

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

GRIZZLY GAME DAY

Missoulian

TOUGH ENOUGH

Senior TJ Rausch
shaped by legendary
Lady Griz mother

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

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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



BILL SPELTZ

50-4



CARSON CASHION

49-5



FRANK GOGOLA

48-6



VICTOR FLORES

47-7

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



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.

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MONTANA GRIZZLIES ROSTER

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

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 Barksins | R-Sr. | CB | 5-11 | 170 | Spring Valley, Calif. | 20 | Trey Wilson | R-Fr. | RB | 5-7 | 170 | San Bernardino, Calif. | 59 | Tyler Charbonneau | R-Sr. | OL | 6-2 | 285 | Pittsburgh, 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 | Pavaiiai, 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 Kerezsi | 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 Giaritta | 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 | | | | | | | | | | | | |

GRIZZLY GAME DAY | MONTANA VS. CAL POLY

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@406mstsports.com.

WILKINSON

Continued from page 3

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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