassis, who got MSU to the 4-yard line before the Bobcats settled for a 24-yard field goal to take a short-lived 3-0 lead.

NDSU's Lance Dunn notched four scores in the first-half, the same as DJ McNorton scored against the Bobcats in the 2010 FCS playoffs. The Bison earned a 38-3 lead by halftime.

Andersen added a 51-yard rushing touchdown in the third quarter, but the Bobcats couldn't find momentum.

The Bobcats finished 8-5 for their first eight-win season since 2014 and just the sixth since 1984.

Dec. 4, 2010: NDSU 42, Montana State 17

Location: Bozeman
Playoffs: Second round

The playoff field expanded in 2010 from 16 to 20 with 12 teams earning a first-round bye and the top five earning seeds. It was also the first year the championship was held in Frisco, Texas.

Unseeded NDSU earned a trip to Bozeman to face the fourth-seeded Big Sky champion Bobcats where they earned the upset with a 28-point outburst in the fourth quarter, including three rushing touchdowns from DJ McNorton on runs of 19, 38 and 52 yards. McNorton also scored once in the third quarter on a 3-yard run to finish with four TDs. Mike Sigers finished it off with just over two minutes to go. On the visiting sideline for the Bison was then-offensive coordinator Brent Vigen.

The Bison were first on the board when Brock Jensen got in the end zone with a 1-yard rushing

touchdown early in the second quarter. The Bison earned a 376-135 yard rushing advantage as the Bobcats, led by Denarius McGhee, got 245 total passing yards to the Bison's 56. Jose Mohler replaced Jensen at quarterback in the second quarter.

The Bobcats got scores from Julius Lloyd (on a 16-yard pass from McGhee), Jason Cunningham (28-yard field goal) and Orenzo Davis's 1-yard run.

From there, the Bison went on to claim the first of their five straight and current nine total FCS championships the following year in 2011.

Sept. 24, 2005: Montana State 20, NDSU 17

Location: Bozeman

The only meeting in recent history in the regular season, the Bison came to town in just their second season at the Division I level.

The Bobcats scored with less than two minutes remaining on a Justin Domineck 1-yard rushing touchdown to pull back in front of NDSU and earn the win. The Bison got the ball back with time remaining, but an incomplete pass with just seconds remaining and then a false start to end the game doomed any chance at a response.

Travis Lulay had 219 yards passing and 48 yards rushing for the Bobcats. He threw touchdowns to Rick Gatewood and Tramaine Murray in the first half.

Kyle Steffes had two 2-yard rushing touchdowns for the Bison and Cory Vartanian added a 36-yard field goal.

Brent Vigen was NDSU's quarterbacks coach and passing game coordinator during his first trip to Bozeman.



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Montana State running back Justin Domineck carries the ball past North Dakota State's Ryan Olson Sept. 24, 2005 in Bozeman.



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North Dakota State vs. Montana State: How they stack up



By NCAA

At the end of the season, North Dakota State was ranked No. 4 and Montana State was ranked No. 1 in the FCS Coaches Poll.

The Bison were ranked No. 3 and the Bobcats No. 1 in the STATS Perform Poll to close the regular season.

Here's how the programs stack up based on this season's results.

	North Dakota State	Montana State		
Record (Conf)	13-2 (7-1)	15-0 (8-0)	Passing leader	
FCS Coaches rank	No. 4	No. 1	QB Cam Miller	3,052 yds, 31 TDs, 4 INT
FCS STATS Perform rank	No. 3	No. 1	QB Tommy Mellott	2,564 yds, 29 TDs, 2 INT
Points per game	38.3	41.3	Rushing leader	
Points allowed	17.7	17.3	RB CharMar Brown	1,104 yds, 14 TDs
Yards per game	318.7	484.1	RB Scottre Humphrey	1,360 yds, 15 TDs
Pass yards per game	225.9	183.1	Receiving leader	
Rush yards per game	192.7	301.0	WR Taco Dowler	35 rec, 546 yds, 10 TDs
Yards allowed per game	316.3	299.1	WR Bryce Lance	66 rec, 964 yds, 16 TDs
Pass yards allowed per game	197.0	190.2	Defense	
Rush yards allowed per game	119.3	108.9	LB Logan Kopp	69 tkl, 8 tfl, 3 Int
			DL Brody Grebe	35 tkl, 8.5 sk, 10 tfl

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NCAA Division I-AA/FCS National Champions

2023: South Dakota State 23, Montana 3

2022: South Dakota State 45, North Dakota State 21

2021: North Dakota State 38, Montana State 10

2020: Sam Houston 23, South Dakota State 21

2019: North Dakota State 28, James Madison 20

2018: North Dakota State 38, Eastern Washington 24

2017: North Dakota State 17, James Madison 13

2016: James Madison 28, Youngstown State 14

2015: North Dakota State 37, Jacksonville State 10

2014: North Dakota State 29, Illinois State 27

2013: North Dakota State 35, Towson 7

2012: North Dakota State 39, Sam Houston State 13

2011: North Dakota State 17, Sam Houston State 6

2010: Eastern Washington 20, Delaware 19

2009: Villanova 23, Montana 21

2008: Richmond 24, Montana 7

2007: Appalachian State 49, Delaware 21

2006: Appalachian State 28, Massachusetts 17

2005: Appalachian State 21, UNI 16

2004: James Madison 31, Montana 21

2003: Delaware 40, Colgate 0

2002: Western Kentucky 34, McNeese State 14

2001: Montana 13, Furman 10

2000: Georgia Southern 27, Montana 25

1999: Georgia Southern 59, Youngstown State 24

1998: Massachusetts 55, Georgia Southern 43

1997: Youngstown State 10, McNeese State 9

1996: Marshall 49, Montana 29

1995: Montana 22, Marshall 20

1994: Youngstown State 28, Boise State 14

1993: Youngstown State 25, Marshall 17

1992: Marshall 31, Youngstown State 28

1991: Youngstown State 25, Marshall 17

1990: Georgia Southern 36, Nevada 13

1989: Georgia Southern 37, Stephen F. Austin 34*

1988: Furman 17, Georgia Southern 12

1987: Louisiana-Monroe 43, Marshall 42

1986: Georgia Southern 48, Arkansas State 21

1985: Georgia Southern 44, Furman 42

1984: Montana State 19, Louisiana Tech 6

1983: Southern Illinois 43, Western Carolina 7

1982: Eastern Kentucky 17, Delaware 14

1981: Idaho State 34, Eastern Kentucky 23

1980: Boise State 31, Eastern Kentucky 29

1979: Eastern Kentucky 30, Lehigh 7

1978: Florida A&M 35, Massachusetts 28

*Stephen F. Austin's participation in 1989 championship vacated.



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Montana State's 2024 season in review

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Aug. 24: No. 4 MSU 35, New Mexico 31

ALBUQUERQUE, N.M. — Scottre Humphrey's 4-yard touchdown run in the waning moments lifted Montana State to a season-opening 35-31 win against the FBS Lobos at University Stadium in Week 0.

Humphrey's score capped an 89-yard drive that began with the Bobcats trailing by three points and 1 minute, 59 seconds remaining on the clock, as Tommy Mellott orchestrated an 11-play drive that ended with Humphrey's game-winning score with 10 seconds left.

After trailing 31-14, Montana State scored the game's last 21 points in the fourth quarter to secure its first win over an FBS opponent since 2006.

Humphrey finished with 140 rushing yards on 19 carries, combining with Adam Jones to lead a Bobcat rushing attack that exploded for 362 yards.

Jones ended his day with 167 yards

on 17 carries, with the bulk of that total coming on a thrilling 93-yard touchdown dash down the left sideline with 4:35 to play in the fourth quarter.

The second-longest run from scrimmage in Montana State history made it 31-28 Lobos with 4:35 left, giving the Cats' defense a chance to make a stop and give Mellott the ball back.

Montana State out-gained New Mexico 220-42 in the fourth quarter alone, with three of the final four Cat drives finding the end zone.

New Mexico's offensive balance was the key feature of the first half. The Lobos rushed for 73 yards before halftime and struck for 153 through the air. But it was the Lobo defense that struck first, with Jayden Wilson stripping the ball from Mellott on a pass play. Christian Ellis returned it 41 yards for a touchdown less than five minutes into the game. After forcing a Bobcat punt on the next possession, UNM drove 67 yards and Luke Drzewiecki connected on a 41-yard field goal.

The Bobcats reached the 50 for the third straight drive on the next possession, but a Mellott incompleteness on fourth down gave New Mexico possession. The Lobos marched 68 yards, and when Devon Dampier found Trace Bruckler the home team held a 17-0 lead.

Montana State's offense stirred to life early in the second quarter. Humphrey, who gained 114 yards before halftime, rushed for gains of 34, 5 and 16 yards, and Adam Jones gained 6. Mellott hit Ryan King for a gain of 9 to the UNM 5, and on first-and-goal Mellott found Rylan Schlepp for the Bozeman Gallatin grad's third career catch and second touchdown. After a three-and-out, Mellott capped a 76-yard drive with an 18-yard scoring strike to Ty McCullough.

It was the Lobos who finished the half strong, however. UNM followed MSU's second score with a 75-yard drive, capped by a 24-yard touchdown run by Dampier. In spite of the 10-point deficit, MSU out-gained the Lobos 240 yards to 226 in the first two quarters.

Aug. 31: No. 4 MSU 31, Utah Tech 7

CEDAR CITY, Utah — After defeating FBS New Mexico a week earlier, the Bobcats didn't suffer any letdown as they traveled to Utah Tech.

In the first half, they didn't allow a first down and surrendered less than 40 yards of offense to the Trailblazers. The Bobcats rode that to a 31-7 win at Greater Zion Stadium in the second of two road wins to open their season.

Adam Jones scored first on a 1-yard rushing touchdown with 2:35 left in the first quarter. Tommy Mellott rushed for a 46-yard touchdown and threw a 45-yard touchdown to Rohan Jones before rushing for one more to put the Bobcats up 31-0.

Utah Tech didn't earn a first down until early in the fourth quarter and scored on a Deacon Hill 24-yard run with 13:03 left in the game.

Linebacker McCade O'Reilly led the team in tackles with five. Defensive back Brock Steel and LB Bryce Grebe each finished with four. Rylan Ortt and Danny Uluilakepa each added three.

Mellott rushed for 152 yards, Scottre Humphrey had 101 and Rohan Jones had 67 receiving.

Sept. 7: No. 3 MSU 41, Maine 24

BOZEMAN — In front of a golden sea of Bobcat fans, MSU roared to a 41-24 win over Maine. The Bobcats put up 526 yards of total offense, including 344 rushing yards.

MSU scored on six of its first seven drives and put up a 38-7 lead by halftime of the Gold Rush game.

Running back Scottre Humphrey found a hole and broke away for a 79-yard touchdown to open the scoring. On the next drive, fellow RB Adam Jones gained 23 yards on a screen, then ran for a 40-yard TD on the next play.

Humphrey led the team with 110 yards and two TDs on four carries. Jones added 63 yards and a pair of TDs on four carries. RB Jared White ran for 99 yards on 15 carries and quarterback Tommy Mellott added 66 yards on five carries.

Mellott — who also went 12 of 15 for



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144 yards through the air — later found tight end Ryan Loneragan for another TD. Myles Sansted added a 24-yard field goal right before halftime.

Defensively, the Bobcats held Maine to 134 yards total and 13 rushing yards in the first half. They earned three sacks from Danny Uluilakepa, Hunter Parsons and Brody Grebe.

MSU also affected the game on special teams with a blocked punt by defensive back Taki Uluilakepa. WR Garrett Walchli recovered the ball on the Maine 22-yard line to set up another scoring drive. Uluilakepa left the game in the second half with an undisclosed injury, but finished with two tackles.

MSU emptied the bench in the second half, with both Jordan Reed and Chance Wilson seeing time at QB. The Bobcats scored just once after halftime on a 31-yard FG from Sansted.

In the second half, the Black Bears scored on a 19-yard TD run by WR Trevin Ewing following a strip sack. Later in the third quarter, Peevy found TE Declan McKeivitt for a 25-yard TD. Maine also scored on a 25-yard FG in the fourth quarter.

Sept. 21: No. 3 MSU 52, Mercyhurst 13

BOZEMAN — Montana State scored

on seven of its nine offensive possessions and held Mercyhurst without a first down in the first quarter, closing the nonconference portion of its regular season with a 39-point win over the Lakers.

The Bobcats rolled up season highs of 52 points, 502 total yards and 246 passing yards, holding Mercyhurst to 233 yards of total offense. MSU quarterback Tommy Mellott threw three touchdown passes for the second time in his career and running back Colson Coon gained a career-high 102 yards rushing. Defensive end Brody Grebe registered three sacks and forced a fumble, and safety Rylan Ortt blocked a punt.

The Bobcats marched 70 yards on the opening possession and opened the scoring on a 23-yard Myles Sansted field goal. On MSU's second drive, Scottre Humphrey scored from 5 yards out, and on the third drive Taco Dowler caught a 5-yard pass from Mellott for a touchdown. Ortt's blocked punt came on the ensuing possession, and defensive end Zac Crews pounced on the ball in the end zone for a touchdown. Right before the half, Mellott connected on a 50-yard touchdown pass with running back Adam Jones as MSU took a 31-0

lead into the intermission.

After Mellott's third scoring strike of the day, Mercyhurst's defense got the Lakers on the board. Adonis Marshall scooped up a fumble and dashed 43 yards for a touchdown, and in the fourth quarter the offense stirred to life. Adam Urena connected with Joe Kerbacher on a 5-yard pass. After MSU tacked on a late score on a Chance Wilson 5-yard run, MSU capped a 52-13 win.

Sept. 28: No. 3 MSU 37, Idaho State 17

POCATELLO, Idaho — Quarterback Tommy Mellott connected with tight end Rohan Jones on a 70-yard touchdown pass early in the fourth quarter to give the Bobcats a 24-10 lead and MSU finished with a 20-point win at Idaho State.

The longest completion of Mellott's Bobcat career and Jones' longest catch answered an Idaho State field goal that trimmed the lead to one score.

Montana State rushed for 268 yards and extended its season-opening streak of scoring at least 30 points to five games, the second-longest stretch to begin a campaign in school history (after 2015). The Cats gained 410 total yards

to Idaho State's 276.

After the long completion from Mellott to Jones, Humphrey ended another scoring drive with a 6-yard run. The Bengals scored with just under five minutes remaining, and Humphrey crossed the goal line for the third time as time expired.

Montana State dominated much of the first half, but big plays on conversion downs by the Bengals compounded by Bobcat mistakes, kept the Bengals within 17-7 at the intermission. Montana State out-gained the Bengals 158-101 in the first two quarters, but the Bengals extended their last drive of the half with two fourth-down conversions and benefited from a pair of Bobcat penalties. Kobe Tracy found Michael Shulikov on the back line of the end zone on fourth-and-goal from the Bobcat 5 with six seconds left for Idaho State's only first half score.

After the teams exchanged punts to open the game, Montana State's Myles Sansted nailed a 45-yard field goal to break the ice. The Cats drove 74 yards on their next possession, with Mellott scoring from 7 yards out. That was MSU's 13th drive of at least 70 yards in the season's first 4 1/2 games.

The teams then exchanged turnovers. Adam Jones fumbled at the Bengals' 41 to give Idaho State its best field position of the day, but Rylan Ortt intercepted a pass three plays later to set up another Bobcat touchdown. This time, Humphrey battered his way across the goal line to give the Cats a 17-0 lead.

Humphrey finished the first half with 72 yards on 13 carries, and Mellott completed six of his nine passes for 34 yards. Taco Dowler returned four punts for 66 yards, including a 50-yarder.

Oct. 5: No. 3 MSU 55, Northern Colorado 17

BOZEMAN — On second-and-7 early in the second quarter from the Bears' 34, wide receiver Ty McCullough found Taco Dowler on a reverse pass they had just installed that week for a 34-yard touchdown pass that gave Montana State a 21-0 lead in a game it won 55-17 over Northern Colorado in Bozeman in front of a homecoming crowd of 22,007.

The pass was the first in McCullough's career and helped lead to a 102-yard afternoon for Dowler, a career best for him. It was part of a 278-yard passing

Please see SEASON, Page M33



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Season

From M32

game for the Cats, the most since the team threw for 295 against Morehead State early in the 2022 season. The team's 510 yards marked its fourth over the half-century mark this season.

After forcing a UNC three-and-out on the game's first possession, MSU struck quick. Scottre Humphrey's 43-yard run set up the Cats at the Bears 20, and five plays later Tommy Mellott found tight end Ryan Lonergan wide open in the end zone for a 9-yard score.

The Cats were back in business after another Bears three-and-out. Taking over at the MSU 49, Mellott engineered a nine-play, 51-yard drive that ended when he connected with Rohan Jones on a 3-yard touchdown pass.

MSU allowed only one Northern Colorado first down in the first quarter, and held the Bears to no points and 124 yards in the first half. By the time UNC scored late in the third quarter, MSU held a 34-0 lead. Northern Colorado finished with 362 yards.

Oct. 12: No. 3 MSU 38, No. 7 Idaho 7

BOZEMAN — Idaho's offense crossed midfield early in the second quarter. Now

faced with a second-and-3, UI quarterback Nick Josifek faked the handoff to running back Art Williams and dropped back to pass.

Montana State defensive end Brody Grebe came off the edge unblocked, but Josifek slipped out of Grebe's grasp. On the other edge, DE Kenneth Eiden IV caught the attention of two Vandals, and nose tackle Paul Brott beat UI left tackle Ayden Knapik.

As Josifek eluded Grebe, Brott was there to clean up for his first sack of 2024.

A dominant defense and an opportunistic offense allowed No. 3 Montana State to shut down No. 7 Idaho in a lopsided victory at Bobcat Stadium. With the win, the Bobcats improved to 7-0 for the first time since 1978.

The prime-time matchup against the Vandals on ESPN2 — a rematch of the 24-21 Idaho win in Moscow, Idaho, the previous season — was on paper one of the first tests for the Bobcats this season. Instead of a tightly contested top-10 matchup, it quickly turned into the sixth win by 20-plus points for MSU.

Safety Dru Polidore, in his season debut, and linebacker Danny Uluilakepa (who suffered a season-ending torn ACL in the game) led the team with five tackles each. Brott, Grebe and Talon Marsh each recorded a sack. Polidore and defensive back Andrew Powdrell broke up passes.

Offensively, it was another dominant effort. Despite UI allowing about 93 rushing yards per game entering the game, MSU did whatever it wanted on the ground. Quarterback Tommy Mellott had a team-high 140 rushing yards and two TDs. Running backs Scottre Humphrey (124 yards) and Adam Jones (39 yards, TD) were also key contributors.

It was another efficient passing day for Mellott as well, going 11 of 15 for 121 yards and TD passes to fullback Rohan Jones and wide receiver Taco Dowler.

The Bobcats outscored the Vandals 17-0 during the final four minutes of the first half and the first four minutes of the second half. A 34-yard field goal by Myles Sansted put the Bobcats up 24-0 at halftime. Then Rohan Jones scored a touchdown from Mellott to open the second half and safety Rylan Ortt forced and recovered a fumble on the next possession. Adam Jones ran it in to finish the drive.

The Vandals finally got on the board with under a minute to play, as Wagner found Deshaun Buchanan for a 9-yard TD.

Oct. 19: No. 3 MSU 44, Portland State 14

HILLSBORO, Ore. — Montana State used a balanced offense and stingy defense to beat Portland State 44-14.

Behind quarterback Tommy Mellott and a powerful ground game, the Bobcats rolled up 607 yards of total of-

fense, the 10th-most in school history. MSU rushed for 323 yards and threw for 284 yards. Scottre Humphrey gained all 160 of his rushing yards before halftime, when MSU built a 35-0 lead, and Mellott threw for 239 yards and three touchdowns on 15-of-20 passing. Taco Dowler caught a 57-yard touchdown pass on his way to 78 receiving yards on three catches.

Montana State's offense kicked into full gear early. The Bobcats took the opening kickoff and marched 75 yards in eight plays for a 7-0 lead. The game's pivot point came on the next possession, when Portland State moved to the Bobcat 33-yard line, and facing a fourth-and-7, quarterback Dante Chachere threw incomplete. The Cats took over, and the Vikings eventually stopped MSU on downs at the Vikings' 23, but the Viking offense didn't cross the 50 again in the half and PSU's defense didn't stop the Cats again.

The Bobcats led 35-0 at the intermission, and the statistics fortified the point. MSU rushed for 210 yards in the first half and threw for 207 yards. The team ran 35 plays in the first half, averaging 11.9 yards per snap. Scottre Humphrey rambled for 160 yards, while Mellott threw for 207 and three scores.

The MSU defense limited the Vikings to 235 total yards, including 90 yards and just six first downs in the first half. Bobcat nickelback Miles Jackson, a Portland na-

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tive, provided one of the day's highlights with his first career interception.

The game provided a pair of milestones. Vigen earned his 40th career win, becoming the first Big Sky coach to get to that total in his first 50 games (he is 40-9). Mellott also got his 26th win as a starting Bobcat quarterback, pulling into a second-place tie with fellow Butte product Paul Dennehy. He passed Travis Lulay, who was at Saturday's game.

Montana State raised its record to 8-0, one of three such starts in program history.

Nov. 2: No. 2 MSU 42, Eastern Washington 28

CHENEY, Wash. — The rain fell throughout the afternoon, but Tommy Mellott provided the lightning.

One play after Eastern Washington tied the game at 28-28 late in the third quarter, Montana State's senior quarterback sprinted 76 yards for a touchdown as the Bobcats recaptured the lead. Then with just over three minutes to play and MSU still clinging to that 35-28 lead, facing a third-and-7, Mellott found Ty McCullough racing down the sideline for a 61-yard touchdown. Those two big plays boosted the Bobcats to a hard-fought win.

The Bobcats rushed for 316 yards and scored over 30 points for the ninth straight game this season, with Mel-



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lott (125) and Scottre Humphrey (110) each topping 100 rushing yards. Each reached milestones, as well, with Humphrey moving past the 1,000-yard mark for the season and Mellott becoming the fourth Bobcat to rush for 3,000 yards in his career.

MSU carried a 28-14 lead into the second half, but Eastern Washington's Tuna Althair scored on a 3-yard pass from Jared Taylor with 9:01 to play in the third quarter to draw the Eagles within 28-21. Then Althair scored from 11 yards out with 1:26 remaining in the third quarter to forge the tie.

The first half started slowly for the offenses, with three-and-outs on each team's first drive. Montana State got things cooking on its second possession, with Mellott completing four of five passes and rushing once for 10 yards. Scottre Humphrey punched it in from the 1. The game's first pivot point came on the next play, when Max Murphy forced a fumble on the kick return and Carson Williams recovered. Mellott found Taco Dowler on the next play for a 19-yard touchdown, and the Cats led 14-0.

Eastern got on the board on its next drive, marching 63 yards. Jared Taylor connected with Efton Chism III on a 4-yard pass for the score to cap a 13-play drive. That was the first offensive touchdown MSU allowed in the first quarter all season, and the first first-quarter points since the season opener at New Mexico.

The Cats answered with an eight-play drive fueled by consecutive runs by Mellott of 26 and 23 yards. That set up a 23-yard touchdown run by Adam Jones. The lightning-strike Eagles offense struck quickly, with Michael Wortham dashing 75 yards on a reverse for a touchdown.

The Bobcats closed the first-half scoring with a 16-play drive, its second-longest of the season. Humphrey plowed in from 4 yards for his second score of the day. MSU out-gained the Eagles 276 yards to 164 in the first half, with 160 on the ground and 116 through the air. Of the Eagles' yardage total, 122 came on the ground.

In addition to his great ground game, Mellott completed 13 of his 20 passes for 181 yards with two touchdowns and his first interception of the season. That interception, with 7:19 to play, set up a dramatic Bobcat defensive stand. On second-and-10 from the MSU 32, Bryce Grebe made a tackle on a middle screen to set up fourth-and-4, then the Cats stopped Michael Wortham short of the line to gain to turn the ball over. That set up Mellott's long scoring strike.

Montana State raised its record to 9-0 for only the second time in school history, and 5-0 in Big Sky play.

Nov. 9: No. 2 MSU 49, Sacramento State 7

BOZEMAN — Plenty of crazy numbers dotted the final statistics of Montana State's 49-7 win over Sacramento State in relatively balmy Bobcat Stadium.

MSU's seven rushing touchdowns set a school record. The 508 rushing yards was second-most all-time. The Cats gained more than 600 total yards for the second time in three games. And Montana State has now scored in 21 consecutive quarters.

But for all the gaudy numbers, one mattered more than the others.

Ten. Or specifically, Ten and oh.

That's what the Bobcats ran their record to after Saturday's victory on a mild 50-degree afternoon that felt more like mid-September than mid-November, the first time an MSU team has ever been 10-0.

"We were not worrying about going 10-0, honestly," said MSU coach Brent Vigen. "But when you play well, when you live in the moment and you continue to do (the right) things, you give yourself that opportunity."

The opportunities came early on Saturday, and the Cats seized them. A team battling a plague of injuries, Sacramento State pieced together an impressive drive on Saturday, but the Cats forced a punt. The Hornets pinned MSU at the 11.

Scottre Humphrey gained 9 yards on first down and 16 more on second. On first-and-10 from the MSU 36, a sweep to Ty McCullough resulted in a 64-yard touchdown dash, and Montana State's ground game was off to the races.

After forcing a long Sac State missed field goal on the ensuing possession, MSU again scored on its third play. This was a 46-yard pass from Mellott to McCullough to give the Cats a 14-0 lead. MSU fumbled on its next possession, but then Julius Davis scored his first touchdown of the season early in the second quarter, and Tommy Mellott scored to close the competitive portion of the game.

While the Bobcats were racing to 284 rushing yards in the first half, extending the lead to 28-0, MSU's defense stifled the Hornets. Sacramento State gained 33 yards on its first drive of the game, and just 117 yards on its next five. The Bobcats ended Sac State's first half when Jon Johnson intercepted a pass in the end zone.

Redshirt freshman running back Adam Jones rushed for a game-high 159 yards on just five carries. He dashed 78 yards early in the game, but was tripped up short of the goal line. That wouldn't happen on his next opportunity, when he scored on a 57-yard run in the third quarter. That made the score 42-7, and ended the day for MSU's top players.

Sophomore running back Scottre

Humphrey gained 129 yards, including a 48-yard run. He has surpassed the 100-yard mark in four straight games, and in seven of the 10 this season.

The day's dark note came before kickoff, when All-American defensive end Brody Grebe was scratched from the lineup with an injury. Hunter Parsons made his first start.

In its previous 119 football seasons, Montana State had never begun 10-0. In fact, the Cats have won 10 games in a full season just eight times now.

Nov. 16: No. 2 MSU 30, No. 4 UC Davis 28

DAVIS, Calif. — MSU clinched at least a share of the Big Sky Conference championship for the second time in three years, along with the conference's auto bid for the FCS playoffs with a 30-28 victory at UC Davis Health Stadium.

The Bobcats appeared headed to another lopsided victory before some fourth-quarter Aggie fireworks with three touchdowns in the final frame.

UC Davis benefitted from a pass interference call in the end zone on a fourth down, and running back Lan Larson punched in the 1-yard touchdown run. Wide receiver Chaz Davis broke off a 77-yard catch and run — aided by another defensive pass interference on MSU — and WR Sam Gbatu, Jr. made the 4-yard TD catch.

Davis recovered the ensuing onside kick with 1 minute, 44 seconds left, and Chaz Davis added an 11-yard TD catch. After trailing by 22, the Aggies were a two-point conversion away from tying the game.

Aggies quarterback Miles Hastings rolled to his right and threw across his body toward Larson. MSU linebacker McCade O'Reilly jumped in front to pick off the pass to snuff out the hope of overtime.

MSU safety Rylan Ortt recovered Davis' last resort onside kick and the Bobcats kneeled it out.

MSU finished with a season-low 333 total yards and 159 rushing yards. QB Tommy Mellott had to largely orchestrate the offense through the air, finishing 18 of 25 for 174 yards and two TDs.

The Bobcats went 6 for 15 on third downs and 2 for 2 on fourth downs.

In the first half, Taco Dowler earned his third career punt return TD when he broke three initial tackles and found open space. He out-ran punter Ben Banks-Altekruse for the 79-yard TD. Myles Sansted's extra point attempt was blocked, but MSU led 20-8.

When the Aggies faced a third-and-6, Grebe forced Hastings to step up in the pocket where Crews smacked the ball out of Hastings' hands and LB Neil Daily recovered the fumble.

MSU converted a pair of third downs

and a fourth-and-1, but stalled out at the Davis 23. Sansted nailed the 42-yard field goal attempt.

MSU went into halftime up 23-8 and tacked on a Julius Davis 7-yard TD in the third quarter before the Aggies scored 20 unanswered points in the fourth quarter.

Larson finished with 117 yards on 23 attempts and a single touchdown for the Aggies.

Defensively, the Bobcats racked up six sacks, nine TFLs (including three from Kenneth Eiden IV), one interception by Dru Polidore and the final fumble and recovery.

Nov. 23: No. 2 MSU 34, No. 9 Montana 11

BOZEMAN — No. 2-ranked MSU improved to 12-0 overall (8-0 in Big Sky play) with a 34-11 win over No. 9 Montana (8-4, 5-3) in the 123rd Brawl of the Wild in front of a Bobcat Stadium-record 22,057 fans.

Not only did the Cats earn the outright Big Sky title, they secured the No. 1 seed and home field advantage in the FCS playoffs with the victory. It's MSU's first undefeated regular season since 1956, when it finished 9-0-1 and won the NAIA title. It was also the first outright Big Sky championship the Cats had clinched on the field since 1984 (they initially shared the 2011 title with UM, but it was later vacated from the Grizzlies because of extra benefits).

With the victory, the Bobcats became the last remaining undefeated FCS team.

MSU opened with a 14-play, 75-yard drive that quarterback Tommy Mellott capped with a 5-yard touchdown run. The home team has scored first in six straight Brawls, and the home team has won the last five, all by at least 19 points.

UM's Ty Morrison made a 47-yard field goal with 13 minutes, 8 seconds left in the first half to cut the deficit to 7-3 — the first time since 2017 that the winning team has held a lead of less than seven points in the second quarter.

That was, however, as close as it would get.

About three minutes after the field goal, Mellott completed a 35-yard TD pass to Rohan Jones on third-and-8 to put MSU ahead 14-3. It was one of six third downs the Cats converted in the game on 12 attempts. They also scored on all four red-zone trips.

UM, meanwhile, went 2 for 12 on third downs and 1 for 1 in the red zone.

Mellott, a senior from Butte, completed 6 of 12 passes for 94 yards and rushed for 50 yards on 10 attempts.

Myles Sansted pushed his mark to 12 of 16 on field goals in 2024 after making both of his attempts.

The Grizzlies finished with 234 total yards (exactly 117 passing and rushing), more than 200 fewer than they averaged entering the game. They punted on their first three drives of the second half.

UM tackled Adam Jones for no gain with under four minutes left in the third quarter at the MSU 5-yard line. Then, the dam broke.

Thanks to what Adam Jones called "a really nice block" from All-American offensive lineman Marcus Wehr, Jones burst through a hole up the middle en route to an 88-yard gain. The redshirt freshman running back scored two plays later to put MSU ahead 27-3. Jones, a Missoula Sentinel graduate, finished with a career-best 197 rushing yards on a career-high 25 carries.

The Griz scored their only TD of the game with 11:02 left, on a 1-yard run from Eli Gillman. Logan Fife found Sawyer Racanelli for a two-point conversion to cut UM's deficit to 27-11.

Dec. 7: No. 1 MSU 49, UT Martin 17

BOZEMAN — Even with fullback Rohan Jones and running back Julius Davis sidelined due to injury, the Montana State offense was still lethal.

Quarterback Tommy Mellott first found tight end Hunter Providence, who was wide open, for the 24-yard touchdown and Providence's first career score. The second score came when Mellott threw a dime to wide receiver Taco Dowler over multiple defenders in the back of the end zone.

No. 1 seed MSU built an early lead and never looked back in a 49-17 win over UT Martin in a second-round FCS playoff game at Bobcat Stadium. The win improved MSU to 13-0 — a program record for wins in a season.

Mellott had a career-best passing performance, going 22 of 25 for 300 yards and four TDs. He set new single-game career highs in completions and passing yards, and it's the second time he's thrown four TD passes. The first was against Northern Colorado on Oct. 5.

As a team, MSU put up 501 yards, including 201 rushing yards. TE Ryan Lonergeran led the team with three catches for 90 yards. WR Ty McCullough finished with four catches for 58 yards and a TD, along with 23 rushing yards and a TD. Running back Scottre Humphrey led the team with 102 rushing yards and a TD on 11 carries.

Dowler had four catches for 71 yards and two TDs. He also had five punt returns for 50 total yards — including a long of 40 yards — becoming MSU's new leader in career punt return yardage (1,022).

The MSU defense also made a consistent impact.

Safety Rylan Ortt led the team with seven total tackles, making three stops on third downs in the first half. Defensive end Kenneth Eiden IV had two tackles for loss and 1.5 sacks. Fellow DEs Brody Grebe (1.5 sacks) and Dominic Solano (one), along with nose tackle Paul Brott (one), also got home. Defensive back Miles Jackson had 1.5 TFLs.

Eiden credited the game plan devised by defensive coordinator/linebackers coach Bobby Daly, co-DC/defensive line coach Shawn Howe and defensive tackles coach Nick Jean-Baptiste.

UTM QB Kinkead Dent finished 15 of 29 for 167 yards and two TDs. Trevonte Rucker was the leading receiver with six catches for 107 yards and two scores. DeVonte Tanksley — UTM's No. 2 receiver — was limited to one catch for 0 yards.

Dec. 14: No. 1 MSU 52, No. 8 Idaho 19

BOZEMAN — A second quarter explosion propelled the No. 1-seeded Bobcats to a 52-19 win over the eighth-seeded Vandals at Bobcat Stadium.

Right after tying the game 10-10 with 8 minutes, 22 seconds left in the first half, the Vandals tried an onside kick. The ball was mis-hit and Montana State got the ball on the UI 38-yard

line. MSU QB Tommy Mellott later scored on an 8-yard run.

The unraveling continued when the Vandals fumbled — a self-inflicted wound by way of wide receiver Mark Hamper running into offensive lineman Ayden Knapik. MSU defensive end Brody Grebe recovered it at the UI 28. Running back Adam Jones scored a 2-yard TD.

The Bobcats forced the first punt of the game with about 35 seconds left in the first half. After not liking what he saw, Mellott decided to scramble once a hole opened, he said. Mellott hurdled UI defensive back Andrew Marshall, eventually being forced out 63 yards later at the 2. Jones scored again with 8 seconds left.

Mellott finished with 131 rushing yards and a TD on 14 carries. He also went 12 of 18 for 174 passing yards and two more scores. UI linebacker Jaxton Eck said after that the combination of a dual threat QB and arguably the best O-line the Vandals have faced all year made Mellott challenging to defend all game.

Vigen pointed to the plays Mellott made in key situations. Mellott converted a third-and-11 with a 25-yard pass to WR Ty McCullouch. After missing WR Lonyatta Alexander Jr., he connected for 21 yards on the next play. After throwing an interception

— and nearly throwing a second to UI DB Tommy McCormick — the Bobcats scored six consecutive TDs.

The Bobcats converted 11 of 15 third downs, compared to UI going 2 for 10. MSU also finished with 283 rushing yards. Jones finished with 95 yards and four TDs on 23 carries, along with three catches for 66 yards. That put him at 1,068 rushing yards and 14 rushing TDs on the season, which are both program records for a freshman.

Dec. 21: No. 1 MSU 31, No. 4 South Dakota 17

BOZEMAN — Top-seeded MSU booked a return trip to Frisco, Texas, with a 31-17 win over fourth-seeded South Dakota at Bobcat Stadium.

Despite giving up two explosive plays in the first half — rushing touchdowns of 55 and 45 yards, respectively — and only scoring once in the second half, MSU found a way to stave off USD.

Punter Brendan Hall flipped the field with five punts, averaging 54 yards per punt.

MSU finished with 356 total yards (222 rushing, 134 passing) and USD had 371 yards (236 passing, 135 rushing). Tommy Mellott had 125 rushing yards and two TDs on 17 carries, and went 8 of 17 for 134 yards and a TD passing.

Mellott got to work quickly with a pass to wide receiver Taco Dowler for a 20-yard gain. Dowler also capped off the opening drive with a 34-yard touchdown.

Dowler led MSU with four catches for 94 yards.

Coyotes running back/fullback Travis Theis broke several tackles en route to the end zone on a 55-yard TD run. He finished with 110 rushing yards on 14 carries, along with seven catches for 80 yards.

MSU regained the lead with a 5-yard TD run by Mellott.

The Coyotes opened the second quarter with another big run — this time a 45-yard TD scamper by RB Charles Pierre Jr. It's the first time the Bobcats have surrendered multiple runs of 45-plus yards in a single game this season.

That run also put USD over 100 rushing yards. But the Coyotes were held to 35 rushing yards the rest of the game. Pierre finished with 57 yards on four carries.

MSU rattled off a 12-play, 74-yard scoring drive to regain the lead. After a defensive holding call on USD, RB Scotre Humphrey scored a 1-yard TD.

MSU kicker Myles Sansted added a 28-yard field goal with eight seconds left in the first half to make it 24-14 MSU at the break.

The Bobcats led in total yardage (269-183) and in time of possession (20:28-9:32) at halftime. Mellott also surpassed 1,000 career playoff rushing yards (1,006) and the Bobcats broke their single-season rushing record (4,428) in the first half.

Mellott got MSU back to midfield on a 26-yard scramble. He later bobbled the snap on a third-and-1, burst up the middle, hurdled USD's Josiah Ganues and scored a 41-yard TD to put MSU up 31-14.

The Coyotes later kicked a 46-yard FG to make it 31-17.

USD had two potential scoring drives in the fourth quarter snuffed out by the MSU defense. The Coyotes lost 11 yards on a botched snap. On a fourth-and-13, tight end JJ Galbreath was knocked out of bounds short of the line to gain by MSU DB Tayden Gray.

On the second drive, Brody Grebe and DE Kenneth Eiden IV bull-rushed Bouman for a sack on a third-and-5. Cornerback Simeon Woodard broke up a pass intended for USD's Carter Bell in the end zone on fourth-and-10.

The last gasp for USD came on an attempted hook-and-ladder from Galbreath to Quaron Adams. But Adams couldn't handle the lateral and Grebe recovered the fumble. Mellott knelt it out to seal the win.

Go Cats Go!

Our AMR teams in Bozeman and Billings are proud to support the Montana State Bobcats in their bid for the FCS Championship! Best of luck in Frisco!

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MONTANA STATE ROSTER

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown, Previous School
1	Andrew Powdrell	DB	5-10	185	So.	The Woodlands, Texas (College Park)
2	L. Alexander Jr.	WR	6-3	210	Jr.	Auburn, Wash. (Washington/Arizona State)
3	Dru Polidore	S	6-2	180	Jr.	Katy, Texas (Air Force)
3	Kory Boyd	DB	6-0	170	Fr.	Dallas, Texas (Wylie East)
3	Jared White	RB	5-10	195	So.	Frisco, Texas (Wakeland)
4	Jon Johnson	QB	6-0	185	Sr.	Gardena, Calif. (El Camino)
4	Tommy Mellott	CB	6-0	208	Sr.	Butte, Mont. (Butte)
5	Caden Dowler	S	6-0	200	So.	Billings, Mont. (West)
5	Javonte King	WR	6-4	220	RFr.	Blackfoot, Idaho (Blackfoot)
6	Miles Jackson	CB	5-11	190	Sr.	Portland, Ore. (Central Catholic)
6	Ty McCullough	WR	6-1	180	Sr.	Moreno Valley, Calif. (Colorado State)
7	Tayden Gray	DB	6-0	185	RFr.	Arlington, Texas (Trinity Leadership Aca.)
8	Rohan Jones	TE	6-3	235	Jr.	Montreal, Quebec (Maine)
9	Ryan King	WR	6-4	216	Jr.	Loganville, Ga. (East Carolina)
9	Simeon Woodard	CB	5-10	180	Sr.	San Antonio, Texas (Veterans Memorial)
10	Bryce Grebe	LB	6-2	225	RFr.	Melstone, Mont. (Melstone)
10	Jabez Woods	WR	5-11	178	Fr.	Spanaway, Wash. (Graham-Kapowsin)
11	Kenneth Eiden IV	DE	6-1	245	Jr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
11	Elijah Elliott	RB	5-10	190	Sr.	Portland, Ore. (Central Catholic)
12	Ryan Bowles	LB	6-2	213	Fr.	Woodinville, Wash. (Woodinville)
12	Jhase McMillan	DB	5-9	157	Fr.	Fulshear, Texas (Katy Thompkins)
12	Jordan Reed	QB	6-6	228	So.	El Centro, Calif. (Central Union)
13	Jackson Harmon	CB	6-3	200	So.	Anchorage, Alaska (South)
13	Chance Wilson	QB	6-3	180	RFr.	Owasso, Okla. (Rejoice Christian)
14	Taco Dowler	WR	5-9	175	So.	Billings, Mont. (West)
15	Patrick Duchien	QB	6-2	210	RFr.	Florence, Mont. (Florence)
16	Z. Dodson-Greene	WR	6-1	185	So.	Salem, Ore. (West Salem)
16	Brendon Ross	DB	5-10	173	Fr.	Rockwall, Texas (Rockwall)
17	Thomas Buchanan	QB	6-4	214	Fr.	Red Lodge, Mont. (Red Lodge)
17	Taki Uluilakepa	DB	6-0	175	RFr.	Provo, Utah (Timpview)
18	Garrett Walchli	WR	5-8	175	Sr.	Hermiston, Ore. (Utah State)
19	Tom Carter	WR	6-0	175	RFr.	Helena, MT (Capital)
19	Neil Daly	LB	6-3	230	So.	Billings, MT (West)
20	Kee Christiansen	WR	6-0	192	Fr.	Dillon, MT (Beaverhead County)
20	Tyson Pottenger	S	6-2	180	Jr.	Couer d'Alene, Idaho (Couer d'Alene)
22	Takhari Carr	DB	6-0	175	So.	Compton, Calif. (Dominguez)
22	Scottre Humphrey	RB	5-11	210	So.	Seattle Wash. (Rainier Beach)
23	Seth Johnson	DB	5-10	161	Fr.	Frisco, Texas (Reedy)
23	Adam Jones	RB	6-1	200	RFr.	Missoula, MT (Sentinel)
24	Colter Petre	DB	6-1	195	RFr.	Helena, MT (Helena)
25	Jacob Trimble	WR	6-0	195	So.	North Richland Hills, Texas (Ft. Worth Christian)
25	Carson Williams	DB	5-11	160	Fr.	Houston, Texas (Westfield)
26	Rylan Ort	S	6-1	210	Sr.	Missoula, Mont. (Sentinel)
27	Brock Steel	DB	6-1	205	So.	Sheridan, Wyo. (Sheridan)
28	Colson Coon	RB	5-11	195	RFr.	Sheridan, Wyo. (Sheridan)
29	JJ Dolan	DB	6-0	175	RFr.	Missoula, Mont. (Sentinel)
30	Danny Uluilakepa	LB	6-1	225	Sr.	Puyallup, Wash. (Puyallup)
31	U. Latin-Henley	RB	5-11	169	Fr.	Tacoma, Wash. (Washington)
32	Julius Davis	RB	5-10	195	Sr.	Menomonie Falls, Wisc. (Wisconsin)
33	Mason Dethman	LB	6-4	206	Fr.	Brockton, Mont. (Froid-Medicine Lake)
34	Cole Taylor	LB	6-3	230	RFr.	Great Falls, Mont. (CM Russell)
35	Ryan Nansel	DB	6-0	177	Fr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Gallatin)
35	Dane Steel	WR	5-10	178	Fr.	Sheridan, Wyo. (Sheridan)
36	Zac Crews	DE	6-4	235	So.	Missoula, Mont. (Sentinel)
37	Josh Woodberry	LB	5-11	205	Fr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Gallatin)
38	Casey Kautzman	K/P	5-11	190	So.	Butte, Mont. (Butte)
39	Myles Sansted	K	6-3	188	So.	Alexandria, Minn. (Alexandria)
41	Brody Grebe	DE	6-3	250	Sr.	Melstone, Mont. (Melstone/Choates Aca.)
42	Ryan Krahe	LB	6-2	230	So.	Great Falls, Mont. (Great Falls)
43	McCade O'Reilly	LB	6-0	220	Sr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
44	Jake Vigen	DE	6-2	235	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Gallatin)
45	Hunter Parsons	DE	6-4	245	Jr.	Sparks, Nev. (Spanish Springs)
46	Logan Fredericksen	DE	6-3	240	So.	Rigby, Idaho (Rigby)
48	Max Murphy	FB	6-2	230	So.	Billings, Mont. (West)
49	Zac Waible	LB	6-2	215	So.	Lake Oswego, Ore. (Lakeridge)
50	Zack Black	LB	6-2	215	Jr.	Meridian, Idaho (Rocky Mountain)
51	Nicholas Korom	DL	6-2	275	Sr.	Bismark, N.D. (Central Lakes JC)
51	Dalton Noble	OL	6-4	260	Fr.	Clancy, Mont. (Jefferson)
54	Zac Nyland	OL	6-4	280	RFr.	Meridian, Idaho (Owyhee)
55	JT Reed	OG	6-3	290	Sr.	San Jose, Calif. (San Mateo College)
55	AJ Tanupo	DT	6-2	295	Fr.	Tacoma, Wash. (Eastside Catholic)
56	Cole Sain	OG/C	6-4	300	Gr.	Darby, Mont. (Riverside CC/Montana)
57	Everett Carr	OL	6-4	290	RFr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
58	Dominic Solano	DE	6-4	235	So.	Glendale, Ariz. (Cactus)
59	Samora Ezekiel	OL	6-2	285	So.	Fort Worth, Texas (North Texas)
60	Tommy Nilson	OL	6-3	285	So.	Missoula, Mont. (Hellgate)
61	Aiden Kaplan	OL	6-3	277	Fr.	Montgomery, Texas (Lake Creek)
63	Dylan Rollins	OL	6-6	300	Fr.	Missoula, Mont. (Sentinel/BYU)
64	Burke Mastel	OL	6-4	315	So.	Red Lodge, Mont. (Red Lodge)
65	Justus Perkins	C	6-0	290	Sr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
66	Titan Fleischmann	OT	6-4	300	RSo.	Pocatello, Idaho (Century)
69	Jaren Perkins	DT	6-1	265	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
71	Tommy Sullivan	LS	5-11	200	Sr.	Everett, Wash. (Archbishop Murphy)
72	Conner Moore	OT	6-5	310	So.	Millbury, Ohio (Lake)
73	Cedric Jefferson	OL	6-4	300	RFr.	Temecula, Calif. (Chaparral)
74	Jaden Perkins	OL	6-1	280	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
75	Braden Zimmer	OL	6-6	240	Fr.	Billings, Mont. (West)
76	Marcus Wehr	OT	6-4	300	Sr.	Billings, Mont. (Central)
79	Jonathan Luhmann	OL	6-4	295	RFr.	Florence, Mont. (Florence)
80	Luvens Valcin	TE	6-1	228	Fr.	Auburn, Wash. (Auburn)
81	Maclain Burckley	WR	6-2	194	Fr.	Billings, Mont. (Senior)
82	Luke Smith	TE	6-5	230	RFr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
85	Aidan Garrigan	WR	6-3	200	Jr.	Magnolia, Texas (Magnolia)
86	Hunter Provience	TE	6-5	245	RFr.	San Diego, Calif. (Christian)
87	Ryan Lonergan	TE	6-4	245	Sr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
88	Rylan Schlepp	TE	6-4	235	So.	Bozeman, Mont. (Gallatin)
89	Rocky Lencioni	TE	6-3	220	Fr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
90	Hunter Sharbono	DT	6-2	280	RFr.	Fairview, Mont. (Fairview)
91	Seth Brock	DE	6-3	204	Fr.	Eagle, Idaho (Eagle)
92	Blake Schmidt	DL	6-2	300	Sr.	San Diego, Calif. (Monte Vista)
93	Brendan Hall	K/P	6-9	235	Sr.	Springtown, Texas (Springtown/SMU)
95	Ryder Trujillo	DL	6-4	275	RFr.	Orange, Calif. (Los Alamitos)
96	Paul Brott	DL	6-3	290	Jr.	Billings, Mont. (West)
97	Alec Eckert	DT	6-2	280	So.	Lewiston, Idaho (Washington State)
98	Hudson Wiens	DL	6-3	250	Fr.	Bozeman, Mont. (Bozeman)
99	Talon Marsh	DL	6-1	280	RFr.	Helena, Mont. (Capital)



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NORTH DAKOTA STATE ROSTER

#	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Yr.	Hometown, Previous School
0	Marcus Gulley	LB	6-3	227	Sr.	West Fargo, N.D. (MSU-Moorhead)
1	Braylon Henderson	WR	5-9	175	Sr.	Plano, Texas (Plano East)
2	Kellen Entz	WR	6-3	204	So.	West Fargo, N.D. (Sheyenne)
3	Raja Nelson	WR	5-9	189	Sr.	Lakeville, Minn. (Lakeville North)
4	Jaylin Crumby	S	5-11	194	RFr.	Tampa, Fla. (Armwood)
4	Owen Johnson	RB	5-11	212	Jr.	Mankato, Minn. (Mankato West)
5	Bryce Lance	WR	6-3	204	Jr.	Marshall, Minn. (Marshall)
6	Tyler Terhark	WR	6-2	209	Sr.	Horace N.D. (Sheyenne)
7	Cam Miller	WR	6-1	212	Sr.	Solon, Iowa (Solon)
8	Barika Kpeenu	RB	5-10	209	Jr.	Fargo, N.D. (West Fargo Sheyenne)
9	Cole Payton	WR	6-3	234	Jr.	Omaha, Neb. (Westside)
10	Trey Drake	QB	6-3	202	RFr.	Jamestown, N.Y. (Jamestown)
10	Marcus Sheppard	CB	5-10	189	Sr.	Novi, Mich. (Bowling Green)
11	Oscar Benson	LB	6-1	215	Sr.	Hillsboro, N.D. (Hillsboro)
12	Nathan Hayes	QB	6-3	206	So.	West Chicago, Ill. (St. Charles East)
13	Najee Nelson	CB	5-11	186	RFr.	Lakeville, Minn. (Lakeville North)
14	Enock Sibomana	LB	5-11	206	Jr.	Fargo, N.D. (Fargo South)
15	Mekhi Collins	WR	6-4	214	So.	North Mankato, Minn. (Mankato West)
16	Silas Evans	WR	6-1	180	RFr.	Denver, Colo. (Colorado State)
17	Jailen Duffie	CB	5-11	169	RFr.	Waukegan, Ill. (Warren Township)
17	Isiah St. Romain	WR	6-1	186	Jr.	Williston, N.D. (Williston)
18	Jaquise Alexander	CB	5-10	175	So.	Ruskin, Fla. (Sumner)
19	Chris Harris	WR	6-3	204	Jr.	El Paso, Texas (El Dorado)
19	Will Rosenmeyer	CB	6-0	181	Fr.	Highlands Ranch, Colo. (Rock Canyon)
20	Will Steil	S	6-2	195	Fr.	Cold Spring, Minn. (Rocori)
21	Noah Taylor	LB	6-0	216	RFr.	Lemont, Ill. (Lemont Township)
22	Hudson Artz	S	6-0	205	So.	Fairmont, Minn. (Fairmont)
23	Aaron Bickerton	P	6-3	205	Jr.	Stoke-on-Trent, England (Howard)
23	Kegan Huber	CB	6-0	179	So.	Lake Geneva, Wis. (Badger)
24	A. Chideme-Alfaro	CB	6-2	197	Jr.	Sacramento, Calif. (Cornell)
25	CharMar Brown	RB	5-11	214	RFr.	Omaha, Neb. (Creighton Prep)
25	Ray James	LB	6-2	210	Fr.	Eden Prarie, Minn. (DeLaSalle)
26	Taylen Eady	S	6-0	188	Fr.	Toano, Va. (Warhill)
27	Ryan Jones	S	6-3	205	Jr.	Frisco, Texas (Reedy)
28	TK Marshall	RB	6-0	208	Sr.	Minneapolis, Minn. (Southwest)
29	Darius Givance	S	6-3	209	So.	Champlin, Minn. (Champlin Park)
30	Kelly Watson	RB	5-11	187	RFr.	Elmhurst, Ill. (York)
32	Austin Altepeter	LB	6-2	226	So.	Fargo, N.D. (Moorhead)
33	Logan Hofstedt	FB	6-1	238	Sr.	Cannon Falls, Minn. (Cannon Falls)
34	Will Washington	CB	6-1	190	Fr.	Burnsville, Minn. (Apple Valley)
35	Sam Jung	S	5-11	192	Sr.	Neenah, Wis. (Neenah)
35	Ryland Satter	LB	6-1	223	Fr.	Sioux Falls, S.D. (O'Gorman)
36	Nick Kubitz	LB	6-3	229	Sr.	Dubuque, Iowa (Dubuque)
36	McClain Miller	RB	6-1	218	Fr.	Goshen, Ind. (Northridge)
37	William Frattalone	CB	6-0	200	RFr.	Wayzata, Minn. (Northern Iowa)
37	Drew Klein	K	5-9	170	So.	Hortonville, Wis. (Hortonville)
38	Eli Ozick	K	5-11	185	RFr.	Liberty, Mo. (Liberty)
39	Griffin Crosa	K	6-1	184	Sr.	Dublin, Ohio (Dublin Scioto)
39	Landon Meier	S	5-11	190	Fr.	Fargo, N.D. (Shanley)
40	Kaden Zenzen	TE	6-4	242	So.	Barnesville, Minn. (Barnesville)
41	Kaedon Steindorf	P	6-1	202	Sr.	Sherwood, Ore. (Sherwood)
42	Reis Kessel	TE	6-5	220	Fr.	Fargo, N.D. (Fargo South)
42	Brady Wavrunek	RB	5-11	206	RFr.	Sioux City, Iowa (Sioux City East)
43	Logan Kopp	LB	6-1	220	Jr.	St. Louis, Mo. (Lindbergh)
44	Luke Kokat	TE	6-3	239	So.	Sturtevant, Wis. (Union Grove)
45	Peder Haugo	RB	6-1	213	Fr.	Fargo, N.D. (Fargo North)
46	Truman Werremeyer	FB	6-2	246	Jr.	Fargo, N.D. (Fargo Davies)
47	Luke Weerts	LB	6-1	221	Sr.	Batavia, Ill. (Batavia)
48	Caleb Bowers	LS	6-1	222	So.	Whitefish Bay, Wis. (Whitefish Bay)
49	Hunter Brozio	FB	6-1	223	Sr.	Lakeland, Fla. (Lake Gibson)
49	Jonathan Harvey	RB	5-10	191	So.	Mahtomedi, Minn. (Mahtomedi)
49	Matthew Stenbroten	DE	6-4	231	Fr.	Lake Mills, Wis. (Lake Mills)
50	Kody Huisman	DT	6-4	283	Jr.	Pella, Iowa (Pella)
51	Donovan Woolen	LB	6-4	214	Fr.	Frisco, Texas (Wakeland)
52	Nathaniel Staehling	LB	6-2	235	So.	Baxter, Minn. (Brainerd)
53	Eli Mostaert	DT	6-3	289	Sr.	Lakeville, Minn. (Lakeville North)
54	Brit Senftner	LB	6-2	209	So.	Bismark, N.D. (St. Mary's Central)
55	Kole Menz	DE	6-2	237	Jr.	Horace, N.D. (West Fargo Sheyenne)
56	Loshiaka Roques	DE	6-3	236	Sr.	Maple Grove, Minn. (Wayzata)
57	Oliver Lucht	LB	6-1	218	RFr.	Fargo, N.D. (Fargo Davies)
57	Noah Stommes	OT	6-6	240	Fr.	Richmond, Minn. (Eden Valley-Watkins)
58	Keenan Wilson	DT	6-1	284	RFr.	Eagan, Minn. (Eagan)
59	Hayden Johnston	C	6-3	282	Sr.	Albert Lea, Minn. (Albert Lea)
60	Isaac Zatechka	C	6-4	288	Jr.	Elkhorn, Neb. (Missouri)
61	Gage Schmidt	C	6-3	295	Fr.	North Mankato, Minn. (Mankato West)
62	Griffin Empey	OG	6-3	295	RFr.	Stoughton, Wis. (Stoughton)
63	Trent Fraley	C	6-1	299	So.	Moon Township, Pa. (Marshall)
64	Jaxon Duttenhefer	DT	6-2	285	Jr.	Mandan, N.D. (Mandan)
65	Bryce Friday	DT	6-3	295	Sr.	Markesan, Wis. (Markesan)
66	Jack Hansen	DT	6-3	259	Fr.	Eagan, Minn. (Eagan)
66	Jack Liwienski	OG	6-3	295	RFr.	Chanhassen, Minn. (Minnetonka)
67	Kaden Chadwick	OG	6-6	285	So.	Granville, N.D. (Velva)
68	Coy Okeson	OG	6-5	284	Fr.	Minot, N.D. (Bishop Ryan)
69	Devin Lockerby	OG	6-5	305	So.	Faribault, Minn. (Faribault)
69	Zach Vanderpool	DT	6-5	240	Fr.	Byron, Minn. (Byron)
70	Beau Johnson	OT	6-6	287	RFr.	Spring Lake Park, Minn. (Spring Lake Park)
71	Nate Tastad	OT	6-5	269	Fr.	Rolette, N.D. (Rolette)
72	Nate Schneckloth	OG	6-5	293	RFr.	Eldridge, Iowa (North Scott)
73	Mason Miller	OT	6-7	305	Fr.	Ada, Minn. (Ada-Borup)
74	Grey Zabel	OT	6-6	305	Sr.	Pierre, S.D. (T.F. Riggs)
75	Josh Magin	OT	6-5	288	So.	Shakopee, Minn. (Shakopee)
76	Hunter Poncius	OT	6-8	318	Sr.	Buffalo, Minn. (Buffalo)
77	Austin Schultz	OG	6-4	293	RFr.	Moorhead, Minn. (Moorhead)
78	Jake Rock	OG	6-7	315	Sr.	Delafield, Wis. (Kettle Moraine)
80	John Gores	WR	5-6	167	So.	Fargo, N.D. (Shanley)
81	Jackson Williams	WR	5-11	177	Fr.	Omaha, Neb. (Millard West)
82	Joe Stoffel	TE	6-4	245	Sr.	River Falls, Wis. (River Falls)
83	Cade Osterman	WR	6-1	189	RFr.	Elk River, Minn. (Minnesota)
84	Logan Conklin	WR	6-3	195	Fr.	Minot, N.D. (Minot)
84	Jacob Kilzer	WR	6-3	207	Fr.	Maple Grove, Minn. (Air Force Prep)
85	Jett Zabel	TE	6-3	215	Fr.	Pierre, S.D. (T.F. Riggs)
87	Nate Forystek	TE	6-6	248	So.	Green Bay, Wis. (Bay Port)
88	Caron Williams	TE	6-4	246	Jr.	Mashalltown, Iowa (Buffalo)
89	Finn Diggins	TE	6-4	248	Jr.	Perham, Minn. (Perham)
90	Wyatt Osterbauer	DE	6-4	235	Fr.	Montrose, Minn. (Buffalo)
91	Will Mostaert	DT	6-2	274	Sr.	Lakeville, Minn. (Lakeville North)
92	Kelton McCaslin	DE	6-5	240	So.	St. Charles, Ill. (St. Charles East)
93	Toby Anene	DE	6-4	252	So.	Cottage Grove, Minn. (East Ridge)
94	Logan Larson	DT	6-3	282	So.	Woodbury, Minn. (East Ridge)
95	Dylan Hendricks	DE	6-3	249	Sr.	Pulaski, Wis. (Pulaski)
96	Abraham Myers	DE	6-2	236	RFr.	Sioux Falls, S.D. (Washington)
97	Victor Isele	DE	6-2	240	RFr.	Grand Island, Neb. (Northwest)
98	Brennan Palmer	DT	6-5	280	RFr.	Fargo, N.D. (Fargo Davies)
99	Hunter Zenzen	DE	6-3	245	Jr.	Barnesville, Minn. (Iowa State)

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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 win 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. The 1984 season was bookended by going 1-10 in 1983 and 2-9 in 1985.



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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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MONTANA STATE ATHLETICS

The Montana State 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.



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North Dakota State's 2024 season in review

NDSU SPORTS INFORMATION

Aug. 29: Colorado 31, No. 2 NDSU 26

BOULDER, Colo. — The North Dakota State football team lost a back-and-forth battle with FBS opponent Colorado in the 2024 season opener, falling 31-26 at Folsom Field.

Bison quarterback Cam Miller completed a 49-yard pass to Tyler Terhark on the final play of the game, but the last-second heave came up 4 yards short of a game-winning touchdown.

Miller finished 18-for-22 passing for 277 yards and one touchdown through the air. He also led the Bison with 81 rushing yards and added two touchdowns on the ground.

Miller found Joe Stoffel for a 7-yard touchdown pass in the first quarter and ran in a 7-yard score himself in the second quarter. With a pair of field goals from Griffin Crosa, the Bison led 20-17 at halftime.

Colorado outscored the Bison 14-6 in the second half with Travis Hunter's second and third TD receptions of the game.

Miller scored on a 20-yard scamper with 2:19 remaining in the game to pull NDSU within five at 31-26.

NDSU senior receiver Braylon Henderson posted five catches for 72 yards. Redshirt freshman CharMar Brown had nine carries for 33 yards in his Bison debut.

Senior safety Sam Jung led the Bison defense with eight tackles.

Colorado quarterback Shedeur Sanders was 26-of-34 for 445 passing yards and four touchdowns.

Sept. 7: No. 2 NDSU 52, Tennessee State 3

FARGO, N.D. — North Dakota State scored touchdowns on all five of its first-half possessions as the No. 2-ranked Bison rolled to a 52-3 victory over Tennessee State for the first win under new head coach Tim Polasek.

Junior wide receiver Bryce Lance had a career-high seven receptions and 106 yards including his first two touchdown catches of 14 and 6 yards from NDSU quarterback Cam Miller, who finished 14 of 18 passing for 181 yards and three TDs.

Four other Bison also scored their first touchdowns. CharMar Brown scored on a 3-yard run, John Gores caught a 12-yard TD from Miller, Mekhi Collins caught a 19-yard pass from Cole Payton, and quarterback Nathan Hayes ran 51 yards to score on his first career attempt.

Redshirt freshman Eli Ozick, who booted 13 of 15 kickoff attempts for touchbacks in the season's first two games, connected on a 51-yard field goal midway through the third quarter. It was his first career attempt and the longest field goal by a Bison kicker in eight years.

Tennessee State (1-1) settled for a 19-yard field goal with 5:34 left in the game after the NDSU defense held on first-and-goal from the 3. Defensive tackle Bryce Friday was in on two of the three Bison tackles.

Cornerback Jaquise Alexander and safety Hudson Artz led the Bison with four tackles apiece, and defensive end Toby Anene made three stops including two tackles for loss and a strip sack.

NDSU outgained Tennessee State 436 to 200 in total yards and held the Tigers to 4 of 14 on third down.

Sept. 14: No. 2 NDSU 38, East Tennessee State 35

JOHNSON CITY, Tenn. — Quarterback Cam Miller scored on an 11-yard run with 50 seconds left in the game to lift No. 2-ranked North Dakota State to a 38-35 win over East Tennessee State before a stadium record crowd of 11,040 at William B. Greene Jr. Stadium.

The Bison trailed by 12 points with 2:20 left and converted a fourth-and-10 when Miller took a hit in the pocket but delivered a 38-yard completion to John Gores that put the Bison on the ETSU 3. TK Marshall scored on the next play and Griffin Crosa's extra-point kick made it 35-30.

NDSU's Darius Givance recovered the ensuing onside kick by Kaedin Steindorf with 1:57 left, and the Bison (2-1) marched 58 yards in six plays for the go-ahead score. A two-point conversion pass to Bryce Lance made it a three-point game.

Bison linebacker Logan Kopp intercepted Jaylen King with 17 seconds left to seal the victory.

Miller finished 21 of 33 passing for 250 yards and one touchdown plus 47 yards on 15 carries with two TDs. CharMar Brown

led the Bison rushing attack with 65 yards on 11 totes and Barika Kpeenu carried nine times for 61 yards.

Bryce Lance led the Bison with five receptions and Mekhi Collins had four catches for a team-high 67 yards.

Both teams scored on their first three possessions in a back-and-forth first half. Eli Ozick's 54-yard field goal was the second longest in Bison history, but ETSU (1-2) answered with a 61-yard rushing TD by Bryson Irby to take a 21-17 halftime lead.

Irby scored his third touchdown of the game on a 10-yard run to cap a 14-play, 75-yard ETSU drive that ate up the first 6:39 of the third quarter and put the Buccaneers ahead 28-17. Irby finished with 147 yards on 15 carries.

North Dakota State finished with a 481-383 advantage in total yards and controlled the football for more than 36 minutes. The teams combined for 22 penalties with the Bison taking 12 for 92 yards and the Bucs 10 for 100 yards.

Please see SEASON, Page M44

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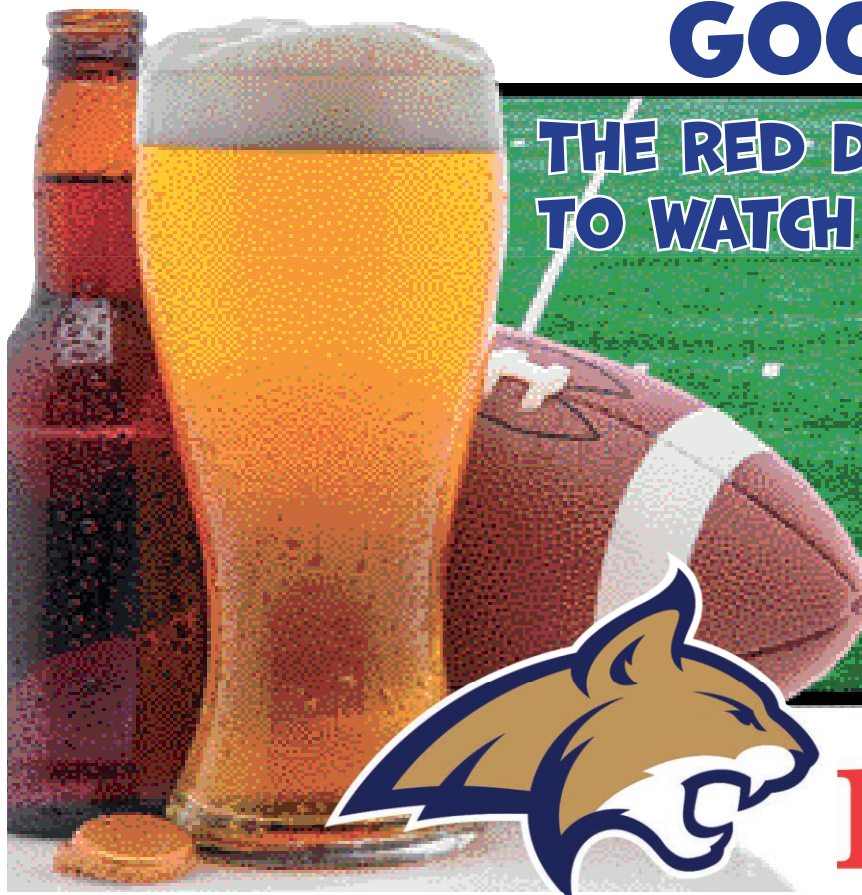
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Season

From M42

Sept. 21: No. 2 NDSU 41, Towson 24

FARGO, N.D. — CharMar Brown rushed for a career-high 126 yards and three touchdowns to lead No. 2-ranked North Dakota State to a 41-24 homecoming win over Towson.

Cam Miller completed his first 14 pass attempts and finished 17 of 19 for 219 yards and one TD for the Bison, who improved to 3-1 overall.

NDSU opened up a 24-3 lead before halftime thanks to a 67-yard punt return touchdown by Jackson Williams and Miller's 19-yard scoring pass to Bryce Lance capping an impressive nine-play, 88-yard drive in the final minutes of the second quarter.

It was 31-10 late in the third before Towson (1-3) clawed its way back into the game. The Tigers got a 15-yard touchdown run from Carlos Davis, held the Bison three-and-out on the next possession, then scored on the next play with a 72-yard run by Tyrell Greene Jr. making it 31-24 with 10:05 to play.

NDSU ate up 5 minutes and 28 seconds on the ensuing drive with Brown rushing for

41 yards on five carries before the Bison settled for a 34-yard Griffin Crosa field goal to make it a two-score game with 4:28 left.

Williams led the Bison with 169 all-purpose yards, cornerback Marcus Sheppard had his first interception and a pass breakup on fourth down to stall a late Towson drive, and the Bison defense got six tackles apiece from linebackers Oscar Benson, Marcus Gulley and Logan Kopp.

Sept. 28: No. 2 NDSU 42, No. 15 Illinois State 10

NORMAL, Ill. — North Dakota State's defense recorded five sacks and held 15th-ranked Illinois State to eight yards rushing in a 42-10 victory at Hancock Stadium.

No. 2-ranked NDSU rushed for 307 yards, controlled the football for nearly 39 minutes, and went 10 of 13 on third down to improve to 4-1 overall and 1-0 in the Missouri Valley Football Conference. The Redbirds dropped to 3-2 overall and 0-1 in the conference.

Defensive tackle Eli Mostaert had two sacks and three total tackles to lead a strong defensive effort by NDSU, which limited Illinois State to 4 of 12 on third down. Linebacker Marcus Gulley made a team-high eight tackles, linebacker Logan Kopp had seven tackles, and linebacker Enock Sibomana had five stops including a sack.



JOSH JURGENS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Dakota State running back CharMar Brown (25) dives over the goal line to score during the second half of an NCAA college football game against South Dakota, Saturday, Nov. 23, 2024, in Vermillion, S.D.

CharMar Brown led the Bison ground game with 17 carries for 100 yards and one touchdown. Coupled with his 126 yards the previous week against Towson, he became the first NDSU player with back-to-back 100-yard rushing games since Kobe Johnson did it in 2022 against North Dakota and Montana.

Bryce Lance led nine Bison receivers with eight catches for 65 yards including a 7-yard touchdown on the game's open-

ing drive. Mekhi Collins caught an 11-yard TD pass late in the second quarter to cap a 10-minute, 16-play scoring drive that opened up a 14-0 NDSU lead.

Bison quarterback Cam Miller completed his first 13 passing attempts and finished 20 of 23 for 216 yards and three touchdowns, including a 40-yard catch and run by Barika Kpeenu to cap the first of four straight touchdown drives in the second half after the Bison held a 14-7 halftime lead.

Oct. 5: No. 2 NDSU 41, No. 6 North Dakota 17

FARGO, N.D. — The No. 2-ranked North Dakota State football team rolled to its fifth straight win with a 41-17 victory over sixth-ranked North Dakota.

NDSU quarterback Cam Miller went 13 of 19 passing for 168 yards and two touchdowns and also picked up his 42nd career rushing TD, setting a new Missouri Valley Football Conference record for rushing touchdowns by a quarterback.

Safety Sam Jung made a team-high six tackles including one tackle for loss to lead the NDSU defense, which held UND to 101 rushing yards and 5 of 11 on third down. The Bison (5-1, 2-0 MVFC) also recovered two fumbles with defensive end Dylan Hendricks forcing one and recovering the other.

TK Marshall jump-started the Bison with a 44-yard kickoff return to open the game, and the Bison went 56 yards in seven plays

capped by CharMar Brown's 2-yard touchdown run. The Bison opened up a 14-0 lead late in the first quarter on a 36-yard TD pass from Miller to Bryce Lance.

NDSU's biggest lead of the game was 38-10 late in the third quarter after Cole Payton connected with Mekhi Collins on a 33-yard touchdown pass.

Collins led the Bison with three catches for 47 yards, Lance had two receptions for 50 yards, Marshall made two catches for 42 yards, and Chris Harris had two catches including his first career touchdown.

UND quarterback Simon Romfo was 18 of 23 passing for 166 yards and Bo Belquist made four catches for 61 yards to lead the Fighting Hawks (4-2, 1-1 MVFC). Gaven Ziebarth carried 12 times for 65 yards.

Oct. 12: No. 2 NDSU 24, Southern Illinois 3

CARBONDALE, Ill. — The No. 2-ranked North Dakota State football team picked up its sixth straight victory 24-3 over Southern Illinois at Saluki Stadium.

NDSU improved to 6-1 overall and 3-0 in the Missouri Valley Football Conference, while Southern Illinois fell to 2-5 overall and 0-3 in the league.

Linebacker Logan Kopp made a team-high seven tackles including one of NDSU's four sacks as the Bison held SIU to 4 of 10 on third down and 187 total yards.

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NDSU's defense created two turnovers, including a forced fumble by Sam Jung and recovery by Nick Kubitz on the game's opening drive. The Bison turned that into a seven-play, 76-yard scoring drive capped by Barika Kpeenu's 6-yard touchdown run.

SIU got its only points on a 50-yard Paul Geelen field goal in the second quarter, but the Bison responded with a 14-play scoring drive. Chris Harris caught his second touchdown in two games on an 11-yard pass from Cam Miller to give NDSU a 14-3 halftime lead.

The Bison tacked on a 34-yard Griffin Crosa field goal in the third quarter and a 9-yard touchdown run by CharMar Brown in the fourth quarter. Darius Givance snared his first collegiate interception before NDSU ran out the clock.

NDSU quarterback Cam Miller went 18 of 24 passing for 193 yards and Brown finished with 20 carries for 95 yards. Bryce Lance led nine Bison receivers with five catches for 63 yards.

Oct. 19: No. 2 NDSU 13, No. 1 South Dakota State 9

FARGO, N.D. — North Dakota State drove 92 yards for the go-ahead touchdown with 1:49 to play and Logan Kopp's interception sealed a 13-9 victory over top-ranked South Dakota State in the Missouri Valley Football Conference on Saturday, Oct. 19.

Raja Nelson caught a 20-yard pass from Cam Miller to cap the 10-play scoring drive for the Bison (7-1, 4-0 MVFC), who snapped a five-game losing streak to South Dakota State (5-2, 2-1 MVFC). It was Nelson's second touchdown reception of the game.

Miller was 7-for-7 passing on the final drive, which took 5:25 off the clock. SDSU moved to its own 47 before Kopp made his second interception of the season, and the Bison kneeled out the clock to claim the Dakota Marker trophy for the first time since 2019.

Miller finished 20 of 27 passing for 163 yards, Nelson had four catches for 48 yards including an 18-yard touchdown to open the scoring in the second quarter, and Chris Harris made a team-high five receptions for 41 yards.

The only play longer than 20 yards in the contest was a 66-yard touchdown run from SDSU's Chase Mason to make it 7-6 before NDSU's Kody Huisman blocked the extra-point try. Hunter Dustman's 42-yard field goal gave the Jacks a 9-7 lead as time expired in the first half.

NDSU missed a 48-yard field goal on the opening drive of the third quarter and the teams traded punts for the next seven possessions before the Bison went on their game-winning march.

Oscar Benson and Luke Weerts made eight

tackles apiece for NDSU. Kopp and Eli Mostaert had six stops each.

Oct. 26: No. 1 NDSU 59, Murray State 6

MURRAY, Ky. — No. 1-ranked North Dakota State scored on all five possessions in the first half and rolled to a 59-6 win at Murray State.

NDSU (8-1, 5-0 MVFC) scored 24 points off five Murray State turnovers, including a 34-yard interception return touchdown by linebacker Enock Sibomana in the first quarter as the Bison built a 42-3 halftime lead.

Bryce Lance caught four passes for 108 yards and three touchdowns, CharMar Brown rushed 13 times for 97 yards and three TDs, and backup quarterback Nathan Hayes completed 9 of 15 passes for 141 yards and two scores in relief of starter Cam Miller, who went 5-for-5 for 128 yards and two TDs.

NDSU opened the game with an impressive six-play scoring drive, converting five first downs before Brown's 7-yard touchdown run. The Bison did not run a third-down play until the second half.

Darius Givance had his second interception in three games. Jaquise Alexander made his first career interception on the first play of the second half to set up

a short touchdown drive, Luke Weerts caused a fumble recovered by Austin Altepeter, and Will Steil recovered a fumbled snap.

The Bison defense held Murray State (1-7, 0-5 MVFC) to five field goal attempts with James London converting from 24 yards in the second quarter and 47 yards in the fourth quarter. London missed from 43 and 57 in the first quarter and had a 51-yard attempt at the end of the first half blocked by Kody Huisman.

Nov. 2: No. 1 NDSU 42, Northern Iowa 19

FARGO, N.D. — TK Marshall returned the opening kickoff 100 yards for a touchdown to spark No. 1-ranked North Dakota State to a 42-19 win over Northern Iowa.

It was the ninth straight win for North Dakota State, which improved to 9-1 overall and 6-0 in the conference heading into a bye week.

NDSU quarterback Cam Miller finished 17 of 20 passing for 216 yards and two touchdowns. He set a new school record for consecutive pass attempts without an interception at 311, breaking the mark of 307 set by Trey Lance from 2018 to 2020.

Bison running back CharMar Brown had his third 100-yard rushing game with 18 carries for 124 yards and one score. His

5-yard run capped a 13-play scoring drive that put the Bison ahead 14-3 late in the first quarter.

Miller completed touchdown passes of 14 yards to Bryce Lance and 15 yards to Braylon Henderson in the second quarter as the Bison opened up a 28-3 halftime lead. Barika Kpeenu added TD runs of 6 and 11 yards in the second half.

UNI (2-7, 0-5 MVFC) got its offense moving in the third quarter with back-to-back scoring drives. Quarterback Matthew Schecklman connected with Sergio Morancy on TD passes of 31 and 9 yards, and the Panthers converted both two-point conversions to make it a 35-19 game with 1:52 left in the third.

NDSU answered with a seven-play, 75-yard scoring drive capped by Kpeenu's second TD early in the fourth, and the Bison stuffed UNI at the goal line twice to end a 12-play drive on downs before running out the final 5:52 of the game.

Linebacker Enock Sibomana was in on both goal-line stops for NDSU and finished with a team-high six tackles. NDSU safety Darius Givance and linebacker Nick Kubitz also had six tackles apiece.

The Bison, who entered the game leading the nation in turnover margin, recovered two more fumbles to move to plus-16 on the season. NDSU made nine tackles for loss.



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Nov. 16: No. 1 NDSU 59, No. 14 Missouri State 21

FARGO, N.D. — No. 1-ranked North Dakota State scored on its first four possessions and cruised to a 59-21 victory over 14th-ranked Missouri State in the annual Harvest Bowl game.

North Dakota State improved to 10-1 overall and 7-0 in the Missouri Valley Football Conference to clinch at least a share of its 11th league title.

Missouri State, in its final year as a league member before jumping to the Football Bowl Subdivision, slipped to 8-3 overall and 6-1 in the MVFC. The Bears will play in Conference USA next year.

NDSU's Barika Kpeenu rushed 10 times for a career-high 169 yards and two touchdowns, and CharMar Brown had 14 carries for 113 yards and one score as the Bison rushed for 364 yards and averaged 9.6 yards per carry.

Kpeenu went 52 yards for a TD on NDSU's second play of the game and also scored on a 49-yard run in the third quarter. Brown scored on a 48-yard run that capped a four-play scoring drive to open the second half.

NDSU kicker Griffin Crosa scored 11 points on eight extra-point kicks and a 32-yard field goal. Crosa finished the game with 404 points, breaking the previous school record of 399 set by kicker Cam Pedersen from 2015 to 2018.

Quarterback Cam Miller completed 17 of 24 passes for 155 yards and a career-high four touchdowns. Tight end Joe Stoffel was one of four NDSU players with three receptions, including TD catches from the 3 and 1. Miller also connected with Jackson Williams on a 22-yard scoring play and Bryce Lance from 4 yards out.

NDSU outgained Missouri State 575 to 382 in total yards and held the Bears to a season-low 21 points.

The Bison had six sacks, forced four fumbles and made two recoveries. Safety Darius Givance and linebacker Marcus Gulley made five tackles apiece, defensive tackle Eli Mostaert had four stops including 1.5 sacks, and defensive end Toby Anene made four stops with one sack.

Nov. 23: No. 4 South Dakota 29, No. 1 NDSU 28

VERMILLION, S.D. — Aidan Bouman threw two touchdown passes in the final four minutes to rally fourth-ranked South Dakota to a 29-28 win over top-ranked North Dakota State at the DakotaDome.

South Dakota (9-2) won a share of its first Missouri Valley Football Conference championship and forced a three-way tie with North Dakota State and South Dakota State for the title at 7-1 in league play.

North Dakota State (10-2, 7-1 MVFC)



JOSH JURGENS, ASSOCIATED PRESS

North Dakota State linemen Griffin Empey (62) and Grey Zabel (74) wait for center Trent Fraley (63) to hike the ball during the second half of an NCAA college football game against South Dakota, Saturday, Nov. 23, 2024, in Vermillion, S.D.

erased its largest deficit of the season after falling behind 14-0 in the first half. The Bison went three-and-out on their first three possessions and punted four times before stringing together four straight touchdown drives.

Quarterback Cam Miller connected with Braylon Henderson on a 23-yard touchdown pass and CharMar Brown scored on a 3-yard run as the Bison executed their two-minute offense to tie the game 14-14 before halftime.

NDSU limited USD to a 37-yard field goal on the opening drive of the second half and then went ahead with a 10-play, 80-yard scoring drive. Miller converted two third downs on a 44-yard completion to Chris Harris and a 3-yard run before scoring from 2 yards out to make it 21-17.

USD stalled on its next possession and downed a punt inside the NDSU 1-yard line with 3 seconds left in the third quarter, but the Coyotes wouldn't get the ball back until there was 4:10 left in the game.

NDSU marched 99 yards in 20 plays and ate up 10 minutes, 53 seconds of the clock, converting two fourth-and-1 attempts along the way. Miller picked up 3 yards from the Bison 37 and found the edge on a 16-yard run from the Bison 49.

The Bison reached the USD 12 before settling for a 30-yard field goal attempt, but a USD penalty for leaping over the long snapper gave the Bison another first down to the USD 6 and Brown scored two plays later to make it a two-possession game.

South Dakota faced fourth-and-10 on the next drive when Javion Phelps caught a 31-yard pass from Bouman to reach the NDSU 40, and two plays later Jack Martens caught a 40-yard touchdown pass down the left sideline to cut NDSU's lead to 28-23.

The ensuing kickoff went over a shallow NDSU return unit to the 1-yard line, and the Bison started on their own 2 with 3:20 to play. USD forced a Bison punt seven

plays later and took over with 1:16 left at its own 42.

Official replay overturned the call of an incomplete pass, resulting in a USD 23-yard completion from Bouman to Phelps reaching the Bison 27. After a short completion and sack back to the Bison 25, Bouman connected with Phelps again for the winning score.

Miller finished 10 of 22 passing for 174 yards and became NDSU's all-time career passing yards leader, finishing the game with 8,810 yards and breaking the record of 8,693 set by Easton Stick from 2015 to 2018.

Miller was also NDSU's leading rusher with 19 carries for 82 yards and one touchdown, while Brown finished with 19 carries for 54 yards and two TDs.

Dec. 7: No. 2 NDSU 51, No. 15 Abilene Christian 31

FARGO, N.D. — No. 2 seed North Dakota State overcame a slow start to score 31 unanswered points and beat No. 15 Abilene Christian 51-31 in the second round of the NCAA Division I Football Championship at the Fargodome.

North Dakota State (11-2) advanced to the FCS quarterfinals for the 15th straight season.

NDSU fell behind 17-3 before Jackson Williams provided a spark with a 100-yard kickoff return touchdown. Griffin Crosa kicked his second of three field goals, and Raja Nelson caught a 6-yard touchdown pass from Cam Miller to put the Bison ahead 20-17 before halftime.

Miller connected on two more TD passes in the third quarter, a 30-yard strike to TK Marshall down the right sideline and a 36-yarder over the top of the Wildcat defense to Bryce Lance, who outran two defenders to the end zone.

NDSU forced three turnovers, including a 31-yard interception return touchdown by linebacker Logan Kopp, who also had two pass breakups and five tackles including a sack fumble for 12 yards and a 16-yard return on the fumble recovery. Linebacker Marcus Gulley had his first interception as a Bison.

Linebacker Enock Sibomana made a game-high 10 tackles for NDSU, linebacker Nick Kubitz had six stops, and defensive tackle Eli Mostaert made five tackles with two tackles for loss and one sack.

Miller finished 20 of 29 passing for 274 yards with three touchdowns and one interception, and he also rushed for one score. Miller broke Brock Jensen's NDSU career passing completions record and also passed Jensen for second on the Bison career list for passing touchdowns now with 74.

Lance led eight Bison receivers with five catches for 70 yards, Nelson made five catches for 26 yards, and Braylon Henderson had three receptions for 67 yards including a diving 32-yard snag to spark NDSU's go-ahead touchdown drive.

Crosa converted field goals from 21, 37 and 24 yards to pass Shawn Bibeau for second all time at NDSU with 53 career field goals made. Crosa also converted six PAT kicks to extend his career total to 264, breaking Cam Pedersen's NDSU, Missouri Valley Football Conference and NCAA FCS record of 261.

Dec. 14: No. 2 NDSU 31, No. 7 Mercer 7

FARGO, N.D. — Cam Miller passed for 259 yards and two touchdowns to lead No. 2 seed North Dakota State to a 31-7 victory over seventh-seeded Mercer in the quarterfinals of the NCAA Division I Football Championship.

Miller connected with Bryce Lance for touchdowns of 40 yards and 4 yards on NDSU's first two possessions to open a 14-0 lead. Miller scored on a 34-yard run in the second quarter and Griffin Crosa added a 38-yard field goal as the Bison built a 24-7 halftime lead.

Lance finished with five receptions for 73 yards and Mekhi Collins had four catches for a career-high 119 yards including a 70-yard catch and run to set up Lance's second TD.

NDSU cornerback Anthony Chideme-Alfaro made a career-high six tackles and got his first interception as a Bison, picking off Whitt Newbauer to stop Mercer at the NDSU 6 after a Bison turnover. Linebacker Nick Kubitz also had six tackles for NDSU.

Mercer, which entered as the top rushing defense in the FCS, held the Bison to 133 yards and a season-low 3.2 yards per carry including four sacks, the most allowed by NDSU since the September home win over Towson.

Mercer linebacker Marques Thomas and safety Chris Joines made nine tackles apiece, and safety Myles Redding intercepted two passes for the Bears, who ended their season 11-3 overall.

Dec. 21: No. 2 NDSU 28, No. 3 South Dakota State 21

FARGO, N.D. — Bryce Lance caught three touchdown passes including the go-ahead score with 4:02 left in the game to lead No. 2 seed North Dakota State to a 28-21 victory over No. 3 seed South Dakota State in the semifinals of the NCAA Division I Football Championship at the Fargodome.

Lance's one-handed catch in the corner of the end zone was his school-record 16th touchdown reception of the season. He finished with six catches for 125 yards, tying the NDSU FCS playoff record for receiving yards set by Darrius Shepherd in the 2018 national championship against Eastern Washington.

Bison quarterback Cam Miller went 13 of 19 passing for 179 yards and also rushed for a game-high 93 yards on 15 carries with one touchdown.

NDSU trailed 14-7 before the only turnover of the game late in the second quarter. Kody Huisman's forced fumble and recovery by Loshiaka Roques set up NDSU with a short field at the SDSU 23, and Miller scored seven plays later on a 2-yard run.

The teams traded three punts apiece in the third quarter before Miller connected with Lance from 47 yards out early in the fourth to give NDSU a 21-14 lead. The Jackrabbits answered with a 10-play, 90-yard scoring drive and tied the game again with Graham Goering's 14-yard touchdown catch from Mark Gronowski.

Miller sparked NDSU's ensuing drive with a 25-yard run to midfield on the first play, and a personal foul on SDSU for unnecessary roughness moved the ball to the 35.

CharMar Brown picked up two tough yards on the ground to convert a third-and-2, Barika Kpeenu picked up another first down with a 12-yard run, and Miller ran for three yards to the 10-yard line before finding Lance for the go-ahead score.

South Dakota State picked up two first downs and looked to be moving into Bison territory on its final drive, but a 15-yard facemask penalty on SDSU negated a big gain near midfield and the Jackrabbits couldn't recover. Roques and Jaxon Duttenhefer combined for a sack on fourth-and-17 and the Bison kneeled out the clock.

Bison linebacker Logan Kopp made a game- and career-high 10 tackles including two of NDSU's 10 tackles for loss.

Gronowski finished 14 of 25 passing for 204 yards plus another 50 yards rushing with one touchdown, and Amar Johnson added 77 rushing yards and one TD for South Dakota State, which finished its season 12-3 overall.



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