

MONTANA AT UC DAVIS • KICKOFF: 8 P.M. MT SATURDAY • TV: MTN • THURSDAY, SEPT. 24, 2026

GRIZZLY COME DAY

Missoulian

PAIN FREE

DYLAN PAINE DISPLAYS RESILIENCE THROUGH INJURIES

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Q&A WITH PUNTER EVERETT O'DONNELL, PAGE 3 • SPELTZ PICKS THE BIG SKY, PAGE 4 • ROSTERS, PAGE 5

'MY HEART WAS SINGING'

RB Paine rebounds from setbacks to contribute

FRANK GOGOLA
406 MT Sports

Dylan Paine took the handoff running right, cut inside and weaved his way through traffic before he broke free around the 50-yard line.

The Montana running back was untouched the rest of the way heading toward the south end zone on Sept. 12 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium. When he crossed the goal line, he recorded a career-long 57-yard run that also marked his first time in college scoring touchdowns in back-to-back games.

While Paine has been a new member of Grizzlies football this season, he's no stranger to college football as this is his seventh season. He is in a renewed state of being healthy after five injuries and four surgeries dating back to high school kept him on the sideline more often than he would've imagined.

"That's just the sport, man, and it's a rough sport," he said prior to Montana's game against UC Davis at 8 p.m. MT Saturday in Davis, California.

"That's what makes moments like Saturday so special when you're out there making plays with your friends because it's not guaranteed. Going through all those injuries, you learn that to be so true. You got to play every moment like it's your last."

As Paine made his way to the end zone, another Paine was in jubilation on the Grizzlies sideline. Ashton, Dylan's younger brother and a backup safety on the Montana defense, was celebrating like he had many times before when watching his brother become a record-setting running back in high school.

Ashton saw how much Dylan went through with two ACL injuries, two ankle injuries and a sports hernia. They played together at FBS Washington State in 2023 and 2024, although they both missed time each year with injuries.

Ashton, who had dealt with a fractured spine and torn labrum early in college followed later by a torn PCL in his knee, transferred to the FCS level for the 2025 season. Dylan stayed at Washington State but missed the entire season.

They had been there in person so many times to help one another during the pre-



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana running back Dylan Paine rushes for a 57-yard touchdown during the college football game against Utah Tech on Sept. 12 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. It was a career-long run for the seventh-year player who has battled back from multiple injuries.

vious recovery processes, but not last year. Phone calls and video games were their way of catching up with and checking in on one another.

Now back together at Montana, they both are healthy and contributing. They also get to cheer on one another, including on Dylan's touchdown run against Utah Tech.

"Someone captured a great video of me just jumping around, screaming, throwing a fist," Ashton said. "Those are the emotions just knowing what he's been through. That's my brother, so seeing him break off that big run, he just deserves it. He's earned it. He's worked for it. It was just awesome, amazing."

Yet another Paine was swelling with emotion when Dylan made his dash for the end zone. John, Dylan's father, had seen him make similar runs in high school, during practices and even on a rare occasion in a game at Washington State.

Dylan has found the motivation to get up off the mat after injuries from his family, who has long been in his corner supporting him. He's particularly been driven by his father, who instilled in him that he should never feel sorry for himself because someone always has it worse than him.

Those lessons were important for John to teach his children because he had a self-described tougher upbringing than Dylan and Ashton. He was raised by a single

mother, dropped out of high school as a sophomore, got his GED and went to work.

He later started and still runs his own car business, Carstars, in Washington. Dylan is looking to get involved with his father's business after he finishes football. He's already earned a bachelor's degree in business marketing and is working on a graduate certificate in entrepreneurship.

John had long told his kids that being a great football player isn't what would define them because they'll have a long life after they're done playing the game. But as Dylan scored his latest touchdown, it was a cathartic moment.



MONTANA ATHLETICS

Montana's Everett O'Donnell punts the ball in the college football game against Southern Utah on Aug. 29 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. O'Donnell is in his first season with the Grizzlies after moving from Australia.

The punter from Down Under

Australian O'Donnell is off to sizzling start

CARSON CASHION
406 MT Sports

Griz starting punter Everett O'Donnell has had more life changes in the last two months than many people have over multiple years.

The Melbourne native uprooted from Australia to come join the Montana football

team just in time for fall camp after navigating the visa processes throughout the summer. He's now UM's starting punter, playing in front of the Washington-Grizzly faithful on Saturdays instead of playing Australian rules football back home.

Despite playing the position Griz fans want to see on the field the least, O'Donnell has found his groove in the last two games for the Grizzlies. He totaled 299 yardage from punts against Utah Tech, placing three of his seven punts inside the op-

posing 20-yard line. The Aussie's performance against the Trailblazers earned him Big Sky special teams player of the week honors.

Then, against Oregon State, three of his six kicks ended inside the 20. He's yet to punt a ball into the end zone this season.

O'Donnell sat down with 406 MT Sports ahead of Montana's road contest against UC Davis at 8 p.m. MT Saturday. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Q: So your arrival in Missoula was a little bit unconventional, can you talk about all of the steps it took to get to UM?

A: Well, I found out about coming here really in January, and it was a long process of getting through visa requirements, all that type of stuff, and then academic stuff as well and getting that sorted. And then, we tried to get here in May. That

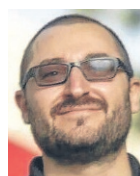
Please see **O'DONNELL**, Page 7

HOW WE SEE THE BIG SKY

BILL SPELTZ
406 MT Sports

Four games into the season, it's still hard to get a handle on the 10th-ranked UC Davis football team.

Harder than it is for most Big Sky Conference programs. Yet oddly similar when it comes to the unknowns that the Aggies' opponent, fifth-ranked Montana, carries into Saturday night's game in Davis, California.



FRANK GOGOLA

37-5



BILL SPELTZ

36-6



VICTOR FLORES

35-7



CARSON CASHION

35-7

those at Montana Tech or Carroll College. It may be of some help to know Davis lost

The three FCS teams the Aggies have beaten are all well beneath them, at least on paper. The one loss they sustained came against FBS 22nd-ranked SMU two weeks ago in Dallas, Texas.

The three teams the Grizzlies have beaten are all well beneath them, at least on paper. The one loss they sustained came against an up-and-coming FBS team in Oregon State in Corvallis, Oregon. A trusted friend of mine attended that game and noted the Beavers were both bigger and faster. That's a tough combination to overcome.

Davis showed its most vulnerability in FCS competition in its opener at Portland State. The Vikings led that game 24-16 with 3 minutes left before a surge of 14 unanswered points by the Aggies. It's hard to know how much weight to put on that game because unusual things happen in openers.

Likewise, Montana showed its most vulnerability against FCS competition in its debut. Southern Utah (1-3) was locked in a 21-21 tie with the Grizzlies with 4 minutes left before Montana scored a TD and then held on for dear life, benefitting from a late non-call on a play that clearly showed pass interference by a Griz defender inside the UM 15-yard line.

So we are left to wonder what might happen Saturday night in the Golden State in a stadium that's not really much more impressive than



Montana running back Eli Gillman avoids a tackle by Oregon State's TJ Crandall during the college football game on Sept. 19 at Reser Stadium in Corvallis, Oregon. Gillman broke the UM career rushing yards record in the game.

DYLAN JACOBS,
MID-VALLEY MEDIA

a home game to Idaho State last year, that coming in early November.

Ah well, it's more fun to watch when we're not sure what will happen. Both teams have yet to prove they can beat an FCS ranked team and both will be locked in. Look for a packed house — or at least as close as the Aggies ever get when playing at home — and a tight game.

No. 5 Montana (1-0, 3-1) at No. 10 UC Davis (1-0, 3-1), 8 p.m. TV: Scripps Sports. In Saturday's blowout loss at Oregon State, the Grizzlies surrendered six touchdowns on the Beavers' first seven possessions before OSU pulled its starting quarterback in the third period. Imagine that, 42-3. And I didn't even keep track of who else the Beavs pulled. There were likely a few more starters that grabbed bench. When reviewing the Griz debacle, don't dwell on stats like total yardage and try to tell me it was a game. It was not competitive and I cannot remember the last time Montana was so thoroughly pounded. Like most Montana fans, I didn't expect it. I expected a decent contest where the Griz lost by maybe two touchdowns. I even had visions of a Montana win. But the offense needs work. The defense needs work. Montana needs to get well quickly because beating Davis on the road will not be an easy task. The Griz remain a marquee brand when it comes to the FCS and for the Aggies, a Saturday win would be monumental. I'll be picking UM to beat Davis in a close one because I still believe in the talent the Grizzlies have on the offensive side of the ball, but this could be a very close game and an upset would not surprise me. **Bill Speltz:** Grizzlies 38, Aggies 37. **Frank Gogola:** Montana 35, Davis 34. **Victor Flores:** Aggies 28, Griz 24. **Carson Cashion:** UC Davis 38, Montana 35.

No. 18 Northern Arizona (1-0, 3-1)

at No. 1 Montana State (1-0, 4-0), 8:30 p.m. TV: ESPN2. In watching last Saturday's close call for the Cats against Central Connecticut State, I marveled at the impact two Missoula Sentinel grads had for MSU. Adam Jones was a difference-maker at running back as usual, scoring what proved to be the game-winning touchdown along with doing a lot of other things that affected the outcome. Zac Crews was just as impactful from his spot at defensive end. In fact, one media outlet declared Crews the player of the game, in part because his sack/forced fumble on the quarterback in the first half was a game-changer. My hunch is Montana State is going to be more locked in from the start this week against the Lumberjacks. It's worth noting NAU has surrendered 113 points, which is almost twice as many as MSU. Plus the Jacks are used to playing in a dome and it's going to be a little chilly by 8:30 p.m. Saturday night in Bozeman. **Speltz:** Cats 41, Jacks 21. **Gogola:** Montana State 38, Northern Arizona 27. **Flores:** Cats 38, Jacks 21. **Cashion:** Montana State 49, Northern Arizona 20.

No. 14 Idaho State (0-0, 3-0) at Southern Utah (0-1, 1-3), 6 p.m. TV: ESPN+. The Bengals were idle last weekend, so they'll be rested and refreshed for Saturday in Cedar City. Idaho State's win at FBS Utah State on Sept. 5 was proof the team is ready to take a big step forward in Big Sky play. Southern Utah, on the other hand, has dropped two in a row to FCS teams and back on Sept. 5 gave up 42 points in their only win over Weber State. Naturally, the assumption is ISU is going to put up big numbers on SUU this week. **Speltz:** Bengals 51, Thunderbirds 27. **Gogola:** Idaho State 42, Southern Utah 21. **Flores:** ISU 35, SUU 24. **Cashion:** Idaho State 28, Southern Utah 27.

Cal Poly (1-0, 2-2) at Eastern Wash-

ington (0-1, 1-3), 5 p.m. TV: ESPN+. The Mustangs were riding high after starting the season with home wins over Idaho and Central Washington. Then came two losses, including a home setback against non-scholarship San Diego last weekend. The Eagles have also lost two in a row, but their setbacks came on the road against eight-ranked South Dakota and FBS Washington. Eastern is not the Big Sky powerhouse it used to be, but the Eagles do play well on the red turf at home. They beat Northern Iowa in Cheney earlier this month and last year they were 4-1 at home. Consequently, I'm going with EWU to beat Cal Poly on a chilly afternoon in front of a healthy crowd. **Speltz:** Eagles 30, Mustangs 28. **Gogola:** Eastern Washington 28, Cal Poly 24. **Flores:** EWU 27, Cal Poly 24. **Cashion:** Eastern Washington 31, Cal Poly 28.

Portland State (0-1, 0-4) at Weber State (1-0, 2-2), 6 p.m. TV: ESPN+. The Vikings' close call with UC Davis in late August has been well-documented by this sports columnist. In fact, it was addressed earlier in this piece. Fans of the struggling PSU program had reason for hope that day. Since then, the Viks have lost three in a row and in those losses surrendered a total of 184 points. Ouch. It must be noted the competition has been mighty stiff, but something tells me the Vikings are back to their old ways (they were 1-11 last season). The Wildcats are coming off a 49-20 win in their home debut against FCS Northwestern State and they're going to dazzle the home folks again this Saturday. **Speltz:** Wildcats 48, Viks 24. **Gogola:** Weber State 41, Portland State 20. **Flores:** Weber 31, PSU 17. **Cashion:** Weber State 45, Portland State 17.

Utah Tech (0-1, 0-4) at Northern Colorado (0-1, 1-3), 6 p.m. TV: ESPN+. The Bears picked up their first win last weekend against NCAA Division II Northeastern State, 23-17 in overtime. That will give them a little bit of confidence but this game is no gimme. The Trailblazers put up a fight against 18th-ranked Northern Arizona last week, eventually dropping a 35-23 decision. The Jacks led by just five points with under 4 minutes left before scoring an insurance TD. Look for a close one in sun-splashed Greeley. **Speltz:** Bears 27, Trailblazers 24. **Gogola:** Northern Colorado 30, Utah Tech 17. **Flores:** UNC 34, Utah Tech 21. **Cashion:** Northern Colorado 20, Utah Tech 10.

Bill Speltz is Missoulian sports editor. Contact him at bill.speltz@406mtsports.com or on Twitter @billspeltz

No.	Name	Yr.	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Hometown	20	Jordan Fisher	Sr.	RB	5-8	180	Portland, Ore.	60	AJ Hasson	R-So.	OL	6-5	310	Davis, Calif.
0	Marquis Bradley	So.	DB	5-11	170	Glendora, Calif.	20	Parker Johnson	Fr.	DB	6-1	185	San Diego, Calif.	62	Jace Denning	So.	OL	6-5	285	San Francisco, Calif.
0	Edward Khutishvili	So.	TE	6-4	225	Anaheim, Calif.	21	Nikolas Blocker	Fr.	WR	5-7	165	Victorville, Calif.	63	Roice Cleeland	R-So.	OL	6-3	300	Vancouver, Wash.
1	Xzavior Guess	So.	WR	5-9	185	Huntington Beach, Calif.	21	Teeg Slone	R-Jr.	DB	6-1	190	Rocklin, Calif.	65	Lucas Winkler	Fr.	OL	6-5	250	Ramona, Calif.
1	Hayden John	R-Jr.	DB	6-1	200	Anacortes, Wash.	22	Charlie Allen	Gr.	LB	6-2	200	Novato, Calif.	66	Jezniah Thurston	Jr.	OL	6-3	290	Beaumont, Calif.
2	Macray Madruga	Gr.	LB	6-3	235	San Ramon, Calif.	22	Laviel Pickett	5th	WR	6-4	205	Redlands, Calif.	67	Jayden Montanez	Jr.	OL	6-4	290	Los Angeles, Calif.
2	Chauncey Sylvester	R-So.	RB	5-10	205	Long Beach, Calif.	23	Brayden Rosa	So.	DB	5-8	180	Santa Clara, Calif.	68	Xander Grayson	Fr.	OL	6-3	270	San Mateo, Calif.
3	Zach Jones	Sr.	WR	5-9	180	Daly City, Calif.	23	Winston Williams	5th	TE	6-4	245	Lemoore, Calif.	69	Braiden McKenna	Fr.	OL	6-2	285	Los Alamitos, Calif.
3	Ty Richardson	Sr.	DB	6-0	190	Menlo, Calif.	24	Coby Herman	Fr.	RB	5-10	190	Encinitas, Calif.	71	Aziz Altuwajiri	So.	OL	6-3	265	Newport Beach, Calif.
4	Greer Arthur	Jr.	WR	6-1	195	Tiburon, Calif.	24	Kameron Totton	So.	DB	5-10	180	Sacramento, Calif.	72	Tyler Keehn	So.	OL	6-3	285	Novato, Calif.
4	Rex Connors	5th	DB	6-1	210	Pleasant Grove, Utah	26	Jeremiah Brown	So.	DB	5-10	170	Moreno Valley, Calif.	74	Anthony Rodriguez	Fr.	OL	6-5	285	Long Beach, Calif.
5	Treynor Cleeland	So.	QB	6-2	225	Vancouver, Wash.	26	Aden Jackson	So.	RB	5-10	210	El Cajon, Calif.	75	Henry Fanua	Sr.	OL	6-5	340	San Jose, Calif.
5	Grant Garretson	Gr.	LB	6-4	235	Chico, Calif.	28	Marcus McGeilberry	Fr.	DB	6-2	170	San Bernardino, Calif.	78	Robert Beverly	So.	OL	6-8	280	Carmel, Calif.
6	Trey Carr	Sr.	DB	5-10	155	Fresno, Calif.	30	Tyler Hughes	So.	K/P	6-2	185	Poway, Calif.	80	Jake Houseworth	So.	TE	6-3	225	Fortuna, Calif.
6	LaDanian Streets	Jr.	WR	6-0	190	Fresno, Calif.	31	Sam Goligoski	R-Jr.	LB	6-3	225	San Mateo, Calif.	82	Cash Bryant	Fr.	WR	6-3	190	Temecula, Calif.
7	Jaden Few	So.	DL	6-5	250	Ventura, Calif.	32	Albert Richardson	Fr.	DB	5-10	190	Hanford, Calif.	83	Matt Watts	Fr.	WR	6-1	170	Agoura Hills, Calif.
8	Samuel Gbatu Jr.	5th	WR	5-10	185	Temecula, Calif.	33	Conner Hergert	So.	LS	6-1	235	Sacramento, Calif.	85	Blake Walls	Jr.	TE	6-3	230	Saint Peters, Mo.
9	Cory McEnroe	So.	LB	6-1	225	Thousand Oaks, Calif.	34	Kai Acia	Sr.	RB	5-10	195	Loomis, Calif.	86	Franz Pohlman	Sr.	TE	6-6	235	Santa Cruz, Calif.
9	Scott Nixon	Sr.	WR	6-2	200	Sacramento, Calif.	36	Dylan Mauro	Jr.	P	6-1	195	Allen, Texas	87	Prescott Langer	Fr.	TE	6-3	220	Ferrndale, Calif.
10	Drew Faulkner	R-So.	DB	5-10	185	Los Angeles, Calif.	37	Owen Scott	So.	DB	5-10	175	Danville, Calif.	88	Robert Meyer	So.	K	6-3	180	Colfax, Calif.
10	Trevor Taumoepeau	Fr.	QB	6-0	190	San Diego, Calif.	38	Mason Walsh	So.	RB	5-10	200	Carlsbad, Calif.	90	Trent Carrade	Sr.	DL	6-3	280	San Rafael, Calif.
11	Drew Cofield	So.	DB	6-1	170	Thousand Oaks, Calif.	39	Porter Connors	5th	LB	6-1	220	Pleasant Grove, Utah	91	Joey Carrillo	Gr.	DL	6-4	250	Lafayette, Calif.
12	William Fowler	Sr.	DB	6-1	190	Fresno, Calif.	43	Daniel Amoako	Fr.	K	6-0	165	Fontana, Calif.	92	Rayne Mayo Jr.	Jr.	DL	6-2	320	San Jose, Calif.
12	Jackson Kollock	R-Fr.	QB	6-4	225	Laguna Beach, Calif.	44	Nick Afato	Sr.	LB	6-1	220	Marysville, Calif.	93	Julian Fernandez	So.	DL	6-6	295	Corcoran, Calif.
13	Tyler Hennessy	So.	WR	5-10	185	Garden Grove, Calif.	45	Rickey Johnson	Fr.	LB	6-0	210	Bakersfield, Calif.	94	Corbin Wade	Fr.	DL	6-5	245	Lakewood, Colo.
13	Thomas McCormick	Jr.	LB	5-10	190	Encinitas, Calif.	46	Tristan McMurry	Gr.	LB	6-0	225	Murrieta, Calif.	95	Jake Williams	Jr.	DL	6-3	300	Temecula, Calif.
14	Axel Eason	So.	QB	6-3	215	Agoura Hills, Calif.	47	Jack Knudtson	So.	LB	6-1	225	Huntington Beach, Calif.	96	Jason Davis Jr.	Fr.	DL	6-4	270	Gridley, Calif.
14	Chaz Gilbreath	Fr.	DB	6-0	185	Bellflower, Calif.	48	Joseph Adema	Sr.	LS	6-3	205	San Diego, Calif.	97	Devin Huegel	So.	DL	6-4	275	Redding, Calif.
15	Jordan Rogers	So.	TE	6-3	220	Kentfield, Calif.	49	Christian Knoos	So.	LB	5-10	230	Thousand Oaks, Calif.	98	Ike Ikegbu	Sr.	DL	6-2	295	Sacramento, Calif.
15	Jackson Sievers	Jr.	LB	6-1	220	Mission Viejo, Calif.	51	Tom Sackinsky	Sr.	DL	6-2	255	Rocklin, Calif.	99	Tyler Parker	So.	DL	5-11	280	Lake Forest, Calif.
16	Jordan Black-Glass	Jr.	DB	6-0	180	Hanford, Calif.	52	Zaire Collier	Sr.	OL	6-4	320	Antelope, Calif.							
16	Jackson Fay	Fr.	WR	5-10	175	Manteca, Calif.	53	Donnie Vercher	Fr.	LB	6-2	222	Portland, Ore.							
17	Kyle Hill	Jr.	LB	6-5	220	Palm Desert, Calif.	54	Ben Honebein	Fr.	DL	6-3	240	Kailua, Hawai'i							
18	Koen Parnell	Fr.	WR	6-2	200	Newport Coast, Calif.	55	David Main	Gr.	OL	6-4	295	Los Alamitos, Calif.							
18	Matteo Perez	6th	RB	5-8	185	Novato, Calif.	56	Julius Ray	Sr.	DL	6-2	250	Palmdale, Calif.							
19	Boston Stovall	Sr.	DB	5-8	160	Ingewood, Calif.	57	Luke Givens	So.	LB	6-2	215	San Diego, Calif.							
							58	David Porotesano	Jr.	OL	6-3	300	Oceanside, Calif.							

Paine

From 2

"It's just been fantastic," John said. "It's been everything you want as a father to see one of your children show that type of resiliency. Going through injuries, it's tough. There's no guarantees on the other end of that. All the rehab and work that takes to get back from those things, my heart was singing real loud."

Dylan didn't think he would still be playing football this season. It's his seventh fall on a football team as he spent the first six at Washington State before transferring to Montana this past offseason.

His career started off with the 2020 COVID season, for which he received a waiver for another year of eligibility off the bat. Then came a redshirt season in 2021 that didn't count against his four seasons of actually playing in games.

He played in 11 games in 2022 and nine games in 2023 while missing three contests that season with injury. He then appeared in the first five games in 2024 before he missed the remainder of the season with an injury.

That time on the sideline extended into 2025 as he sat out the whole year recovering from an injury. He didn't even know if he could get a medical waiver to play this fall, but he took the opportunity when it was afforded to him.

"That's been my word of the year is gratitude," he said. "I tell myself every day, I pray to God and I tell him I'm so grateful for this opportunity and for every day coming out here. I feel like I brought more energy than I have to practice in the past because I'm truly grateful to be healthy and playing."

Rebounding from injuries was nothing new to Paine when he was hit by his first one in college: a sports hernia over the summer heading into the 2023 season. The first real injury, not counting a shoulder injury in middle school that he discounted, came during his junior year of high school.

He tore the ACL in his left knee during a blowout win in the fifth game. He played through his senior season without being 100% healthy, he said, but helped Tumwater win the Washington Class 2A state championship with an undefeated record while setting the school's career rushing yards record.

The resiliency he has shown in all his comebacks has come in part from his high school program. It was there he had the phrase "never give up" ingrained in him.

"That was my high school's motto basically and so that's kind of always been my thing," he said. "No matter what you're



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana running backs Eli Gillman (10) and Dylan Paine (23) celebrate after Gillman scores a touchdown during the college football game against Utah Tech on Sept. 12 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. Paine, who has backed up Gillman, already has a career-high 189 rushing yards through four games.

going through, if you just put your head down and work through it, things are always going to be better on the other side. I've had things happen so many times in my life I just know that to be true."

This season has been Paine's first time playing meaningful football since his injury in 2024. That setback served as what is still his lowest moment.

He was coming off the high of scoring two touchdowns against San Jose State, including the game-winner in a 54-52 overtime victory. The next week, he tore the ACL in his left knee in a loss against Boise State.

That was Sept. 28, the same exact date

as his previous ACL injury six years earlier. Unlike the ankle injury that forced him to miss a few games in the middle of the 2023 season, this injury was a season ender.

"For a split second I was thinking it's over, I'm done," he said. "Then I snapped right out of it and I was like I'm going to play another year. I'm going to come back from this. This is not going to be my last play."

That was the second time he had the same injury in the same knee. This time, the doctors used part of the patella from his right knee to reconstruct his left ACL. They had already used part of the patella in his left knee during the previous surgery.

That meant double knee surgery and scars on both knees. It also meant a more intense recovery process.

"Turns out it felt like I tore both my ACLs and was recovering for like nine, 10 months," he said. "It was a really weird process."

He missed the entire 2025 season with another ankle injury. As the season was winding down, he reflected on his journey and whether he wanted to play another year.

Ashton told Dylan what he would've wanted to hear if he was in his brother's situation. Dylan kept his cleats, and the brothers, who were both former walk-ons turned scholarship players, reunited at Montana after Ashton spent 2025 at South Dakota.

"As I got healthy at the end of the season, I was like, man, I feel like I have more left in the tank," Dylan said.

He wrapped up his Washington State career with 292 all-purpose yards in 25 games. That broke down as 49 carries for 254 yards and three touchdowns to go with five catches for 38 yards.

In his first four games at Montana, he's already up to 189 rushing yards and two touchdowns on 25 carries as he has backed up All-American Eli Gillman, who became UM's career rushing yards leader last week.

It's a single-season career high for him in rushing yards and tied for his personal best for touchdowns and carries in a season. He also has five catches for 15 yards.

"I'm on a good streak right now," he said. "I've never felt this good in a long time."

He's pain free and running free on the field, just like he did on that 57-yard touchdown scamper. It was a moment that was a mix of "special," "pretty cool," "fun" and "indescribable" to him as he reflected in the days after.

He's hoping it won't be his last highlight of the season. He was drawn to UM in part because of the chance to win an FCS championship, which he saw his former Washington State teammate Alec Eckert do last year at Montana State.

"I was telling my dad before the season even started that no matter what happens this season, I'm so glad I came here," he said. "That's really a testament to this team and these coaches and the culture they've built in this town."

"I couldn't have come to a better place. I've had the most fun of my life these last nine months and I can't wait to keep going and make more memories."

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.

O'Donnell

From 3

fell through, and then it was just every day, kind of working through it, and then got here just in time for fall camp and then straight into it, really.

Q: And you were going to college in Australia beforehand, right?

A: Yeah. I completed a diploma in health science back home, it was a year-long course. I completed that, then took a bit of time off, and then found out about the possibility of something like this.

Q: You learned punting through ProKick Australia, what does that whole process look like?

A: It works around your time off, like high school and stuff like that. It's mainly for like 18 to 18-plus kind of guys who have got more free time to work on it. You join there, you go to the tryouts, you make it in through there, and then after that, you spend about a year kind of getting the fundamentals. Then after a year, it's more recruitment and just fine tuning.

Q: Were you still playing Australian rules football at the time?

A: No, a majority of the guys will stop just injury-wise, trying to avoid anything like that coming up. But no, I played Australian football since I was about five years old. Five years till 22, or so.

Q: What stood out about trying to play American football or just going through the ProKick process?

A: I think it's more the experience. College is a lot different here than it is back home, just in terms of the lifestyle, and so I think it was mainly that, that brought me over. Just having the experience that no one else back home really gets a chance to have.



CARSON CASHION, MISSOULIAN

Montana punter Everett O'Donnell poses for a photo on Sept. 15 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. O'Donnell was named the Big Sky special teams player of the week following the win over Utah Tech.

Q: How has getting to know the guys been going for you?

A: It's been great. I mean, they've taken me in like family from the first day. They love having an Australian on the team, so it makes things good.

Q: Have you been teaching them anything about Australia or vice versa?

A: Mainly the animals. I've been teaching them, you know, we definitely don't ride the kangaroos to school. Vegemite, stuff like that. And yeah, I'm gonna be honest, I didn't know much in terms of rules about the

game. That's something I've been just picking brains about. But yeah, mainly just the animals.

Q: What was it like playing in here (Washington-Grizzly) for the first time? And how does this kind of compare to some of the venues you played in in Australia?

A: Back home, I played in front of maybe a couple people walking their dogs and stuff like that. Coming out here for the first night was insane. It was a great game to play in as well, but no, the fan support is, especially here, it's on a whole 'nother level.

Q: What do you miss most about home?

A: My mum's cooking.

Q: Any meals in particular?

A: She, well, actually, technically my grandma's cooking, but she, my grandma cooks this really good shepherd's pie. That would be it.

Q: I saw some of your family got to come to the first game. Just how much did that mean to you to see them across the world, literally?

A: It meant the world. I didn't really think they'd be able to make it, just with work for themselves and stuff like that. So to have them here, and thankfully play a couple of good games in front of them, it meant the world to me.

Q: I feel like there's been a surge of ProKick guys going into not only high D-I college football, but also the NFL. What do you feel like kind of translates and allows so

many people to be successful from that program and just Australian rules football in general?

A: I think it is the foundational talent that we have for kicking. It mainly just stems from Australian football. I mean, we grew up kicking it. Like I step out there, and it feels like second nature to me. It's just muscle memory. So I think it's mainly that, and I think it's our ability just get the job done. That kind of like robotic nature. That kind of helps with our success.

Q: What type of music do you listen to?

A: Country, thankfully, because that's about all I hear around here.

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

CLEAN EQUIPMENT • DEPENDABLE SERVICE • LOCAL MONTANA SUPPORT

Western Montana's Trusted On-Site Services

RESTROOM TRAILERS
 PORTABLE RESTROOMS
 TEMPORARY FENCE

CALL TODAY
406-844-8404
sweetpeasonsite.com

GO GRIZ!

HERE TO HELP WITH ALL YOUR CAFFEINATED NEEDS!

1915 STEPHENS AVE • 1650 W BROADWAY • 4921 N RESERVE

A local partner makes a world of difference.

Believe in a world of wellness
knowing Blue Cross and Blue Shield
of Montana is lighting the way for
your health and wellness journey.
Always helping your story shine
through by keeping you at the
center of everything we do.



Montana

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Montana, a Division of Health Care
Service Corporation, a Mutual Legal Reserve Company, an Independent
Licensee of the Blue Cross and Blue Shield Association