

INDIANA STATE AT MONTANA • KICKOFF: 1 P.M. SATURDAY • TV: MTN • THURSDAY, SEPT. 18, 2025

# GRIZZLY GAME DAY

Missoulian

## TIGHT BOND

Senior Evan Shafer continually inspired by late wrestling coach

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Q&A WITH CB KYON LOUD, PAGE 3 • SPELTZ PICKS THE BIG SKY, PAGE 4 • ROSTERS, PAGE 5

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**'I THINK HE'D BE REALLY PROUD'**

**BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN**

Montana tight end Evan Shafer (84) gets brought down during the Big Sky Conference football game between the Grizzlies and Eastern Washington on Sept. 28, 2024, at Roos Field in Cheney, Washington. The Indiana native has played in all 31 games since he transferred to UM ahead of the 2023 season.

## Indiana native carries coach's memory while being tight end fixture

**FRANK GOGOLA | 406 MT Sports**

**E**van Shafer puts on his headphones and presses play on the same playlist every time he begins his warmup workouts on game day.

Among that list of songs is TP & Esco's "The Realest Sport." The lyrics start, "This is the official song for wrestling," and it's understandable why the song is on the playlist. Shafer's high school wrestling team played it during training.

That he's carried on the tradition as a game day ritual in his senior year playing tight end for Montana is a nod to his late wrestling coach. Steven "Mac" Taylor was a big influence on him but died before he got to see Shafer play in college.

"I think he'd be really proud," Shafer

said ahead of the Grizzlies' game against Indiana State at 1 p.m. Saturday in Washington-Grizzly Stadium.

"I'd love to have him out here. Would love to have him come see a game. I'd pay for it myself. I wish he could see it because it's what he always dreamed of for me. He was pretty excited."

Shafer still thinks about Taylor often, particularly the coach's go-to sayings that live rent free in his head after years of hearing them yelled at practice. He'll use some of them on his Griz teammates, like when

he tells them, "You guys are moving like pond water." It's a poke at them for standing around and not doing anything productive.

There's no standing still on the wrestling mat, which is where Shafer first met Taylor. He joined the Connersville High School wrestling team in Connersville, Indiana, as an inexperienced grappler. Taylor was the master teacher who in 1996 set the national high school record with 221 career wins.

Please see **SHAFFER**, Page 6



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana cornerback Kyon Loud (5) celebrates a game-winning pass deflection during the game between Montana and North Dakota on Saturday at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. The Bay Area native was named UM's defensive player of the game in his first career start in the opener.

# Loud poised for breakout season

Sophomore corner played regularly as true freshman, is now starting

**CARSON CASHION**  
406 MT Sports

As a member of a defensive unit that returned zero starters from 2024, sophomore cornerback Kyon Loud is a rare familiar face.

The Bay Area native played in 13 of Montana's 14 games as a true freshman, earning 18 tackles (12 solo) and a pair of pass breakups. In his collegiate debut against Missouri State, he registered a solo tackle.

Loud picked up where he left off in the Grizzlies' season opener, earning defensive player of the game honors from UM. He totaled five tackles (two solo), one tackle for loss and one pass breakup. Perhaps his biggest highlight from the day came when he swatted up an end zone shot from Central Washington that landed in the hands of safety Kade Boyd.

The redshirt sophomore took the ball back to the 25-yard line, shifting the momentum and preventing a CWU score.

He continued his hot start to the 2025 season with a six-tackle performance in Montana's comeback win over North Dakota. He also broke up two passes and registered one quarterback hurry.

*Loud sat down with 406 MT Sports prior to Montana's game against Indiana State at 1 p.m. Saturday in Washington-Grizzly Stadium. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.*

**Q: Now that you're in "season mode" and most weeks have the same schedule, does anything start to slow down for you?**

**A:** I would say it kind of speeds up, just because it's more repetitive every day. The turnaround for the game is faster than fall camp. It was like three weeks before we played our first game, so it sped up a little bit.

**Q: Do you enjoy that consistency, though?**

**A:** Oh, yeah, definitely. I feel like practicing every day and, you know, going at it, it prepares us for the games, and it goes by so much faster because we're so busy. We kind of lose track of time.

**Q: The interception you helped force for Kade against Central Washington was one of the biggest highlights from the season opener, but I feel like people missed that you tried to get him to kneel down in the end zone at first. Was that going through your mind?**

**A:** Yeah, actually it was. I see him catch it, he's in the end zone, so I was like, 'Go down,' because if you come out, it's a risk. He came out, and it surprised me. So I had to go off, go find someone to block, and then I end up tripping.

**Q: That was the other part I noticed, you got tripped up behind the play.**

**A:** Yeah, I got tripped up. But, you know, luckily, he got to like the 20-something, 25-(yard line) so it ended up working out.

**Q: You entered a program last year that rarely sees true freshmen play as large of a role as you did in your freshman season. Was that something you expected coming to Montana?**

**A:** Honestly, no. They told me when they first came to visit my house, because that's what they do when you commit, they told me I'd redshirt. So I used that as motivation. Before I reported, I worked out a lot, you know, tried to get my mental right, my body right. I wanted to play. I came in and played as a true freshman, so it was just a blessing.

**Q: What was the biggest lesson you learned in year one?**

# HOW WE SEE THE BIG SKY

**BILL SPELTZ**  
406 MT Sports

Over the years, Montana's Big Sky Conference football foes have learned the hard way how to adjust to the impressive fan noise at Washington-Grizzly Stadium.



**BILL  
SPELTZ**

**31-2**



**CARSON  
CASHION**

**31-2**



**FRANK  
GOGOLA**

**29-4**



**VICTOR  
FLORES**

**29-4**

echo chamber.

Indiana State's job is going to be hard enough just playing a confident Montana squad. Facing the Grizzlies in Wa-Griz is on a whole other level when it comes to

adversity.

*Here's a look at Saturday's Big Sky Conference games:*

**Indiana State (2-1) at No. 5 Montana (2-0), 1 p.m. TV: Scripps Sports.** The Grizzlies had a nice comeback win over North Dakota last week. That's the good news. The fact the Griz trailed most of the game and were inconsistent on offense, that wasn't so good. The jury is still out on exactly how good they can be. They need to improve running the football and defending against big plays. In my mind, their game with UND was evenly matched. That doesn't mean the Griz can't get better as the season progresses. Look for improvement Saturday and a much more one-sided affair. **Speltz:** Grizzlies 38, Sycamores 24. **Gogola:** Montana 41, Indiana State 7. **Flores:** Griz 35, Sycamores 13. **Cashion:** Montana 38, Indiana State 13.

**Mercyhurst (1-2) at No. 4 Montana State (1-2), 1 p.m. TV: The Spot-MTN.** As if there was any doubt, the Bobcats showed they're the team to beat in the Big Sky with an offensive explosion and blowout win last Saturday. But it's September, and a lot can change over the next two months. The list of legitimate challengers to knock MSU off the top of the mountain include Montana, Idaho, Northern Arizona and UC Davis. This week marks another opportunity for the Cats to mesh offensively and they'll take full advantage by draining the Lakers. **Speltz:** Cats 55, Lakers 17. **Gogola:** Cats 49, Mercyhurst 13. **Flores:** Cats 52, Lakers 14. **Cashion:** Montana State 48, Mercyhurst 17.

**No. 19 Incarnate Word (1-2) at No. 17 Northern Arizona (2-1), 2 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** Incarnate Word is located in San Antonio, Texas, in case you're interested. The elevation down there is 650 feet. Playing an equally talented Lumberjacks team at 6,800 feet is going to be a real challenge for the Cardinals. In fact, between the elevation and the dome noise and the fact Incarnate Word was pushed by winless Eastern Washington at home two weeks ago, the smart pick here is NAU. **Speltz:** Jacks 31, Cardinals 27. **Gogola:** Jacks 42, UIW 27. **Flores:** NAU 38, UIW 28. **Cashion:** Incarnate Word 28, Northern Arizona 24.

**No. 8 Idaho (2-1) at FBS San Jose State (0-2), 3 p.m. TV: Mountain West Network.** The Spartans are starved for their first victory after dropping a close call at home against Central Michigan on Aug. 29 and losing handily at Texas two weeks ago.



**BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN**

Montana linebacker Peyton Wing (32) celebrates after intercepting a pass in last Saturday's game against North Dakota at Washington-Grizzly Stadium. The Griz won, 24-23.

Because San Jose State is well-rested coming off a bye week, I'm picking them to win at home. Idaho is on a two-game roll but lacks a signature win. **Speltz:** Spartans 24, Vandals 21. **Gogola:** Idaho 20, SJSU 16. **Flores:** Idaho 17, SJSU 13. **Cashion:** San Jose State 31, Idaho 21. **Lincoln (California) (0-3) at Idaho State (0-3), 4 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Bengals showed their moxie in a 38-31 loss at UNLV on Aug. 23. Unfortunately for them, they still haven't won. That will change this week when they pummel NCAA Division II Lincoln, a team that plays all its games on the road and has been outscored 149-26 in its three losses. Idaho State is coming off a bye week and has the talent to surprise some folks in the Big Sky this fall. **Speltz:** Bengals 49, Oaklanders 13. **Gogola:** ISU 63, Lincoln 9. **Flores:** ISU 52, Lincoln 7. **Cashion:** Idaho State 59, Lincoln 10.

**Western Illinois (1-2) at Eastern Washington (0-3), 5 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** This shapes up as a coin toss. The Leathernecks were whipped by two Big Ten teams before winning a shootout with Valparaiso last week. The Eagles are mired in a three-game skid but they pushed 19th-ranked Incarnate Word in Texas three weeks ago and nearly beat Northern Iowa in the Panthers' dome last week, dropping a 17-14 decision. I'm picking EWU to get its first W. **Speltz:** Eagles 28, Leathernecks 27. **Gogola:** Eags 27, WIU 21. **Flores:** EWU 31, WIU 24. **Cashion:** Eastern Washington 41, Western Illinois 10.

**Northern Colorado (1-2) at Houston Christian (1-2), 5 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Bears showed they're not a pushover, giving South Dakota a tough test in its dome last Saturday. The Coyotes escaped with a 24-17 overtime victory. Two weeks ago, UNC pushed Colorado State before losing, 21-17. The Huskies, a member of the Southland Conference, have one thing in common with UNC: Neither has a win over a Division I foe. This promises to be a close game but I'm going with the Big Sky team to win. **Speltz:** Bears 27, Huskies 24. **Gogola:** UNC 31, HCU 20. **Flores:** UNC 27, HCU 21. **Cashion:** Northern Colorado 21, Houston Christian 13.

**Cal Poly (2-1) at Stephen F. Austin (1-2), 6 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Mustangs appear to be an improved team, but it's hard to tell for certain because their wins have come against non-scholarship San Diego and Division II Western Oregon. Stephen F. Austin's most noteworthy result came two weeks ago when it pushed 14th-ranked Abilene Christian before losing, 28-20, in Abilene. That score, and the Lumberjacks' big win last week, compel me to pick them at home Saturday. **Speltz:** Lumberjacks 30, Mustangs 28. **Gogola:** SFA 35, Poly 24. **Flores:** SFA 31, Cal Poly 21. **Cashion:** Stephen F. Austin 31, Cal Poly 24.

**Central Arkansas (1-2) at No. 24 Sac State (1-2), 7 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Hornets showed their offensive firepower in a 49-28 home win over Mercyhurst last Saturday. They'll win big again this week against a Bears team that was whipped at home last week by third-ranked Tarleton State, 56-10. **Speltz:** Hornets 37, Bears 17. **Gogola:** Hornets 38, Bears 20. **Flores:** Sac 34, UCA 20. **Cashion:** Sacramento State 35, Central Arkansas 14.

**Butler (2-1) at Weber State (1-2), 7 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The non-scholarship Bulldogs have wins over Division III and Division II teams. They'll be hard-pressed to beat a Wildcats team coming off a thrilling win at McNeese State, 42-21. **Speltz:** Wildcats 32, Bulldogs 17. **Gogola:** Weber 35, Butler 17. **Flores:** Weber 38, Butler 24. **Cashion:** Weber State 21, Butler 10. **Southern Utah (1-2) at No. 9 UC Davis (1-1), 8 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** My capable colleague Carson Cashion smells an upset in this one. I'm taking the safe route and sticking with the home team coming off a bye week. **Speltz:** Aggies 41, Thun-derbirds 35. **Gogola:** Davis 45, SUU 34. **Flores:** Davis 35, SUU 28. **Cashion:** Southern Utah 31, UC Davis 24.

MONTANA GRIZZLIES ROSTER

No.	Name	Year	Position	Height	Weight	Hometown														
0	Monte Gillman	R-Fr.	WR	5-8	162	Dassel, Minn.	24	Diezel Wilkinson	So.	S	6-0	193	Spokane, Wash.	62	Everett Johnson	R-Sr.	OL	6-7	290	Turlock, Calif.
0	Terahiti Wolfe	So.	S	5-11	173	Kahalu'u, Hawaii	25	Brady Beaner	Fr.	S	6-0	187	Anacortes, Wash.	63	Kaikoa Kanakaole	Fr.	OL	6-5	335	Kapa'a, Hawaii
2	Drew Deck	R-Sr.	WR	5-9	165	Kalispell, Mont.	26	Chase Cook	Fr.	RB	5-11	198	Red Lodge, Mont.	64	Matt Hilden	R-Fr.	OL	6-6	309	Santa Rosa, Calif.
2	Micah Harper	R-Sr.	S	5-10	194	Chandler, Ariz.	28	Hashim Jones	Fr.	RB	6-0	208	Hartford, Conn.	65	Dylan Jemtegaard	R-Sr.	OL	6-4	281	Yelm, Wash.
3	Brooks Davis	R-Fr.	WR	6-0	174	Brentwood, Calif.	29	Tanner Huff	R-Sr.	S	6-0	210	Butte, Mont.	66	Ezra Meyer	Fr.	OL	6-5	290	Missoula, Mont.
3	Jeilani Davis	R-Fr.	S	6-0	204	Inglewood, Calif.	30	Kade Cutler	R-Jr.	S	6-0	200	Phillipsburg, Mont.	68	Torin Jeske	R-Fr.	OL	6-6	271	Bozeman, Mont.
4	Blake Bohannon	R-Sr.	WR	6-1	195	Woodstock, Ga.	31	Tommy Running Rabbit	R-Fr.	RB	6-1	195	Browning, Mont.	69	Cannon Panfiloff	R-Sr.	OL	6-6	294	Roy, Utah
4	Dane Parker	R-Fr.	S	6-1	175	Puyallup, Wash.	32	Geno Leonard	R-Sr.	LB	5-11	230	Missoula, Mont.	70	Colin Amick	R-Fr.	OL	6-6	292	Sammamish, Wash.
5	Ian Finch	R-Jr.	WR	6-3	209	Missoula, Mont.	33	Peyton Wing	Jr.	LB	6-0	229	Sumner, Wash.	71	Quinlan Hyatt	Fr.	OL	6-7	285	Spokane, Wash.
5	Kyon Loud	So.	CB	6-2	175	San Mateo, Calif.	34	Taylor Jones	Fr.	LB	6-1	205	Missoula, Mont.	72	Cade Klimczak	Gr.	OL	6-1	285	Rockford, Mich.
6	Prince Ford	R-Sr.	CB	5-11	170	Concord, N.C.	35	Talen Reynolds	R-Fr.	RB	5-11	170	Missoula, Mont.	73	Trevor Steinbach	R-Fr.	OL	6-5	300	Sammamish, Wash.
6	Michael Wortham	R-Sr.	WR	5-9	190	North Highlands, Calif.	36	Grady Walker	R-Fr.	LB	6-4	224	Missoula, Mont.	74	Tate Templeton	R-So.	OL	6-3	290	Missoula, Mont.
7	Malae Fonoti	R-Fr.	RB	5-11	207	Laie, Hawaii	36	Ty Morrison	Sr.	KP	6-3	220	Valencia, Calif.	75	Jose Balver-Mendoza	R-Fr.	OL	6-5	287	Athens, Ga.
7	Kash Goicoechea	R-Fr.	S	6-1	197	Kalispell, Mont.	37	Garrett Speer	R-Fr.	DB	6-0	191	Sherwood, Ore.	76	Patrick Matan	Gr.	OL	6-4	295	Chevy Chase, Md.
8	Keali'i Ah Yat	R-So.	QB	6-1	200	Kaneohe, Hawaii	38	Clay Owen	R-So.	LB	6-2	216	Billings, Mont.	77	Carter Bowen	Jr.	OL	6-7	318	Dawson, Minn.
8	Kenzel Lawler	R-Sr.	CB	6-0	190	Corona, Calif.	38	Caleb Moran	So.	LB	6-1	210	Milton, Ga.	78	Lucas Freitas	R-So.	OL	6-6	318	Snoqualmie, Wash.
9	Justus Breston	Sr.	CB	5-11	178	Atlanta, Ga.	39	Fynn Ridgeway	R-So	S	6-1	204	Whitefish, Mont.	79	Liam Brown	R-Sr.	OL	6-5	316	Beaverton, Ore.
9	Jordan Dever	R-So.	WR	6-0	174	Spokane, Wash.	40	Colton Lentz	Fr.	LB	6-3	213	Nooksack, Wash.	80	Jamell Ward	Fr.	WR	6-4	170	Nacogdoches, Texas
10	Eli Gillman	R-Jr.	RB	6-0	213	Dassel, Minn.	42	Giovanni Pifferini	Jr.	DL	6-4	230	Placerville, Calif.	81	Josh Gale	R-Sr.	TE	6-4	243	Gilbert, Ariz.
10	TJ Rausch	R-Sr.	S	6-3	208	Missoula, Mont.	43	Grayson Pibal	R-Sr.	LS	6-3	214	Clackamas, Ore.	84	Evan Shafer	Gr.	TE	6-5	270	Connersville, Ind.
11	Cameron Gurnsey	R-So.	WR	6-1	197	Butte, Mont.	44	Titus Rohrer	R-Jr.	TE	6-7	240	Bryan, Ohio	85	Bridger Smith	Fr.	WR	5-11	170	Kalispell, Mont.
11	Elijahah Tolbert	R-Sr.	LB	6-1	232	Chicago, Ill.	45	Caleb Otlewski	R-So.	LB	6-0	241	Melissa, Texas	86	Weston Adams	R-Jr.	WR	5-11	192	Shell, Wyo.
12	Elijahah Brady	R-So.	CB	6-1	172	Seattle, Wash.	46	Jo Silver	R-Jr.	KP	6-0	213	Fremont, Ohio	87	Jake Olson	R-Sr.	TE	6-7	260	Butte, Mont.
12	Gage Sliter	R-So.	QB	6-1	193	Kalispell, Mont.	47	Kellen Detrick	R-Sr.	DE	6-3	240	Havre, Mont.	88	Malaki Davis	Fr.	TE	6-5	230	Tacoma, Wash.
13	Brock Beaner	Fr.	S	6-0	193	Anacortes, Wash.	48	Styles Goodman	Fr.	LB	6-2	234	Austin, Texas	89	Danny Sirmon	R-Fr.	TE	6-6	255	Missoula, Mont.
13	Lekeldrick Bridges	R-Fr.	WR	5-11	170	Cedar Hill, Texas	49	Isaac Keim	R-Fr.	DL	6-4	265	Kalispell, Mont.	90	Jareb Ramos	R-Jr.	DL	6-4	287	Centennial, Colo.
14	DeAnte Gentry	Fr.	DB	5-11	169	Fort Worth, Texas	50	Sam Merriman	Fr.	LB	6-0	225	Seattle, Wash.	91	Cooper Buffington	Fr.	DL	6-4	252	Winfield, Iowa
14	Korbin Hendrix	R-So.	WR	6-3	192	McKinney, Texas	51	Spencer Tripp	Fr.	DL	5-11	264	Missoula, Mont.	92	Zekiel Seumalo	Jr.	DL	6-0	265	Kent, Wash.
16	Jake Jensen	R-Sr.	QB	6-1	215	Pleasant Grove, Utah	52	Cy Stevenson	R-So.	LB	6-2	220	Libby, Mont.	93	Cole Muilenburg	R-Fr.	DL	6-5	246	Gig Harbor, Wash.
17	Kade Boyd	R-So.	S	6-0	197	Billings, Mont.	54	Bridger Salvendold	Fr.	LB	6-2	207	Culbertson, Mont.	94	Cole Harpole	Fr.	DL	6-3	221	Gunter, Texas
17	Luke Flowers	R-Fr.	QB	6-1	188	Rigby, Idaho	55	Austin Buehler	R-So.	OL	6-5	285	Helena, Mont.	95	Derek Moreland	Sr.	DL	6-1	262	Fresno, Calif.
18	Cody Schweikert	R-Fr.	QB	6-3	212	Columbia Falls, Mont.	56	Hunter Peck	R-Sr.	DE	6-2	252	Windsor, Colo.	96	Logan Knaevelsrud	Fr.	DL	6-4	235	Snoqualmie, Wash.
19	Drew Price	Fr.	QB	5-10	171	Jacksonville, Fla.	57	Jake Mason	R-So.	DL	6-2	250	Ferndale, Wash.	97	Hayden Schwartz	R-Jr.	DL	6-4	248	Jacksonville, Fla.
20	Sage Salopek	Fr.	CB	6-0	168	Seattle, Wash.	58	Solomon Tuliaupupu	Gr.	LB	6-3	242	Pomona, Calif.	98	Matai Mata'afa	R-Sr.	DL	6-1	236	Lahaina, Hawaii
21	Stevie Rocker Jr.	R-Sr.	RB	6-0	210	Tucson, Ariz.	59	Hayden Opitz	R-So.	LB	6-2	230	Helena, Mont.	99	Braydon Bailey	R-Jr.	DL	6-2	280	Kona, Hawaii
23	Rashid Mansour	Jr.	CB	6-0	163	Fresno, Calif.	60	Dillon Botner	Gr.	OL	6-6	280	Whitefish, Mont.							
							61	Lincoln Hoefler	Fr.	OL	6-6	279	Everson, Wash.							

INDIANA STATE SYCAMORES ROSTER

No.	Name	Year	Position	Height	Weight	Hometown														
0	Elijah Coker	So.	DB	6-4	210	Mishawaka, Ind.	22	Zach Coleman	Fr.	DB	6-1	185	Chicago Heights, Ill.	60	Griffin Hile	R-Fr.	OL	6-5	310	Jasper, Ind.
1	Devin Johnson	R-Jr.	DB	6-1	205	Berea, Ohio	23	Ahmond Glass	R-Sr.	DB	5-11	170	Atlanta, Ga.	62	Owen Trietsch	Fr.	OL	6-5	290	Sheridan, Ind.
1	Plez Lawrence	R-Jr.	RB	5-9	200	Kokomo, Ind.	24	Luke Lindsey	Fr.	WR	5-10	175	Vincennes, Ind.	63	Ben Brasher	Fr.	OL	6-3	300	Evansville, Ind.
2	Elijah Owens	R-So.	QB	6-2	225	Jacksonville, Ill.	25	Robert Beasley	Fr.	DL	6-1	250	Indianapolis, Ind.	64	Jacek Blaszynski	R-So.	OL	6-3	305	Lemont, Ill.
2	Jerome Robinson	R-Jr.	DB	5-11	170	Zachary, La.	26	Kaden Gajewski	R-So.	LB	6-3	215	Nashville, Ill.	66	Zack Hess	R-Fr.	OL	6-2	310	Clinton, Ind.
3	Brandon Amaniampong	R-So.	DL	6-6	250	Wordridge, Ill.	27	CJ Castner	Fr.	WR	5-9	175	West Chester, Ohio	67	Jordan Solofa-Fatu	R-So.	OL	6-3	300	San Francisco, Calif.
3	Larry Stephens III	R-Sr.	WR	5-11	195	Springfield, Ohio	28	Deion Brown	R-So.	RB	5-9	195	St. Louis, Mo.	68	Zach Simpson	R-So.	OL	6-5	295	Collinsville, Miss.
4	Drew Covington	R-Jr.	LB	6-4	230	Cincinnati, Ohio	29	Jamere Pendleton	Fr.	LB	6-2	215	Chicago, Ill.	70	Bradyn Mazanowski	Fr.	OL	6-4	270	Bloomington, Ill.
4	Bryan Domino	R-So.	WR	5-9	175	Richmond, Texas	30	Micah McNair	Fr.	LB	6-1	225	Joliet, Ill.	71	Carter Schmidt	R-So.	OL	6-6	285	Kearney, Mo.
5	Kimal Clark	Sr.	DB	5-10	195	Lackawanna, N.Y.	31	Damon Sturm	R-So.	RB	5-11	190	Terre Haute, Ind.	72	Kai Holec	R-Fr.	OL	6-8	325	Seattle, Wash.
5	Zechariah Prince	R-So.	RB	6-2	220	Cross Plains, Tenn.	30	Carson Weed	Fr.	LS	6-3	210	Greenwood, Ind.	73	Ezekiel Pacheco	R-Jr.	OL	6-7	300	Glendale, Ariz.
6	Kolten Gajewski	R-Jr.	DL	6-5	260	Nashville, Ill.	32	Gavin Hagan	Fr.	DB	6-1	185	Lockport, Ill.	74	Tyson Miller	R-Jr.	OL	6-5	290	Lafayette, Ind.
6	Brady Wilson	Fr.	QB	6-0	185	Terre Haute, Ind.	33	Edward Amankwah	R-Sr.	DB	5-11	200	Tinley Park, Ill.	75	Drew Page	R-Jr.	OL	6-4	330	Noblesville, Ind.
7	CJ Davis	R-So.	DB	5-10	185	Fort Wayne, Ind.	33	Carson Dunn	R-So.	RB	5-10	205	Fishers, Ind.	76	Karson Kinsinger	Fr.	OL	6-6	325	Lapel, Ind.
7	Angelo St. Louis	R-So.	RB	5-10	200	Evansville, Ind.	34	Nic Yatsko	R-Fr.	DB	6-1	200	Terre Haute, Ind.	77	RJ Brooks	R-Jr.	OL	6-1	310	Indianapolis, Ind.
8	Nathan Gonzales	Jr.	DL	6-5	255	Bell Gardens, Calif.	35	Kaleb Harris	R-Fr.	DL	6-3	240	Evansville, Ind.	78	Zac Wurm	R-Fr.	OL	6-3	300	Monroeville, Ind.
8	Rashad Rochelle	Sr.	WR	5-11	185	Springfield, Ill.	35	Adam Mohamed	R-Fr.	P	6-1	200	Terre Haute, Ind.	80	Rocco Ciocca	R-Jr.	TE	6-5	245	Fort Wayne, Ind.
9	Nick Osho	R-Jr.	RB	6-2	220	Burnaby, British Columbia	36	Alex Rose	R-So.	LB	5-10	220	Terre Haute, Ind.	81	Larry Robinson III	Fr.	WR	6-4	185	Kirkwood, Mo.
10	J.T. Anderson	R-Sr.	DB	6-1	200	Tampa, Fla.	37	Sebastian Lopez	R-So.	K	6-2	200	Fort Wayne, Ind.	82	EJ Hartwell	Fr.	WR	5-11	185	Suwanee, Ga.
10	Brock Riddle	R-Fr.	QB	6-2	205	Greenwood, Ind.	38	DJ Griffith	R-Jr.	LB	6-0	225	Louisville, Ky.	83	Talan White-Hatch	Fr.	WR	5-11	175	Chicago, Ill.
11	Jorge Valdes	R-So.	DB	6-0	195	Fort Wayne, Ind.	39	Joseph Sopiarz	R-Jr.	LS	5-10	185	Carol Stream, Ill.	84	Jaylan Johnson	Fr.	TE	6-3	210	Seymour, Ind.
12	Torey French	R-Fr.	WR	5-9	185	Zion, Ill.	40	Dallas Westhoff	R-Jr.	LB	6-1	225	Cedar Falls, Iowa	85	Jake Dyer	Fr.	WR	5-10	170	Madison, Ind.
13	Tre Brown	R-Fr.	WR	6-2	190	Brownsburg, Ind.	41	Spencer Conrad	R-Fr.	K/P	5-11	200	Galena, Ohio	87	Lance Rees	R-Sr.	TE	6-5	255	Marshall, Ill.
13	Will Gavin	R-Jr.	DB	6-1	180	Overland Park, Kan.	42	Braxton Sampson	R-Jr.	LB	6-2	225	Brazil, Ind.	88	Zack Drawdy Jr.	R-So.	WR	6-3	190	Yulee, Fla.
14	BJ Wuest	R-So.	WR	6-1	195	Danville, Ind.	43	Braydon Durham	R-Fr.	LB	6-0	215	Santa Claus, Ind.	89	Jaden Wayt	R-So.	WR	6-3	190	Terre Haute, Ind.
15	Xavian Andrews	R-Jr.	DB	6-1	200	Gaithersburg, Md.	44	Tysen Smith	R-Fr.	DL	6-3	245	Bloomington, Ind.	90	Shane Bennett	R-Jr.	DL	6-4	275	Greenwood, Ind.
15	Keegan Patterson	R-Jr.	QB	6-0	195	Longmont, Colo.	45	Lucas McAllister	R-So.	LB	6-0	220	St. Louis, Mo.	91	Ryder Woolwine	Fr.	DL	6-2	225	Bargersville, Ind.
16	Tyree Rochell	R-Jr.	DB	6-1	200	Bloomington, Ind.	46	Harry Traum	Sr.	P	6-0	190	Melbourne, Australia	92	Jayden Childers	R-Jr.	DL	6-3	240	Carmel, Ind.
16	Cael Vanderbush	R-Jr.	TE	6-5	240	Plainfield, Ind.	48	John Prince	R-Jr.	DL	6-2	250	Valhalla, N.Y.	93	Mason Knipp	R-Fr.	DL	6-2	295	Waterloo, Iowa
17	Keshon Singleton	R-Fr.	WR	6-1	205	Springfield, Ill.	50	Sunny Okunola	R-Sr.	OL	6-4	310	Brockton, Mass.	94	Bryan Henderson II	R-Jr.	DL	6-0	250	West Chester, Ohio
18	Brandon Lynch	R-Fr.	LB	6-1	210	Mishawaka, Ind.	51	Gabe Winans	R-So.	OL	6-3	305	Paris, Ill.	95	Rylan Vinard	Fr.	K	6-1	160	Fortville, Ind.
18	Jacob Soley	Fr.	TE	6-4	225	Crown Point, Ind.	52	Mason Keifer	Fr.	DL	6-2	295	Brownsburg, Ind.	95	Logan Wilson	R-Sr.	DL	6-3	275	Appleton, Wis.
19	Baruk Jonsson	Fr.	QB	6-3	180	Mascoutah, Ill.	54	Zeshaun Hudson	R-So.	OL	6-7	330	Clarksville, Tenn.	96	Jace Deakins	Fr.	DL	6-1	210	Brazil, Ind.
19	Zakiese Smith	Fr.	DB	5-10	160	St. Louis, Mo.	55	Shko-Mak Pahmahmie	R-Fr.	DL	6-2	330	Kansas City, Mo.	97	Dilyn Fuller	R-So.	DL	6-1	260	Anderson, Ind.
20	Max McCool	Fr.	RB	6-1	205	Newburgh, Ind.	56	Hank Fuchs	R-Fr.	OL	6-2	295	Lawrence, Kan.	98	Bryce Patterson	R-So.	DL	6-3	280	Brownsburg, Ind.
21	Evan Reff	R-Jr.	DB	6-0	205	Newburgh, Ind.	58	Andy Hertlein	Fr.											

## Shafer

From 2

Shafer continued to progress under his tutelage. Excitement reached a new high when he qualified for state as a senior in the 2020-21 school year. Then he got a call he never imagined on the night of New Year's Day: Taylor had died in a fatal shooting accident at a holiday party. He was 43 years old.

"He was one of the best mentors I've had in a long time," Shafer said. "He saw a lot in me I couldn't see in myself. He would break me down like all coaches do, but then in the same instance, it'd be like, 'I know you're just in your head. Get out of your head and do what you know to do.'"

"It's like, 'Duh.' It's the most obvious things in the world but you just can't think of them at that time. And just taught me more about life than I ever thought I could learn from a coach. A lot about patience."

Shafer brought his coach to the state wrestling meet in spirit. He had printed a t-shirt depicting Taylor's face and placed it on one of the coaches chairs in his corner of the mat during his run to a fourth-place finish at 285 pounds.

His standout wrestling over the years earned him a scholarship from Liberty University. He also earned a football offer from NCAA Division II Hillsdale College as he had carried over to the football field the mental fix of flushing the good and bad to move on to the next task that Taylor had instilled in him.

The two of them had previously talked about choosing college football or wrestling. Shafer got the message that no matter what he picked, Taylor wanted him to succeed in the classroom. He's doing that and will soon have bachelor's degrees in business administration and wildlife biology.

"The wrestling team, we had a lot of misfits, a lot of kids who didn't have good home lives, kids who were raised by grandparents, and coach Taylor almost became a replacement father figure for



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana tight end Evan Shafer (84) takes the field before kickoff during the first round of the NCAA Division I FCS playoffs between the Grizzlies and Tennessee State on Nov. 30, 2024, at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. Shafer is in his third season at UM after transferring from NCAA Division II Hillsdale College.

some of those guys," Shafer said. "He was turning them into men and giving them the mentality that they can always push through, they can always do better, they can make it."

"That was his goal for every single one of us in there: Figure out a way to get us to college. He would tell the guys that all the time. It was the coolest thing ever."

Shafer keeps a hand-drawn picture of himself and Taylor, who had been a staff sergeant in the U.S. Army, in his house. He's kept something special from nearly every coach he's had, particularly those who impacted him.

Assistant wrestling coach Justin Leising still sends along texts of support, he said. Coach Tim O'Rourke was the one who convinced him to join the track team and run hurdles, another sport that helped him on the gridiron.

He also learned from football coach Adam Kelly even though they went through a pair of winless seasons. When he was training to go to college football

camp, he said O'Rourke let him use the weight room at his house.

"All of them just taught me to be the man I am today," he said. "I still talk to every single one of them very, very often and thank them for everything that they did. I recently got a text that they were watching the Central Washington game and they're like, 'We saw you, we saw you.' I'm like, 'That's so awesome.' Every single one of them has had a huge impact on me."

Before Shafer got into high school, his biggest impact came at home. He said his family moved a couple times to Ohio and Michigan but home was always Connerville. It's an agricultural city of about 13,000 people that used to be known as "Little Detroit" because of its manufacturing and automotive impact.

He was hands on with manual labor early while working for his father, Jeremy Shafer, who started Shafer & Sons, a construction and remodeling company. He said he learned to do plumbing, electrical work, laying concrete and brick, and more.

That gave him some job skills if college never worked out.

Being strong-willed men who could support a family was how his mother, Kelly Shafer, also raised her kids, he said. He's the second oldest of four boys who toughened up each other while growing up.

"It helped build the competition aspect of my whole life," he said. "You're trying to beat one of your brothers at something or catch up in another thing or falling behind in another. It's made me exactly who I am."

Evan particularly looked up to his older brother, Braden Shafer. He started playing football in first grade and said he was big enough to play up two grades with his brother, who was a linebacker.

His father coached them, he said, and instilled in them the lesson that the "toughest man on the field's going to win." Evan admired how his brother played and tried to mirror that himself as a linebacker and defensive end.

It wasn't until high school that he moved to offense, where he has been for three seasons with

the Grizzlies as a tight end. He has played in all 31 games since he transferred to Montana ahead of the 2023 season, living out the college sports dream his brother never experienced.

"He had the chance but ended up not going because he wasn't a big school guy," Evan said. "I'll say to this day that he was a better football player than me. The main reason I started playing football was because I wanted to be like my big brother. He was a killer outside linebacker. Just reckless abandonment going to go crack somebody."

"Everybody called me Baby Shafer because I was younger. It was so annoying to me. I was trying to be like he was and just recklessly smacking people and be the toughest guy out there. That's who I tried to base myself off of."

Shafer showed a measure of toughness when he went through Montana coach Bobby Hauck's winter conditioning this past offseason unsure if he would get his NCAA waiver approved for an extra year of eligibility. It was a move in which "everybody called me crazy," he said with a laugh.

He got married in the offseason in July having planned a wedding thinking his time in college was going to be over after the 2024 season. He had met his wife, Hope Kelley, in Indiana during a trip home during the football offseason.

They met at Papermoon Designs, the same store where Shafer had those t-shirts of his late wrestling coach printed. Wherever he lands after playing for the Griz, he won't soon forget his Indiana roots.

"I've just had to work for everything," he said. "Nothing's really been handed to me. Coming from a small school and coming from a small town, I had to put myself out there, had to build up my personal brand to be seen. It was a lot of work to put in. It helped make me who I am."

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.

## Loud

From 3

**A:** It's all about confidence at the end of the day. If you go out there scared, you're gonna play scared. Building confidence and acting like you know you're that guy is very important.

**Q: Who did you learn from the most in your freshman season?**

**A:** Honestly, I got to say my coach, coach (Kim) McCloud. He supported me. As soon as I came in, first thing I did is I went straight to his office because I wanted to play. And then the two starting corners from last year, RJ (Ronald Jackson) and Trevin (Gradney), they played a very important role in getting me ready for a big freshman season.

**Q: As a Bay Area native, who are your sports teams from the region?**

**A:** I'm a Warriors fan. I'm a big Steph Curry fan. We've had a great basketball team, and then I am still a Raiders fan, even though they left the Bay.

**Q: Is Steph your Bay Area sports G.O.A.T?**

**A:** Yeah, most definitely.

**Q: Does anyone else come close?**

**A:** I'm a big Michael Crabtree fan too, even though I'm a Raiders fan. I used to play receiver in high school, so watching the Niners — and you know how good they were — Michael Crabtree was a very important role model.

**Q: What do you miss most about the Bay?**

**A:** I miss In-N-Out. I'm a big In-N-Out guy, that's my favorite place to go. Out here, you know, it's kind of non-existent. You got to pick and choose where you go. Then I'd say my family. I miss my family a lot every day, so I try to get through it every day. And then, just the water, the ocean, you just drive on the bridge and you see the beautiful bay. It's just very different.

**Q: On the flip side of that, what's your favorite thing in Montana you wouldn't get back home?**

**A:** Honestly, the beautiful lakes. There's a lot of beautiful lakes and rivers out here. You don't get that in California, just because it's so busy.

**Q: What are you doing when you aren't playing football?**

**A:** I'm usually sleeping a lot. I like to sleep. I play the (video) game here and there, talk to my family, just hang out. I'll go bowling sometimes with my teammates.

**Q: Playing on a PS5?**

**A:** Yeah.

**Q: What's your most frequent game?**

**A:** NCAA. I'll play (NBA) 2K here and there. I used to play Fortnite a lot. I'm off



Montana cornerback Kyon Loud (5) takes the field during the FCS football game between Montana and North Dakota on Saturday at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. The Bay Area native played in 13 of UM's 14 games as a true freshman in 2024.

**BEN ALLAN SMITH,**  
MISSOULIAN

that. I've matured pretty much.

**Q: When you're playing NCAA and rebuilding a program, which one are you usually picking?**

**A:** I'll say Cal Berkeley. I'm from the Bay, they're in Berkeley, not too far from my house. I try to make them top tier, you know, because they're not good like that.

**Q: What kind of music do you listen to?**

**A:** I'm a big rap guy, like Lil Baby. I'm also a big R-N-B guy, just depends on my moods.

**Q: Any Bay Area rap, E-40 or anything like that?**

**A:** E-40, Too Short, all of 'em, man, I like all of 'em.

**Q: You moved from wearing 14 to 5 this season, what went into that decision?**

**A:** Honestly, I wanted 5 last year. But because I was a freshman, I didn't want to come in and, you know, wearing a single digit. I wanted to work my way up. So this year I picked 5 because it's a legacy number for my family. My dad wore 5 at Cal Poly, actually, and he played here. So I wore 5. Just represents a lot to me and my family.

Carson Cashion is a sports writer for 406 MT Sports. Follow him on X @CarsonCashion or contact him at carson.cashion@406mtsports.com.

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