

CAL POLY AT MONTANA • KICKOFF: 2 P.M. SATURDAY • TV: MTN • THURSDAY, OCT. 9, 2025

GRIZZLY GAME DAY

Missoulian

TOUGH

Senior TJ Rausch
shaped by legendary
Lady Griz mother

ENOUGH

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Q&A WITH S DIEZEL WILKINSON, PAGE 3 • SPELTZ PICKS THE BIG SKY, PAGE 4 • ROSTERS, PAGE 5

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Rausch reaps rewards

Missoula native adds to family's legacy with Griz

FRANK GOGOLA | 406 MT Sports

TJ Rausch saw the football dribbling toward the north end zone at Washington-Grizzly Stadium and raced to secure it for Montana.

He scooped up the oblong ball at the goal line, just like he had done diving for loose basketballs on the hardwood growing up, and used his momentum to fall into the end zone. His first career score gave the Grizzlies a 28-7 lead over Indiana State on Sept. 20 in what would become a 63-20 win.

The play also netted the Missoula native and Sentinel grad the first six points of his Griz career in his fifth year on the team. It inched him closer to his mother, Ann Rausch, who had poured in 1,358 points while starring for the Lady Griz on the basketball court under her maiden name, Ann Lake.

"She pushed me so much," TJ said prior to No. 4 Montana's homecoming game against Cal Poly at 2 p.m. Saturday in Washington-Grizzly Stadium.

"She knew what it was like to be a college athlete, and she knew that was my dream and pushed me towards it and kind of gave me the mindset of what college athletics is like."

TJ had some understanding of how good a basketball player his mother was for the Lady Griz. He heard her talk about her time playing for UM after she led Missoula Big Sky to two high school state basketball championships while being an All-American and Montana Gatorade Player of the Year.

He also saw newspapers at his grandparents' house highlighting his mother, who was a Big Sky Conference

See RAUSCH, PAGE 6

Montana safety TJ Rausch (10) celebrates after he recovered a fumble for a touchdown during the college football game against Indiana State on Sept. 20 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. It was the first career touchdown in college for the Missoula native and Sentinel grad.

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN



WILKINSON MAKES AN INSTANT IMPACT

SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN

Montana safety Diezel Wilkinson (24) looks toward Grizzlies fans after a college football game against Idaho State on Oct. 4 at ICCU Dome in Pocatello, Idaho. The sophomore is in his first season at UM after he transferred from Idaho.

Idaho transfer starts as safety for Griz in sophomore season

CARSON CASHION | 406 MT Sports

There might not be a member of Montana's football team that savored the Grizzlies' recent top-10 win over Idaho more than sophomore safety Diezel Wilkinson.

The Spokane, Washington, native spent

his freshman year of college in Moscow, Idaho, competing in the Vandals' secondary. Wilkinson earned 12 total tackles in his freshman campaign before entering the transfer portal last December.

Montana announced the signing of the 6-foot, 193-pound safety on Dec. 19. Wilkinson logged seven total tackles in his first game at Wa-Griz against Central Washington, including five solo tackles. He recorded four total tackles against his former team Sept. 27 — two solo tackles — and a QB hurry, too.

Most recently, against Idaho State, he logged his first tackle for loss of the season

when he brought down Bengals running back Carson Sudbury. The play helped stall out ISU's drive, forcing a field goal try.

Wilkinson sat down with 406 MT Sports ahead of Montana's homecoming game against Cal Poly at 2 p.m. Saturday in Washington-Grizzly Stadium. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

Q: What was your recruitment process like coming out of high school?

A: I was a three-star recruit. I had a good amount of offers, both on offense and defense; receiver and safety. Ended up going to Idaho, played there as a true

freshman. I think I played in every game except for one. Then my coaching staff left, decided to get in the portal. I already had been offered here previously in high school, so it kind of just felt like I was picking up where I left off with the coaching staff.

Q: What made you stick with playing defense at the college level?

A: Really just the coaches had faith in me. They saw a high ceiling with me at defense, and I thought I would try it out and just put my trust in the coaches.

See WILKINSON, PAGE 7

HOW WE SEE THE BIG SKY

BILL SPELTZ | 406 MT Sports

You could argue Cal Poly, this week's opponent for the Montana Grizzlies, is the most improved team in the Big Sky Conference this season.

Even with the home loss in a close game against sixth-ranked UC Davis last Saturday, the argument is a strong one. The Mustangs won 32-24 at then-ranked Sacramento State a week earlier and have already matched their win total from last year.



**BILL
SPELTZ**

50-4



**CARSON
CASHION**

49-5



**FRANK
GOGOLA**

48-6



**VICTOR
FLORES**

47-7

coach Jim Harbaugh's staff with the San Francisco 49ers in 2012. The three-time Big Sky Coach of the Year (2001, 2004 and 2005) got the signature win he desperately needed over Sac State and it no

Cal Poly has at least two more games that it will enter as the favorite. The Mustangs host hapless Portland State on Nov. 1 and struggling Eastern Washington on Nov. 22. Their game at Idaho State on Nov. 8 looks like a toss-up — at least at this point — and they'll be the underdog this week along with Oct. 25 against Montana State and Nov. 15 against Northern Arizona.

Cal Poly certainly has a proven leader in head coach Paul Wulff. The former Washington State and EWU skipper, who was tapped to lead the Mustangs after the 2022 season, has 28 years of college coaching experience.

Wulff's first season (2023) wasn't exactly a big success. His only wins came over non-scholarship San Diego, unaffiliated Lincoln (California) and Northern Colorado. Last year wasn't much to brag about either, with Cal Poly's only wins coming against NCAA Division II Western Oregon, Northern Colorado and a Sac State team that was in disarray.

That's why this season has been such a pleasant surprise for the Mustangs under Wulff, who was on



SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN

Montana wide receiver Michael Wortham (6) heads upfield during last Saturday's game at Idaho State. The fourth-ranked Grizzlies will host Cal Poly this Saturday.

doubt gave him breathing room in his bid for an extended stay in San Luis Obispo.

The September game at Sac State was a roller-coaster ride. The Mustangs raced to an 18-7 lead sparked by a pick-6 by Brian Dukes. The Hornets responded with two-straight touchdowns to claim a 21-18 lead before Cal Poly scored with 2:06 left before halftime and stayed in front for the duration.

Sac State hurt itself with three interceptions. Neither team was particularly effective on third-down conversions but the Mustangs played solid defense when it mattered most down the stretch.

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

Cal Poly (1-1, 3-3) at No. 4 Montana (2-0, 5-0), 2 p.m. TV: Scripps Sports. Should we be concerned about the Griz defense after it surrendered 38 points at Idaho State last Saturday? Or should we just salute the Bengals' offense for being exceptional? It's on the minds of a lot of Montana fans and probably even a few Griz coaches with tougher foes ahead. The Mustangs have proven they can put points on the board. They have scored almost as many as the Griz (182-212) and they've played a tough schedule that included Utah on Sept. 6. Still, Montana's defense has been tough at home with its crowd support. That crowd can usually

be relied on for multiple motion penalties on the visiting team. **Speltz:** Montana 31, Cal Poly 27. **Cashion:** Montana 38, Cal Poly 21. **Gogola:** Montana 41, Cal Poly 27. **Flores:** Griz 41, Cal Poly 24.

Idaho State (1-1, 2-4) at No. 5 Montana State (2-0, 4-2), 1 p.m. TV: The Spot-MTN. The Bobcats, and their defense in particular, were impressive last Saturday at Northern Arizona. That defense will be put to the test against a Bengals passing attack that humbled the Montana defense until the very end last Saturday when the Griz stopped a potential game-winning TD. Consider that Montana State has allowed only 109 points this year and if you take out the blowout loss at FBS powerhouse Oregon, the Cats have allowed 50 in four games against decent FCS competition. Idaho State impressed me with its passing game last weekend. That was until the final drive when, after the Bengals reached the Montana 20-yard line, the coaches opted for questionable home run-or-bust passes into the end zone. In my opinion, the ISU coaches froze even more than the players. Idaho State will be unable to rise to the occasion this week in Bozeman the way it did last week at home. **Speltz:** Bobcats 48, Bengals 21. **Cashion:** Montana State 42, Idaho State 17. **Gogola:** MSU 38, ISU 23. **Flores:** Cats 45, ISU 17.

Northern Colorado (0-1, 2-3) at No. 11 Idaho (0-1, 2-3), 3 p.m. TV: ESPN+. I don't consider the Vandals the 11th-best team in the nation. The ranking is too high. Their only two wins have come against St. Thomas and Utah Tech. They earned a lot of respect by staying close with Washington State on opening week and San Jose State on Sept. 20, but losses are losses. Then they couldn't get it done against Montana in Missoula, dropping a 41-30 decision. Idaho will win this week coming off a bye against the Bears, but until the Vandals beat a team that's in the FCS rankings, call me a doubter. **Speltz:** Vandals 27, Bears 17. **Cashion:** Idaho 28, Northern Colorado 13. **Gogola:** Idaho 31, Northern Colorado 21. **Flores:** Idaho 21, UNC 17.

No. 14 Northern Arizona (1-1, 4-2) at No. 6 UC Davis (2-0, 4-1), 5 p.m. TV: ESPN+. The Aggies' only loss came against the Washington Huskies in Seattle. That's worth noting along with the fact they led Mercer in their road debut before the game was called because of weather. Davis will get its stiffest FCS test this week and will be up to the task in front of a healthy home crowd. The Lumberjacks looked vulnerable defensively against Montana State last week. Look for Davis, which had a nice win at improved Cal Poly last week, to put up big numbers against NAU this week. **Speltz:** Aggies 34, Lumberjacks 24. **Cashion:** UC Davis 38, Northern Arizona 31. **Gogola:** UC Davis 35, NAU 30. **Flores:** Davis 27, NAU 24.

Sacramento State (0-1, 2-3) at Weber State (0-1, 2-3), 6 p.m. TV: ESPN+. While both teams have a losing record, the Hornets have looked better. They pushed second-ranked South Dakota State in their debut before losing in Brookings, 20-3. A week later, they nearly knocked off Nevada in Reno, dropping a 20-17 decision. Mark my word: Sac State will take a two-game win streak into its home game against the Grizzlies on Oct. 24. Weber State, on the other hand, has given up 192 points this season and will probably surrender more than 30 this Saturday. **Speltz:** Hornets 32, Wildcats 23. **Cashion:** Sac State 31, Weber State 20. **Gogola:** Sac State 34, Weber State 28. **Flores:** Sac 35, Weber 28.

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

MONTANA GRIZZLIES ROSTER

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

CAL POLY MUSTANGS

No.	Name	Year	Position	Height	Weight	Hometown	20	Kenny Olson	R-Jr.	LB	6-1	225	Pleasanton, Calif.	58	Thomas Bouda	R-Sr.	DL	6-2	270	Newport Beach, Calif.
0	Darren Barkins	R-Sr.	CB	5-11	170	Spring Valley, Calif.	20	Troy Wilson	R-Fr.	RB	5-7	170	San Bernardino, Calif.	59	Tyler Charbonneau	R-Sr.	OL	6-2	285	Pittsburg, Calif.
0	Logan Booher	Sr.	WR	6-1	200	Long Beach, Calif.	21	Troy Fletcher	R-Jr.	RB	5-9	180	Huntington Beach, Calif.	60	Ethan Rodriguez	R-Sr.	DL	6-3	280	Whittier, Calif.
1	Jeremiah Bernard	So.	S	6-0	195	Modesto, Calif.	21	CJ Solis-Lumar	Fr.	CB	6-1	185	Los Angeles, Calif.	61	Abu Fofanah	Fr.	OL	6-4	305	Freetown, Sierra Leone
1	Anthony Grigsby Jr.	R-Jr.	QB	5-11	195	Stockton, Calif.	22	Paul Holyfield Jr.	R-Jr.	RB	6-0	200	Los Angeles, Calif.	62	Jonathan Ybarra	Fr.	OL	6-1	305	Sanger, Calif.
2	Troy Bean	R-So.	LB	6-4	215	Temecula, Calif.	22	Misa Paiau	R-Fr.	LB	6-0	225	Pavaiaai, American Samoa	65	Leif Magnuson	Gr.	OL	6-4	285	Saskatchewan, Canada
2	Antoine Sullivan	R-Jr.	WR	6-1	180	Hemet, Calif.	23	SJ Gentle	Fr.	CB	5-11	170	Palmdale, Calif.	66	Kamani Fifita	R-Fr.	OL	6-3	310	San Leandro, Calif.
3	Ethan Calvert	R-Sr.	LB	6-3	215	Westlake Village, Calif.	23	Tyrei Washington	R-Jr.	RB	5-10	215	Stockton, Calif.	69	Enzo Hall	R-Fr.	OL	6-2	300	Camarillo, Calif.
3	Bo Kelly	R-Jr.	QB	6-0	195	Dana Point, Calif.	24	Amarion Orange	Fr.	CB	6-0	175	Moreno Valley, Calif.	70	Charlie Adams	So.	OL	6-3	310	Los Angeles, Calif.
4	Jaedon Matthews	R-Fr.	RB	5-11	185	Scottsdale Ariz.	24	Michael Otterstedt	R-Sr.	TE	6-3	230	Vacaville, Calif.	71	Anthony Patt	Gr.	OL	6-4	285	San Marcos, Calif.
4	Calvin Moore	So.	CB	5-10	180	Moreno Valley, Calif.	25	Logan Carpenter	Fr.	DB	6-0	195	West Hills, Calif.	72	Matthew Mena	Jr.	OL	6-4	290	Huntington Beach, Calif.
5	Tayten Beyer	R-Fr.	CB	5-11	180	Corona, Calif.	26	Malachi Brown	R-Fr.	RB	5-9	190	Moreno Valley, Calif.	73	Dawson Kerezi	Fr.	OL	6-4	280	Livermore, Calif.
5	Jordan Garrison	R-So.	WR	6-2	190	Santa Clarita, Calif.	26	Tayden Phillips	R-So.	CB	5-11	180	San Jose, Calif.	74	Jasdev Banwait	R-Jr.	OL	6-4	295	Elk Grove, Calif.
6	Fidel Pitts	Jr.	WR	6-0	190	Stockton, Calif.	27	Hudson Giarritta	Fr.	WR	6-2	190	Sonoma, Calif.	75	Tanner Hirschler	R-Jr.	OL	6-3	290	Fresno, Calif.
6	Justus Woods	So.	CB	6-0	180	Oceanside, Calif.	28	Carson Kuhl	Gr.	WR	5-9	180	Westlake Village, Calif.	76	Trevor Newkirk	R-Fr.	OL	6-7	300	Ladera Ranch, Calif.
7	Ty Dieffenbach	R-So.	QB	6-6	220	Calabasas, Calif.	29	Jace Gomes	Fr.	LB	6-3	200	San Luis Obispo, Calif.	78	Racin Delgatty	R-So.	OL	6-3	300	La Cañada Flintridge, Calif.
7	Jake East	R-Jr.	S	5-11	195	Agoura Hills, Calif.	30	Boston Wilson	R-Jr.	CB	6-2	190	Pomona, Calif.	79	Miles Medina	R-So.	OL	6-7	305	Ventura, Calif.
8	Kian Salehi	R-So.	WR	6-0	185	Tarzana, Calif.	31	Kane Cooks	Fr.	DB	6-1	205	Atascadero, Calif.	80	Cal Zimmerman	R-Fr.	WR	6-2	180	Bellevue, Wash.
8	DeMel Turner	R-So.	S	6-1	185	Lemoore, Calif.	32	Mason Rivera	R-Jr.	S	6-0	190	Tracy, Calif.	81	Myles Tarkington	Fr.	WR	6-3	170	Compton, Calif.
9	Brian Dukes Jr.	Sr.	S	6-3	205	Spring Valley, Calif.	33	Spencer Moore	R-Sr.	LS	6-3	225	Ventura, Calif.	82	Maurie Phillips-Porter	Fr.	WR	6-1	170	Ukiah, Calif.
9	Brooks Wheatley	R-So.	WR	5-11	175	Stockton, Calif.	34	Kendric Sanders	R-So.	RB	5-9	190	San Francisco, Calif.	84	Nic Sani	Gr.	TE	6-6	265	Turlock, Calif.
10	Michael Briscoe	R-Sr.	WR	6-2	205	Vacaville, Calif.	35	Jesse Ehrlich	R-Jr.	P	6-2	200	Melbourne, Australia	85	Alek Marshall	So.	TE	6-7	240	Menlo Park, Calif.
10	Victory Johnson	R-So.	DL	6-4	250	San Diego, Calif.	36	Josue Lopez	R-Fr.	K	6-1	180	Arroyo Grande, Calif.	86	Brady Pohl	Fr.	WR	5-9	160	San Marcos, Calif.
11	J.T. Houston	R-Fr.	DL	6-2	230	Long Beach, Calif.	37	Gianluca Dimauro	R-Jr.	K	6-2	195	Petaluma, Calif.	87	Aaron Okoro	Gr.	WR	6-4	210	Long Beach, Calif.
11	Savion Taylor	Fr.	WR	6-0	180	Oxnard, Calif.	38	Noah Serna	R-Jr.	K	6-2	200	Riverside, Calif.	87	Kaleb Pleis	Fr.	DL	6-5	210	Danville, Calif.
12	Jackson Atkins	R-So.	QB	6-2	205	Phoenix, Ariz.	39	Caden Rose	R-Fr.	TE	6-0	240	Temecula, Calif.	88	Reese Brooks	Fr.	TE	6-4	220	Round Rock, Texas
12	Gage Burnett	R-Fr.	LB	6-1	220	Ladera Ranch, Calif.	40	Matthew Nuanez	R-Sr.	DL	6-3	240	San Diego, Calif.	89	Tyler Hoffman	R-Jr.	TE	6-4	240	Diablo, Calif.
13	Kresean Kizzy	R-So.	CB	5-10	160	Bakersfield, Calif.	41	Anthony Navarro	Fr.	DL	6-5	220	Apple Valley, Calif.	90	Bobby Piland Jr.	R-So.	DL	6-1	285	Rocklin, Calif.
13	Sam Wulff	Fr.	QB	6-0	200	Arroyo Grande, Calif.	42	Jake Javorsky	R-Fr.	LB	5-11	220	Laguna Hills, Calif.	91	Chase Brackney	R-So.	DL	6-4	285	Greenwood Village, Colo.
15	Budha Boyd Jr.	R-So.	CB	5-11	175	Pittsburg, Calif.	43	Caden Ritchie	Fr.	S	6-1	185	Visalia, Calif.	92	Jake Vorhees	R-Fr.	DL	6-3	225	Carlsbad, Calif.
15	Sam Hedrick	Sr.	TE	6-3	245	Charlotte, N.C.	44	Mikay D'Amato	Jr.	LB	6-0	230	Mission Viejo, Calif.	93	Manaalii Danielson	Fr.	DL	6-2	255	Stockton, Calif.
16	Lucas Razore	R-Fr.	QB	6-0	175	Bellevue, Wash.	47	Brayden Breedlove	R-Fr.	CB	6-1	185	Danville, Calif.	94	Ish Taliauli	R-So.	DL	6-1	270	Seattle, Wash.
16	Ethan Torres	R-So.	DB	5-11	160	Lafayette, Calif.	49	Julius Jordan	R-Jr.	DL	6-2	250	Sacramento, Calif.	95	Antonio Vakameilalo	R-Sr.	DL	6-0	275	Mountain View, Calif.
17	Makai Puga	Jr.	WR	5-10	185	Arroyo Grande, Calif.	50	Jacob Bobic	R-Fr.	DL	6-1	270	Wilmington, Calif.	96	Mason Barbour	R-Sr.	DL	6-2	265	Templeton, Calif.
17	Richie Watts	R-Jr.	LB	6-3	210	Rocklin, Calif.	51	Will Plemons	R-Fr.	DL	6-2	235	Fresno, Calif.	97	Noah Sacuskie	Fr.	DL	6-3	225	Modesto, Calif.
18	Josiah Lamarque	R-Fr.	WR	5-10	180	Newport Beach, Calif.	52	Cole Fuller	Fr.	OL	6-1	275	Temecula, Calif.	98	Luke Westfall	Fr.	DL	6-2	250	San Diego, Calif.
19	Zion Hall	R-Sr.	RB	5-8	180	Bakersfield, Calif.	54	Hayden Jones	R-Jr.	OL	6-2	275	Stockton, Calif.	99	Josh Ngaluafe	R-Sr.	DL	6-2	300	Sacramento, Calif.
19	Shane Ramstad	Fr.	LB	6-3	205	Vista, Calif.	55	Tristan Fui	R-Fr.	OL	6-2	295	Utulea West, American Samoa							

RAUSCH

Continued from page 2

MVP and honorable mention All-American. He even correctly recalled that she scored 36 points against Boise State in 1994 as a senior, which she did on 16 made field goals, still tops in program history.

He saw even more of her dominance in highlight packages when she was inducted into the Grizzly Sports Hall of Fame in 2022. The toughness she displayed while pulling down a still-program-record 338 offensive rebounds in her career was something he had seen her try to instill in him growing up.

“My mom is all about toughness,” he said. “Any time you’re hurt, she’d make you know that you weren’t that hurt. Just kind of that get-up mentality, injured vs. hurt for sure.”

“Football’s not a game of softness, so you got to be tough to play this game.”

TJ began to develop the toughness that has benefitted him as a Griz safety before he even got started in tackle football in fourth grade. Basketball was his first love, which stemmed in part from his mother’s history with the game.

She was a 6-foot forward for UM. He was more of a guard growing up. But he wasn’t afraid to get down in the post to battle for boards, set screens or draw charges while playing basketball on an AAU team and for the Spartans.

He first learned basketball fundamentals from his mother on the court at The Peak. They’d butt heads when he was a kid, he said, but he came to recognize she was right when he got older. The lessons also translated to football.

“The toughness part for sure and then being a leader and a team guy,” he said. “It’s never about yourself. It’s about the team. She definitely instilled that in me as well.”

TJ was open to playing college basketball like his mother before the Griz came through with a football offer ahead of his senior season. That fall, he helped the Spartans end a 48-year state title drought with a roster that included 12 players who went on to join an NCAA Division I football team.

Also like his mother, TJ decided to stay home in the Garden City. She picked Robin Selvig’s Lady Griz over the Pac-10 Arizona Wildcats and a host of other Big Sky Conference teams. He chose Bobby Hauck’s Griz over offers from D-II and in-state NAIA programs.

He dreamed of playing for the Griz while he grew up watching Butte native Colt Anderson go from walk-on to All-



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana safety TJ Rausch (10) reaches for a tackle on Central Washington running back Beau Phillips (14) during the college football game on Sept. 6 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. The senior is in his first season as a regular starter for the Grizzlies.

American safety. He also learned about Tim Hauck, a former Griz safety who was nicknamed “Hitter.”

“That kind of mentality was just built into me — a hard-nosed football player — I think for sure getting to watch those guys as a kid,” he said. “It was obviously my dream to play here as a kid.”

TJ arrived at UM in 2021 hearing people ask him if he was going to be an all-time great like his mother. He tried to not let any pressure get to him as a two-star receiver who was moved to defense when he redshirted that first season.

A lack of confidence struck him as a redshirt freshman in 2022 while he was a special teams contributor. He started to rediscover that confidence in 2023 as a sophomore and felt he had fully recovered it last year as a junior.

Both his parents gave him advice to help keep up his confidence. Even with some down days, he believed increased playing time would one day come. He was going to

stick it out. His mother didn’t raise a quitter. “That too for sure,” he said. “There’s no quit in our family.”

TJ looked up to nickel TraJon Cotton, who he backed up in 2023, and strong safety Ryder Meyer, who he backed up in 2024. He even took lessons from former safeties Nash Fouch and Robby Hauck.

His biggest challenge was being more consistent on a play-to-play basis over the years. He got a big boost from Tim Hauck, who had joined the coaching staff in 2023 and has been his position coach for the past two seasons.

This fall, he has gotten off to his best start to a season statistically and is on pace to have a career year.

“Coach Tim has been a huge supporter of me and shaped who I am,” he said. “I’m so grateful for him.”

Before TJ joined his mother as a point scorer and regular starter for the Griz this year, he matched her as an All-Big Sky honoree last year. He earned second-team

recognition as a special teams contributor.

He has also been a three-time Academic All-Big Sky selection while he earned his bachelor’s degree in accounting. He’s now working on his master’s degree in accounting while wanting to become a certified public accountant, following his grandfather’s career path.

In following his mother’s athletic footsteps, he’s proud to have added to the family’s legacy as their second D-I player.

“It’s everything that I dreamed of it being,” he said of playing for the Griz. “Each Saturday night in that stadium is crazy. It’s awesome.”

“It’s been a dream. It’s cool to be able to keep the legacy going. Hopefully in the future the legacy continues.”

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.

WILKINSON

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Q: Where do you feel you grew the most in your year in Moscow?

A: Definitely just football I.Q., you know. I went to a smaller high school in Washington where I kind of just got handed the ball every play and got told to run. So getting to college was definitely an eye opener of what it takes to be a student of the game.

Q: So the primary reason you transferred from Idaho was the departure of the coaching staff?

A: Yeah, that coaching staff left, I didn't really want to live in Albuquerque (where former Idaho head coach Jason Eck now coaches), and I just thought I would start a new chapter. This was the place to do it.

Q: Who from the Griz were you in contact with once you entered the portal?

A: (Quarterbacks) coach (Brent) Pease offered me previously when I was in high school, when I had a wide receiver offer here. When he found out I got in the portal, he was the first one to call me up, just because I already had a relationship

with him in high school. And then he kind of set me up with (safeties) coach Tim (Hauck), and it just went from there.

Q: You registered seven tackles in the season opener against CWU. What were the emotions like of your first game at Wa-Griz?

A: I had never gotten to play in this stadium, I had never seen a game in this stadium, so all I've heard was just my teammates talk about it. When I finally got out there to play, it was a really, really crazy feeling. Just lots of lots of emotion going on, lots of lots of excitement, it's really fun to play here.

Q: How's it compare to the Kibbie Dome?

A: I mean, we sold out the Kibbie Dome a good amount of times over there. But nothing can compare to this stadium. I mean, this is the Mecca of FCS football for a reason.

Q: Does it get louder at Wa-Griz?

A: Oh, way louder, way louder.

Q: Had the game against Idaho been circled on your calendar at all?

A: I mean, I definitely look forward to every game we play. That one was definitely one that I had my eyes open for. I'm just glad that we could be on the winning side.

Q: What were the feelings like playing against your old teammates?

A: I still love all those guys. I got to play against some of my roommates and just old teammates, which is always fun. Good amount of banter back and forth, but it's all out of love. It was good to see those guys again, and I'm glad I can send them on a bus home with a good score on our side.

Q: Was that your first trophy you've held after a rivalry win?

A: When I was at Idaho, we played Idaho State for the potato trophy, so I got to hold that one. But this was the first one where it really meant something to me.

Q: If you had to rank Missoula, Moscow and Spokane, how would you order them?

A: I mean, I'm loving Missoula right now. I really, really do love everything about it. The community is great. The fans are amazing. The people are kind and the football is really good over here. So I'll have to put Missoula one. Spokane second, just because I was born and raised there, that's just my roots. And then Moscow at the bottom.

Q: What's your favorite thing in Missoula you didn't have in Moscow?

A: Twenty thousand fans in the stadium, that's something that we didn't have in Moscow. Scheels, I guess, and Big Dipper ice cream. I live for Big Dipper ice cream, I love it.

Q: What's your go-to flavor at Big Dipper?

A: Just good old chocolate.

Q: What was the process like of adjusting to Missoula after never having lived here before?

A: It was really, really easy, especially being from Spokane. It's not too far of a drive, so I've been around this area before. My sister played basketball at Carroll, so I've kind of passed through the area plenty of times. When I got to that locker room, it really just clicked and felt like family.

Q: What are your favorite food spots in Missoula?

A: I like Plaza Azteca, and then Big Dipper again. I'll tell you, every time they bring it out for pre-game meal, I have to grab, like, three of them. And then probably Pie Hole.

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



SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN

Montana safety Diezel Wilkinson (24) warms up before a college football game against Idaho State on Oct. 4 at ICCU Dome in Pocatello, Idaho. The sophomore is from Spokane, Washington.

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