

MONTANA AT SOUTH DAKOTA STATE • KICKOFF: NOON SATURDAY • TV: ESPN+ • THURSDAY, DEC. 5, 2024

GRIZZLY GAME DAY

Missoulian

KASCHMITTER CASHES IN

NOAH KASCHMITTER
COLLECTS DEGREE,
CAREER YEAR AFTER
ALMOST QUITTING

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

ROSTERS, PAGE 2 • Q&A WITH DT PAT HAYDEN, PAGE 4 • SPELTZ PICKS THE BIG SKY, PAGE 5



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No.	Name	Year	Pos.	Hgt.	Wt.	Hometown	23	Beau Dantic	R-So.	RB	5-9	192	Laurel, Mont.	62	Everett Johnson	R-Jr.	OL	6-7	301	Turlock, Calif.
0	Monte Gillman	Fr.	ATH	5-8	153	Dassel, Minn.	24	Cameron Gurnsey	R-Fr.	WR	6-0	181	Butte, Mont.	63	Dylan Cohen	R-Fr.	OL	6-1	267	Seattle, Wash.
0	Vai Kaho	R-Sr.	LB	6-1	235	Reno, Nev.	25	Jaxon Lee	Sr.	S	6-1	210	Missoula, Mont.	64	Matt Hilden	Fr.	OL	6-6	278	Santa Rosa, Calif.
2	Drew Deck	R-Jr.	WR	5-9	160	Kalispell, Mont.	26	Nick Ostmo	Gr.	RB	6-0	221	Portland, Ore.	66	Brandon Casey	Sr.	OL	6-5	309	Sandpoint, Idaho
2	Ronald Jackson Jr.	R-Jr.	CB	6-1	191	Detroit, Mich.	27	Jordan Dever	R-Fr.	WR	6-0	170	Spokane, Wash.	68	Torin Jeske	Fr.	OL	6-6	253	Bozeman, Mont.
3	Brooks Davis	Fr.	WR	6-0	168	Brentwood, Calif.	28	Isiah Childs	Sr.	LB	6-1	209	Manhattan, Kan.	69	Noah Kaschmitter	R-Jr.	DL	6-3	253	Grangeville, Idaho
4	Dane Parker	Fr.	S	6-1	178	Puyallup, Wash.	29	Tanner Huff	R-Jr.	CB	6-0	207	Butte, Mont.	69	Cannon Panfiloff	R-Jr.	OL	6-6	293	Roy, Utah
4	Ryan Simpson	R-Sr.	WR	6-6	209	Bozeman, Mont.	30	Kade Cutler	R-So.	S	6-0	203	Phillipsburg, Mont.	70	Colin Amick	Fr.	OT	6-6	264	Sammamish, Wash.
5	Junior Bergen	Sr.	WR	5-11	184	Billings, Mont.	30	Tommy Running Rabbit	Fr.	ATH	6-1	202	Browning, Mont.	72	Cade Klimczak	Sr.	OL	6-1	286	Rockford, Mich.
6	Prince Ford	R-Jr.	CB	5-11	170	Concord, N.C.	31	Geno Leonard	R-Jr.	LB	5-11	231	Missoula, Mont.	73	Trevor Steinbach	Fr.	OL	6-5	290	Sammamish, Wash.
6	Keelan White	R-Sr.	WR	6-2	184	North Vancouver, B.C.	32	Tyson Rostad	R-So.	S	6-1	201	Hamilton, Mont.	74	Tate Templeton	R-Fr.	OL	6-3	298	Missoula, Mont.
7	Malae Fonoti	Fr.	RB	5-11	200	Palolo Valley, Hawaii	33	Lekeldrick Bridges	Fr.	WR	5-11	162	Cedar Hill, Texas	75	Declan McCabe	R-Jr.	OL	6-4	295	Waco, Texas
7	Kash Goicoechea	Fr.	S	6-1	194	Kalispell, Mont.	34	Talen Reynolds	Fr.	RB	5-11	161	Missoula, Mont.	76	Journey Grimsrud	R-Jr.	OL	6-3	302	Huntley, Mont.
8	Keali'i Ah Yat	R-Fr.	QB	6-1	192	Kaneohe, Hawaii	35	Grady Walker	Fr.	ATH	6-4	202	Missoula, Mont.	77	Michael Ray	R-So.	OL	6-3	289	Yakima, Wash.
8	Kenzel Lawler	R-Jr.	CB	6-0	190	Corona, Calif.	36	Ty Morrison	Jr.	KP	6-3	210	Valencia, Calif.	78	Lucas Freitas	R-Fr.	OL	6-6	312	Snoqualmie, Wash.
9	Chrishawn Gordon	R-Sr.	S	5-11	191	Oceanside, Calif.	36	Garrett Speer	Fr.	DB	6-0	187	Portland, Ore.	79	Liam Brown	R-Jr.	OL	6-5	317	Beaverton, Ore.
9	Sawyer Racanelli	R-Sr.	WR	6-3	208	Brush Prairie, Wash.	37	Trevin Gradney	R-Sr.	CB	6-0	184	Billings, Mont.	80	Brady Lang	R-Jr.	WR	6-1	179	Bozeman, Mont.
10	Eli Gillman	R-So.	RB	6-0	208	Dassel, Minn.	38	Marcus Evans	R-So.	LB	6-0	221	Helena, Mont.	81	Joseph Grezmak	R-So.	TE	6-5	241	Pilot Mountain, N.C.
10	TJ Rausch	R-Jr.	S	6-3	205	Missoula, Mont.	39	Jace Kluczewich	R-Jr.	S	5-10	166	Frenchtown, Mont.	82	Ian Finch	R-So.	WR	6-3	204	Missoula, Mont.
11	Cole Grossman	R-Sr.	TE	6-4	220	Vancouver, Wash.	40	Cooper Barnum	Sr.	LB	6-2	225	Vancouver, Wash.	83	Drew Klumph	R-So.	WR	5-11	181	Missoula, Mont.
11	Gabe Longin	R-Jr.	S	5-11	184	Great Falls, Mont.	41	Brayton Boyer	R-Fr.	KP	5-11	179	Madison, N.J.	84	Evan Shafer	Sr.	TE	6-5	273	Connerville, Ind.
12	Elijah Brady	R-Fr.	CB	6-1	165	Seattle, Wash.	42	Riley Wilson	R-Jr.	LB	6-2	230	Prosper, Texas	85	Dayton Toney	R-Jr.	WR	6-1	191	Frisco, Texas
12	Logan Fife	R-Jr.	QB	6-0	205	Tracy, Calif.	43	Grayson Pibal	R-Jr.	LS	6-3	197	Clackamas, Ore.	86	Joe Weida	R-So.	TE	6-4	230	Missoula, Mont.
13	Xavier Harris	Sr.	RB	5-10	173	Oxnard, Calif.	44	Ryan Tirrell	R-Sr.	LB	6-2	235	Missoula, Mont.	87	Erik Olson	R-Jr.	TE	6-7	258	Butte, Mont.
13	Ryder Meyer	R-Sr.	S	5-10	185	Fairfield, Mont.	45	Caleb Otlewski	R-Fr.	LB	6-4	235	Melissa, Texas	88	Erik Barker	Sr.	TE	6-4	240	Keizer, Ore.
14	Aaron Fontes	Sr.	WR	6-																

No.	Name	Year	Pos.	Hgt.	Wt.	Hometown	25	Cale Reeder	Sr.	S	6-0	190	Yorkville, Ill.	62	Kenyon BigBow	R-Fr.	OL	6-5	295	Anadarko, Okla.
0	Daeton Mcgaughy	Sr.	LB	6-0	205	Elwood, Kan.	26	Kolten Tilford	R-Fr.	S	5-9	180	North Platte, Neb.	63	Kyan Rauk	Fr.	OL	6-8	285	Northfield, Minn.
1	Tucker Large	Jr.	S	5-11	185	Sioux Falls, S.D.	27	Noah Thompson	So.	S	6-0	185	Brandon, S.D.	64	Ethan Vibert	Sr.	OL	6-4	310	Regina, Saskatchewan
2	Marcus Preston	Sr.	WR	6-2	200	Lawrence, Kan.	28	Chase Van Tol	R-Fr.	LB	6-1	200	Tea, S.D.	66	Rhett Schaefer	Fr.	DE	6-3	240	Walcott, Iowa
3	Amar Johnson	Sr.	RB	5-10	205	O'Fallon, Mo.	29	Graham Spalding	Sr.	LB	6-2	215	Oviedo, Fla.	67	Ian Mutchler	R-Fr.	OL	6-4	280	Morton, Ill.
3	Dontay Johnson	So.	S	6-2	190	Fort Collins, Colo.	30	Cody Cotton	Jr.	CB	6-0	170	Pleasant Prairie, Wis.	68	Nick Bakken	Fr.	OL	6-5	275	Whitefish Bay, Wis.
4	Steven Arrell	Sr.	CB	6-3	200	Brooklyn Park, Minn.	31	Trey Ridley	Fr.	S	6-1	200	Overland Park, Kan.	69	Quinten Christensen	So.	OL	6-5	300	Wessington Springs, S.D.
4	Kentrell Prejean	R-Fr.	WR	5-8	160	Lafayette, La.	32	Adam Bock	Sr.	LB	6-1	225	Solon, Iowa	71	Max Chapman	Fr.	DT	6-2	300	Creston, Iowa
5	Jon Bell	Jr.	QB	6-3	195	Naperville, Ill.	33	Bryce Johnson	So.	LB	6-3	215	Parker, Colo.	72	Hayden Venenga	Fr.	OL	6-6	290	Willmar, Minn.
6	Elijah Ervin	Jr.	WR	6-1	195	Phoenix, Ariz.	34	Maxwell Woods	Fr.	RB	5-10	185	Carver, Minn.	73	Caden Hotz	Fr.	OL	6-2	280	Waverly, Iowa
6	Jalen B. Lee	So.	CB	6-0	200	Wentzville, Mo.	35	Quinton Renfro	Fr.	RB	5-11	185	Joplin, Mo.	74	Shane Willenbring	Fr.	OL	6-4	285	La Crosse, Wis.
7	Dalys Beanum	Sr.	CB	6-1	200	Omaha, Neb.	36	Dane Miller	So.	WR	6-3	185	Hardy, Neb.	76	Sam Hagen	Jr.	OL	6-6	315	Fordville, N.D.
7	Chase Mason	Jr.	QB	6-4	230	Hurley, S.D.	37	Kaydon Olivia	Jr.	LS	5-11	215	Schertz, Texas	77	William Paepke	R-Fr.	OL	6-5	295	Rapid City, S.D.
8	Sammy Dresie	Fr.	WR	6-2	185	Maize, Kan.	37	Carsten Reynolds	Fr.	LB	6-3	205	Sedro-Wooley, Wash.	78	Marcus Hicks	Sr.	OL	6-6	320	Wichita, Kan.
8	Blake Peterson	Gr.	DE	6-4	255	Beresford, S.D.	38	Max Stanard	Fr.	S	5-11	190	Manhattan, Kan.	79	Thomas Martian	Fr.	OL	6-3	280	Rapid City, S.D.
9	Caleb Franci	Sr.	LB	6-1	195	Grand Island, Neb.	40	Brayden Delahoyde	Fr.	TE	6-5	220	Spearfish, S.D.	80	Lofton O'Groske	Fr.	WR	6-2	200	Coon Rapids, Minn.
10	Hunter Dustman	Sr.	K/P	6-4	225	East Bethel, Minn.	40	Aaron Kusler	Sr.	LB	6-3	230	Sioux Falls, S.D.	81	Joey Neumann	R-Fr.	TE	6-4	235	Antioch, Ill.
11	Mark Gronowski	Sr.	QB	6-3	230	Naperville, Ill.	41	Max Pelham	Jr.	P	6-1	195	Ankeny, Iowa	82	Ky Oday Jr.	So.	WR	5-11	180	Denver, Colo.
11	Joe Ollman	So.	LB	6-1	225	Mequon, Wis.	42	Anthony Palano	Fr.	LB	6-1	210	Arlington Heights, Ill.	83	David Alpers	So.	TE	6-6	240	Sioux Falls, S.D.
12	Graham Goering	Jr.	WR	6-2	200	Iowa City, Iowa	43	Andrew Gustad	So.	TE	6-1	235	Volin, S.D.	84	Joe Randle	R-Fr.	WR	6-3	205	St. Anthony, Minn.
12	Jack Amer	R-Fr.	QB	6-2	215	Gilbert, Ariz.	44	Kevin Brenner	Sr.	TE	6-3	240	Silver Lake, Wis.	85	Joe Roll	R-Fr.	WR	5-9	180	Gretna, Neb.
13	Aydan Dautermann	Jr.	CB	6-0	185	Hartford, Wis.	45	Boden Schiller	Fr.	LB	6-1	200	Volga, S.D.	86	Patrick Hoffmann	Sr.	WR	6-1	195	Naperville, Ill.
14	Colby Huerter	Sr.	S	6-1	205	Katy, Texas	46	Blake Leiferman	Fr.	TE	6-5	250	Kimball, S.D.	87	Davin Stoffel	R-Fr.	TE	6-6	250	Mosinee, Wis.
15	Devon Cole Jr.	Sr.	WR	5-10	185	Clermont, Fla.	47	Kytan Fyfe	So.	LB	6-2	210	Grand Island, Neb.	88	Greyton Gannon	So.	TE	6-4	235	Eagle, Wis.
15	Hudson Metcalf	Sr.	LB	6-2	215	Soldotna, Alaska	48	Jack Nash	Fr.	LB	6-1	185	Palmer, Alaska	90	Randy Keumogne	Sr.	DE	6-2	240	Oakdale, Minn.
16	Jack Henry	Fr.	QB	6																



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana defensive lineman Noah Kaschmitter (69) runs at halftime during the first round of the FCS playoffs between Montana and Tennessee State on Nov. 30 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

Kaschmitter grinds it out

Idaho native overcomes injuries, stays dedicated with academics to excel

FRANK GOGOLA
406 MT Sports

Noah Kaschmitter walked into head coach Bobby Hauck's office and told him he was quitting.

Not that he was quitting the football team. But he was drop-

ping out of school, which would effectively end his athletic career with the Montana Grizzlies.

Kaschmitter had loved football but not school. The classroom wasn't for him.

"I was sick of school," he said before Montana's second-round playoff game against South Dakota State at noon on Saturday in Brookings, South Dakota.

"I remember walking in there

and I was like, 'I'm done. I need to go to work.' I hated school. I just never really enjoyed it. I was ready to go to work."

Hauck and then-defensive line coach Barry Sacks talked Kaschmitter out of that choice and into sticking around. His parents back in Idaho were also influential in the decision reversal for the underclassman.

Kaschmitter put in the work

in the classroom and earned his bachelor's degree in sociology this past spring. He's now working on a criminology concentration.

He even made the Dean's List in spring 2024 for having a grade-point average greater than 3.5 but less than 4.0.

"I just got better at school," he said. "Everything with school got easier as I got in the groove with it. One day I just decided to put

my head down and start doing it. I was like, 'If I want to play football, I just got to do the school.'"

Kaschmitter stuck with school to stay academically eligible but was being slowed by injuries on the field. First, he had surgery on a torn shoulder during fall 2020 when the football season was postponed to the spring.

See KASCHMITTER, PAGE 7

Hayden enjoys final season

New Jersey native starts at nose tackle in 1st year after transferring to Griz

FRANK GOGOLA
406 MT Sports

Pat Hayden broke through with his first tackle for loss this season two weeks ago. He followed up with his first sack last week.

The sixth-year senior has been tasked with doing the dirty work in the middle of the D-line while replacing Alex Gubner, the 2023 Big Sky Conference defensive player of the year. He's played in all 13 games and started in 12 of them at nose tackle in his first year with the Grizzlies, tallying 12 tackles.

Hayden had joined Montana in the offseason for his final year of eligibility, choosing the Griz over FBS teams Ball State, Coastal Carolina, Eastern Michigan, Jacksonville State, Old Dominion and Western Kentucky. The native of Deptford, New Jersey, also had some offers from FCS teams.

Hayden — who has played at 6-foot-2 and 285 pounds this year — spent his first five years at Monmouth, which played in the Big South Conference and later in the Coastal Athletic Association. He totaled 60 tackles, nine tackles for loss and five sacks in 29 games.

Hayden sat down with 406 MT Sports prior to Montana's second-round playoff game against South Dakota State at noon MT on Saturday in Brookings, South Dakota. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Q: How have you been enjoying Missoula coming from the East Coast?

A: "I grew up 15 minutes outside of Philadelphia in South Jersey. Missoula is much, much different. Everything from just the mountains and the town. The people are so much nicer. I guess you could say nicer from where I am back home. I've loved every single second I've been here. It really has been such a different experience



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana defensive tackle Pat Hayden (99) celebrates with Montana defensive lineman Henry Nuce (96) during the first round of the FCS playoffs between Montana and Tennessee State on Nov. 30 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

from where I played college football at the previous five years. The fans here, the coaches here, everything about it, I've really fell in love with it. All of my friends and all my teammates have accepted me and treated me like a brother too. I'm just really grateful for all of that."

Q: You got your first tackle for loss against Montana State. What do you remember about that play and how did it feel to finally get that first one?

A: "We called the play and I knew my responsibility and I shot

off the ball. The Cat week is a ginormous week and I just tried to be the best me that I could be, play as hard as I can that week because I know how much it means to not only me and how much it means to all the Montana guys. We couldn't get the job done, but I made sure I just busted my ass off every single play. So that was just a cool play to remember in the Brawl of the Wild."

Q: How much did you know about Montana before coming out here?

A: "We (Monmouth) played

them in 2019 and I ended up coming out here. But, not really that much because I was focused on the CAA. I didn't really pay attention, but everybody knows about the Montanas, the Dakotas, the powerhouses of the FCS. So, I knew that they were a great school and a great team. But I didn't really know anything from how crazy the atmosphere or the fans or anything like that is and just how much the community loves us. So, that's been something that I've really enjoyed and really appreciated."

Q: Did you ever get to play in the playoffs with Monmouth?

A: "We played in the playoffs two years. Our first year, we beat Holy Cross my freshman year, and then we got waxed by JMU. James Madison beat us down pretty bad. That was with (quarterback) Ben DiNucci and that team. Then my second year, we made it to the playoffs, we ended up losing to Sam Houston State, who ended up winning the national championship that year during the COVID year. That was a close game (21-15) and I got to play against them."

Q: How much was Montana's run to the national title game last year an influence for you to come here and what does it mean to you to be part of another playoff team hoping to make a deep run?

A: "When they originally brought me in, I knew the piece that I was replacing in Gubner too. They made a big thing about it for me. I just wanted to play the best football as I possibly could. I had some FBS teams, but here, there's nothing like Missoula, Montana. There's nothing like playing for the Grizzlies. Our facilities, our stadium, our fans, it really is FBS-like. I was just trying to put my foot in the door and help the team as best as I can and just play my role and do what I have to do, and I feel like I've done that. I can't wait to go on a run with these guys because I know we can and we have the seniors to do it, and we have the team to do it. We just have to put it together, and that's really all that it is."

Q: How much pressure did you feel to replace the Big Sky defensive player of the year and how much has Alex Gubner helped you as he's been on the staff?

A: "Gub's been a great help ever since he's joined on staff. We meet every single day. Even before our meetings that we're supposed to

HOW WE SEE THE BIG SKY

406 MT Sports writers picking Cats to win, Griz to lose

BILL SPELTZ
406 MT Sports

The long and winding road for the Montana football team in 2024 has led back to a head-on collision with the team that spoiled its national championship dreams last January in Frisco, Texas.

The South Dakota State Jackrabbits may be seeded third, but they're the big bad wolf of the Football Championship Subdivision, according to NCAA.com. There's a playoff bracket with projections on that web site and it's the Jackrabbits, not the top-seeded Montana State Bob-

cats or the second-seeded North Dakota State Bison, that are pegged to win it all.

The only thing tougher than facing SDSU in Frisco — at least in recent years — is playing the Jackrabbits in their home digs. At least that would seem to be the case in 2024 as South Dakota State has posted a 6-0 mark at Dana J. Dykhouse Stadium.

Brookings, South Dakota, might best be described as a small cowboy town. At least that's how this sports writer remembers it from his only visit in the early 1980s. I made the mistake of not wearing a cowboy hat to a local watering hole and, for the only time in my life, I felt like I needed to go out and buy me a cowboy hat.

Anyway, the Jackrabbits have been wrangling the competition since suffering their only FCS loss at North Dakota State, 13-9, on Oct. 19. They edged fourth-seeded South Dakota — the team that handed NDSU its only FCS loss last week — in an overtime thriller on Oct. 26. From there they've reeled off four blowout wins behind veteran quarterback Mark Gronowski.

If Montana finds a way to stun SDSU on its home field, it would certainly be the greatest Griz road victory since I moved to



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana quarterback Logan Fife (12) scrambles past Tennessee State defensive back Boogie Trotter (1) and linebacker Ahmad Nelson (7) during Saturday's playoff game at Washington-Grizzly Stadium. The Grizzlies won, 41-27.

Missoula in 2007. That's saying a lot, because the Grizzlies have had some mighty memorable wins the past 17 years.

A lot of folks don't think the Griz stand a chance. I think they do if they can somehow muster 28 points and match the defensive effort they displayed in the first half against the unbeaten Bobcats two weeks ago. It may help that Montana had to prepare for Gronowski 11 months ago.

Watching your team compete as a heavy underdog is fun. The Griz have a rare opportunity and it will be exciting to watch it unfold.

Here's a look at Saturday's games involving Big Sky Conference teams (with seedings included):

No. 14 Montana (9-4) at No. 3 South Dakota State (10-2), noon, ESPN+. The Grizzlies probably won't have two special teams touchdowns like they did in their home playoff opener against Tennessee State. They're going to have to dig

in on defense and play their best offensive game since early November, running the football with consistency. The Jackrabbits had the best defense in the Missouri Valley Conference this season, allowing just 12.4 points per game on average. In contrast, the Griz defense allowed an average of 25.2 points per game. SDSU definitely played the tougher schedule, starting with Oklahoma State and Incarnate Word in nonconference action and then league games against North Dakota State and South Dakota. This game represents an opportunity for Montana to do something fans will remember for many, many years. But it's going to take a near-perfect performance. **Speltz:** Jackrabbits 35, Grizzlies 27. **Flores:** SDSU 34, Griz 17. **Gogola:** South Dakota State 28, Montana 13.

UT Martin (9-4) at No. 1 Montana State (12-0), 1 p.m., ESPN+. The Skyhawks whipped 16th-seeded New Hampshire on its home field last Saturday, 41-

10. They'll lose the wind beneath their wings in Bozeman this Saturday. Montana State's running attack will be too much for the visitors, who are used to playing in much warmer weather. I'll be interested to see how many of the three talented Bobcat running backs see action in the game. Two sat out in the Brawl of the Wild and Adam Jones picked up the slack. My hunch is Jones will get some help this week. **Speltz:** Bobcats 42, Skyhawks 21. **Flores:** Cats 38, UT Martin 14. **Gogola:** Montana State 35, UT Martin 14.

Lehigh (9-3) at No. 8 Idaho (9-3), 7 p.m., ESPN+. Lehigh had the most impressive comeback of the FCS playoffs last Saturday in knocking off No. 9 seed Richmond. Trailing 16-7 with under 11 minutes left, the Mountain Hawks' offense put up a pair of big plays in a 20-16 win. Still, Idaho has played a much tougher schedule this season and the Vandals are tough to beat in their dome. Remember, Idaho gave the mighty Oregon Ducks a decent game in late August, losing 24-14. Then Idaho beat FBS Wyoming and came within a whisker of winning at UC Davis in late September. The Vandals may not be as good as the top four seeds in the playoffs, but they'll earn a quarter-final rematch at MSU a week from Saturday. **Speltz:** Idaho 28, Lehigh 14. **Flores:** Idaho 27, Lehigh 13. **Gogola:** Idaho 31, Lehigh 13.

No. 12 Illinois State (10-3) at No. 5 UC Davis (10-2), 2 p.m., ESPN+. Although the Aggies are seeded highly, they barely escaped with a 42-39 win at Sacramento State in their final regular-season game. The question is: How much weight should we place on that game? Certainly Davis played Montana State tough in the Aggies' final regular-season home game, losing 30-28. But it took a monster comeback to make things interesting against the Cats. This has the makings of a close game and I could even see the Redbirds flying out of town with an upset win. I'll go with the Aggies simply because they're well-rested and playing at home. **Speltz:** Aggies 30, Redbirds 28. **Flores:** Davis 42, Illinois State 21. **Gogola:** UC Davis 34, Illinois State 24.

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



**BILL
SPELTZ**

64-15



**FRANK
GOGOLA**

64-15



**VICTOR
FLORES**

65-14

Hayden

From 4

meet, me and him watch film all the time. He does that with all the noses too. We all meet together. We have a really close group too. He's been a great help. I didn't really feel any pressure. I've played a lot of football, so I know the type of player that I am. I just knew that I had to go out there and be the best me that I could be and play my role and just try my hardest. At the end of the day, I just have to accept that for what it was. I just can't thank him enough for helping us out all the time. He's been a tremendous help."

Q: You're not getting a ton of stats in the middle of the line, so how have you embraced doing that dirty work?

A: "Somebody's got to



ANTONIO IBARRA OLIVARES, MISSOULIAN

Montana quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat (8) attempts to escape a blitz as offensive lineman Declan McCabe (75) gets stiff-armed by defensive tackle Pat Hayden (99) during the Griz spring game on April 12 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

do it. The O-line doesn't get any stats. It's just how it is, man. You have to do it, you have to do your job

and do your job to the best of your ability. We always say you have to do your 1/11th. That's pretty much

what I've embraced. That's what (D-line) coach (Mike) Linehan always harps on. You have to go out there

and be the best you that you can be and know that other guys are going to eat. At the end of the day, the

only thing that matters is the W in the stat column. That's all that really matters to me."

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Kaschmitter

From 3

He was then a backup D-lineman and special teams player in 2021 and 2022 before he tore the lower abductor muscle off the bone in his hip and missed most of 2023. The rehab went into the offseason, but he's returned to have the best statistical year of his career this fall.

The success in the classroom and on the field are both things for him to smile about.

"The main thing I'm most proud of is the school part," he said. "I never really thought I would be able to finish because school never really was my thing. Football is a grind too. I'm just proud I was able to do that."

Kaschmitter hadn't given college football much thought as he grew up with two older brothers and one older sister who were involved in sports but didn't play beyond high school themselves. Then he met Jeff Lindsley.

Lindsley is from Kaschmitter's hometown of Grangeville, Idaho, and played tight end at Boise State from 1985-88. He returned home to coach his alma mater, overlapping with a young Kaschmitter.

They had a conversation during high school football camp one fall. That talk stuck with Kaschmitter.

"I remember riding down to the gym with him in his rig," he recalled, "and he's like, 'Have you ever thought about playing college football?' I looked at him and was like, 'No.' I had the thought of school and was like, 'I don't really want to go to college.' He's like, 'You should probably rethink that.'"

Kaschmitter was proving it on the field. He was part of Grangeville's Class 2A state championship in 2015. He was later named the Central Idaho League's



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana defensive lineman Noah Kaschmitter (69) prays after the first round of the FCS playoffs between Montana and Tennessee State on Nov. 30 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

all-state player of the year in 2018 while playing running back and linebacker.

He worked his way to a college opportunity and signed with Montana in the 2019 recruiting class. He didn't join the team until the next season as he grayshirted that year, which he said was related to academic eligibility.

He spent that year working at Camas Gravel, a rock-crushing business run by his father and uncles. He'd sometimes start work as early as 4 a.m., he said, and then go lift and work out afterward to stay in shape for football.

He had worked at the family business in the summertime growing up and had come to love it. He was able to put to use life lessons he learned growing up in small-town Grangeville with its population of 3,617.

"Everyone knows everyone there, so it's pretty cool," he said. "It's like a logging town. A lot of blue-collar workers. I think it helped me out a lot because growing up in a small town, you're always working or finding work."

Kaschmitter didn't think he'd still be at Montana six years after signing with the Griz. He was taken aback when he realized he'll turn 25 this month.

He thought 2023 might be his final year because it would line up with his graduation from school. Then the injury that derailed that season made him want to come back and give it one more run.

"During that summer, I was lifting hard, gaining some weight and then that (injury) happened," he said. "I was like, 'I can't go down this way.' To only play in two games, I was like, 'I got to stay one more year and grind it out.'"

Kaschmitter did that in 2024 in what would become his final season of college. He was honored on senior day as one of 26 players who were recognized.

He played in front of a boatload of family members in his last regular-season home game. He even collected his first career sack that day. He added another sack two weeks later in his final home game.

He's posted career highs with 13 tackles, 2.5 tackles for loss and two sacks this year in nine games, including his first career start. He had 11 tackles and half a TFL in 21 games across his previous four seasons.

His time at Montana has fulfilled his hopes and dreams even though he couldn't have foreseen it

playing out like it did.

"Growing up in a small town, everyone wants to dream of playing college football," he said. "Then coming here, walking out of that tunnel on Saturdays when the stands are full, it's

been pretty cool."

Kaschmitter has another year of eligibility remaining if he wants to play. However, he has made up his mind to move on from football.

He's had too many injuries, including some that have forced him to miss games this year. It's been a challenge to stay healthy and put a full effort into practice every day.

His body hasn't been able to hold up as much as he'd like. He's heading into a manual labor job where using his body is of high importance. Still, he's glad he stuck with it.

"I'm pretty happy I did it because I didn't really play that much as a freshman and sophomore," he said. "To actually get to play now, it was pretty worth it. Now I can say I played some."

Kaschmitter isn't sure how much his degree will help him in his upcoming

job. But earning that is a point of pride.

The lessons of perseverance and hard work he gained can be applied beyond college. He's certainly come a long way from walking into Hauck's office prepared to quit.

"I proved that I could get through some hard times, stressful moments," he said. "When you're doing schoolwork and you got finals coming up and football at the same time, you got to make time somehow. You got to stay up late nights and then you got to wake up early and go lift."

"I proved to myself that I can just keep grinding."

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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