

# GRIZZLY GAME DAY

Missoulian



## LAWLER

Senior Kenzel Lawler  
adds to family's proud  
football tradition

## LEGACY

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Q&A WITH LB CALEB OTLEWSKI, PAGE 3 • SPELTZ PICKS THE BIG SKY, PAGE 4 • ROSTERS, PAGE 5

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# SPIRIT OF THE LAWLER

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana cornerback Kenzel Lawler (8) runs back an intercepted pass during the game against Cal Poly on Oct. 11 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. The California native got his first career interception in his sixth season of college football.

## SoCal native hones mental game as he excels at cornerback

FRANK GOGOLA  
406 MT Sports

Kenzel Lawler dropped back a few yards after the snap, saw the throw coming his way, jumped in front of Cal Poly receiver Michael Briscoe and

picked off the pass near the 20-yard line at Washington-Grizzly Stadium.

The Montana cornerback finally got the first interception of his career in his 35th game and sixth season in college across two teams. He then returned to his California high school quarterback roots to score the Grizzlies' first pick-6 since 2023 as he sparked a 28-9 comeback win on Oct. 11 in Missoula.

As he ran the ball down the visitor sideline and into the north end zone, that was the type of play Lawler had dreamt of since he followed his father and brother's footsteps

into college football in 2020. It's now the most memorable play of his career so far as he's into the second half of his senior season.

"That is my greatest moment in college sports," he said ahead of No. 4 Montana's game against Sacramento State at 8:30 p.m. MT Friday in Sacramento, California. "It's going to be one that sticks with me forever.

"It was a little bit of everything. It was excitement. It was definitely happiness. It was relief. And it was just pure joy. For me, it was huge just to be able to finally have a moment like that."

Lawler scored that touchdown while wearing Montana's No. 8 jersey. That number is special to him because it's the same one his father, Kenneth Lawler, donned while playing cornerback for the Oregon Ducks in the late 1970s.

He has looked up to his father, who had made football coaching stops at Boise State, Mt. San Antonio College, Pasadena City College and San Bernardino Valley College. Kenneth is currently coaching junior college track and field.

Please see **LAWLER**, Page 6

# OTLEWSKI MAKING BIG PLAYS

Texas native is in first season as starting LB

**CARSON CASHION**  
406 MT Sports

**A** week-to-week starter in Montana's linebacker room, Caleb Otlewski appears to be heating up as the season progresses.

A Melissa, Texas, native who spent his redshirt season with the San Diego State Aztecs, Otlewski registered a season-high six total tackles in Montana's win over Sacred Heart last week. He also logged four solo tackles, which tied a season high he recorded against Central Washington in the opener.

Two weeks ago, donning the copper and gold for the Grizzlies' homecoming game against Cal Poly, the 6-foot-4, 241-pound linebacker secured his first turnover of the season. As the Mustangs drove down the field in the first quarter, reaching the UM 16-yard line, Otlewski dropped back in coverage on second down and drifted to his left to intercept Cal Poly quarterback Ty Dieffenbach's throw.

The play helped keep the Mustangs scoreless in the first quarter, a crucial stop as Montana's offense worked to find its groove.

*Otlewski sat down with 406 MT Sports ahead of No. 4 Montana's road contest against Sacramento State at 8:30 p.m. Saturday in Sacramento, California. This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.*

**Q: As one of the returning faces in the Griz linebacker room, what was the process of finding your groove early on in the offseason and fall camp?**

**A:** I think it was a competition at the beginning — honestly, I wouldn't even say it was competition. I think it was just work and seeing who's gonna be able to fulfill that spot, who's gonna get it done. I feel like we're all really good, we have some guys who have special abilities. Some have different skill sets than others, but they all benefit the same thing, if that makes sense. We all bring something to the table.



**BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN**

Montana linebacker Caleb Otlewski (45) tackles Sacred Heart quarterback Jack Snyder (14) during the college football game on Oct. 18 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. Otlewski had a career-high six tackles in the 43-21 win.

# HOW WE SEE THE BIG SKY

**BILL SPELTZ** | 406 MT Sports

**C**razy things happen at Hornet Stadium and the Montana football team needs to be ready for one of its toughest tests of the season Friday night against Sacramento State.

That may seem like a wacky notion given the Hornets' loss at home to Cal Poly in late September. After all, Montana handled Cal Poly in impressive fashion two weeks ago, 28-9.

Still, longtime Griz fans know from memory the Hornets put forth their best when Montana comes to town. Three years ago, UM took a 5-1 record to Sacramento and left with a shiner, losing 31-24 in overtime. Six years ago, the Grizzlies took a 5-1 record to Sacramento and lost handily, 44-29.

But this year's undefeated Grizzlies are special, right? Uh, well, they didn't look so special last time they hit the road, escaping with a 42-38 win in a game they trailed most of the way against heavy underdog Idaho State.

Montana has been good against the run but may have its hands full with Sac State's running game.

The Hornets use an offense created by their first-year head coach, Brennan Marion, called the "Go-Go" offense. It's an uptempo, run-heavy scheme with two running backs sometimes aligned on the same side of the quarterback. The goal is to force defenses to be out of position and wear them down.

It didn't work so well in the season opener when the Hornets lost at second-ranked South Dakota State, 20-3. It wasn't

clicking a week later either when Sac State lost at Nevada, 20-17 — although the Hornets did turn some heads by playing the Wolf Pack and Jackrabbits close.



**BILL  
SPELTZ**

**57-6**



**CARSON  
CASHION**

**55-8**



**FRANK  
GOGOLA**

**53-10**



**VICTOR  
FLORES**

**52-11**



**BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN**

Montana quarterback Keali'i Ah Yat (8) runs past Sacred Heart linebacker Kyle Hall (6) during last Saturday's game at Washington-Grizzly Stadium.

The "Go-Go" has been quite effective since then, with the exception of that 32-24 home loss to Cal Poly. Opponents are forced to respect the Hornets' league-leading run game and it opens things up for play-action passes.

Then there's the intangibles that make Friday night so intriguing. Sac State is not used to playing on ESPN2 as often as Montana, so you know the hosts are going to be sky-high and motivated to do something special in front of a national television audience.

In my 20 years since landing in Montana and covering Big Sky Conference football, I've noticed a few things about California FCS teams:

They go largely unnoticed in their home state, which is the polar opposite for FCS teams from the Treasure State. Maybe that's partially why Golden State FCS teams sometimes fold up their tents by mid-season — very few fans are watching anyway. Likewise, California FCS teams generally play well when they know a lot of folks are watching.

Regardless, Friday night is must-see television. The Grizzlies will want to prove to themselves they can whip a good team on the road. Sac State will want to give the Griz a run for their money in the Hornets' final Big Sky season.

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

**No. 4 Montana (4-0, 7-0) at Sacramento State (2-1, 4-3), Friday at**

**8:30 p.m. TV: ESPN2.** The Hornets trailed early in the fourth quarter at home last week against Northern Colorado (3-4) before escaping with a win, 40-35. That leads one to believe they're vulnerable heading into Friday's game. On the other hand, the Griz had a rough patch in last Saturday's home win over upset-minded Sacred Heart. Early in the fourth quarter it was a one-score game before UM pulled away. For all Montana has accomplished with its perfect record, you still can't help but wonder if they're capable of steamrolling a team like Sac State in California. Something tells me Friday is going to be close but Montana will prevail, leaning on its stout run defense and strong conditioning. **Speltz:** Grizzlies 32, Hornets 30. **Cashion:** Montana 45, Sacramento State 28. **Gogola:** Montana 49, Sac State 27. **Flores:** Griz 35, Sac 31.

**No. 5 Montana State (3-0, 5-2) at Cal Poly (1-2, 3-4), 6 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Bobcats have won five in a row and haven't allowed more than 14 points in any of those wins. Something tells me the Mustangs, who managed just nine points in their most recent game at Montana, won't be able to score enough to stun Montana State. The Cats have allowed only 123 points total, which is the fewest among Big Sky teams. And lately MSU has been racking up the points, averaging 46 in their past three outings. Both Montana State and Cal Poly are well-rested coming off bye weeks, so we'll see which coaching staff made the

most of the layoff. **Speltz:** Bobcats 38, Mustangs 10. **Cashion:** Montana State 38, Cal Poly 17. **Gogola:** Cats 35, Poly 10. **Flores:** Cats 31, Mustangs 7.

**No. 6 UC Davis (3-0, 5-1) at Northern Colorado (1-2, 3-4), 1 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Bears have made an amazing leap since finishing 1-11 last season. They had the big win at previously ranked Idaho two weeks ago, but that victory doesn't look as impressive after the Vandals dropped a game at Eastern Washington last Saturday. Davis has won four in a row and its 45-24 win over 20th-ranked Northern Arizona two weeks ago makes you wonder if maybe the Aggies are on the same level as the Grizzlies and Bobcats. We'll get a chance to find out, at least as far as the Cats are concerned, when Davis visits Bozeman on Nov. 15. In the meantime, the Aggies shouldn't have too much trouble winning their next three games. **Speltz:** Aggies 41, Bears 27. **Cashion:** UC Davis 42, Northern Colorado 38. **Gogola:** Davis 38, Bears 27. **Flores:** Davis 42, UNC 27.

**Eastern Washington (2-1, 3-4) at Weber State (1-2, 3-4), 1 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** This is the toughest one of the week to call. Both teams beat doormat Portland State over the past two weeks, for what it's worth. What's more noteworthy to me is that the Eagles dropped previously ranked Idaho last Saturday in Cheney. They'll take momentum and confidence into Ogden and put up a high point total against an inconsistent Weber defense. **Speltz:** Eagles 35, Wildcats 28. **Cashion:** Eastern Washington 24, Weber State 20. **Gogola:** Eags 34, Wildcats 24. **Flores:** EWU 27, Weber 21.

**Portland State (0-3, 0-7) at Idaho (0-3, 2-5), 2 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** The Vandals have lost four in a row but they'll get back on track in their home dome this week. The Vikings have surrendered a league-high 293 points. **Speltz:** Vandals 44, Vikings 27. **Cashion:** Idaho 35, Portland State 10. **Gogola:** Vandals 42, Viks 17. **Flores:** Idaho 28, PSU 14.

**No. 20 Northern Arizona (1-2, 4-3) at Idaho State (1-2, 2-5), 4 p.m. TV: ESPN+.** After losing on back-to-back weeks to highly ranked Montana and Montana State, the Bengals may be running on fumes Saturday. Look for the Lumbarjacks to snap their two-game skid. **Speltz:** Jacks 49, Bengals 38. **Cashion:** Northern Arizona 28, Idaho State 21. **Gogola:** Bengals 45, Jacks 41. **Flores:** ISU 45, NAU 42.

**MONTANA GRIZZLIES**

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	Kahala'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 Oldewski	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 Hoefler	Fr.	OL	6-6	279	Everson, Wash.
62	Everett Johnson	R-Sr.	OL	6-7	290	Turlock, Calif.
63	Kaiko 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-So.	OL	6-5	316	Beaverton, Ore.
80	Jamnel 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	R-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'afa	R-Sr.	DL	6-1	236	Lahaina, Hawaii
99	Braydon Bailey	R-Jr.	DL	6-2	280	Kona, Hawaii

**SACRAMENTO STATE HORNETS**

No.	Name	Year	Position	Height	Weight	Hometown
0	Savion Red	Sr.	RB	5-10	233	Grand Prairie, Texas
1	Jamar Curtis	Sr.	RB	5-8	169	Waldorf, Md.
1	Ricky Lee III	So.	CB	5-10	162	Atlanta, Ga.
2	Rodney Hammond Jr.	Sr.	RB	5-9	195	Norfolk, Va.
2	Deven Wright	R-Sr.	OLB	6-5	215	Southaven, Miss.
3	Jordan Anderson	R-Fr.	WR	5-11	172	Inglewood, Calif.
3	Brodie Tagaloa	Jr.	DL	6-5	288	Pittsburg, Calif.
4	Koa Akui	Jr.	S	5-10	188	Hilo, Hawaii
4	Damian Henderson II	So.	RB	6-2	210	Compton, Calif.
5	Oscar Moore	Sr.	LB	6-1	216	Fort Worth, Texas
5	Jaden Rashada	R-So.	QB	6-4	183	Pittsburg, Calif.
6	Jamar Malone	Fr.	QB	6-2	211	Los Angeles, Calif.
6	Warren Smith Jr.	R-So.	CB	6-1	188	Richmond, Calif.
7	Cardell Williams	Jr.	QB	6-2	181	Houston, Texas
7	Jalen Williams	Sr.	S	5-11	190	Lancaster, Calif.
8	Tim Conerly	Sr.	WR	5-9	157	New Orleans, La.
8	Kris Ross	Jr.	DL	6-2	262	Houston, Texas
9	Damien McDaniel	R-Fr.	ATH	6-0	185	Hitchcock, Texas
9	Malik Tullis	Jr.	DL	5-11	294	Fairburn, Ga.
10	Derek Houston	So.	ILB	6-1	231	Rocklin, Calif.
10	Jace Wilson	Jr.	WR	6-4	214	Denton, Texas
11	Jamal Hood	Jr.	S	6-0	185	Kettering, Md.
11	Gavin Thomson	R-Sr.	WR	6-1	191	Allison Park, Pa.
12	Jason Oliver	Jr.	CB	6-0	175	Bakersfield, Calif.
12	Onterio Smith Jr.	So.	WR	6-2	188	Sacramento, Calif.
13	Ernest Campbell	R-Fr.	WR	5-9	145	Refugio, Texas
13	Yebrell Emerson	Jr.	S	6-2	195	Fresno, Calif.
14	Currion Borders	So.	RB	5-7	197	Sacramento, Calif.
14	Drey Garner	Fr.	WR	6-0	193	San Diego, Calif.
15	Je'kob Jones	R-Sr.	ILB	6-0	222	Fresno, Calif.
15	Luke Sprague	Sr.	QB	6-5	220	Springfield, Pa.
16	Kaleb Higgins	Sr.	S	6-2	193	Austin, Texas
16	Jordan Williams	Jr.	TE	6-5	217	Riverside, Calif.
17	Ajon Bryant	R-Fr.	ATH	5-6	162	Santa Ana, Calif.
17	Anta'Veon McKenzie	So.	S	6-1	193	Stockton, Calif.
18	Tye Nickens	Fr.	WR	5-11	170	Petaluma, Calif.
18	Fata Puloka	So.	OLB	6-3	226	Sacramento, Calif.
19	Josh Cashiola	Sr.	OLB	6-3	234	Houston, Texas
19	Logan Tanner	So.	TE	6-3	229	Houston, Texas
20	Adam Taylor	R-Fr.	CB	5-10	164	Stockton, Calif.
21	Hayden Anderson	Fr.	WR	6-1	204	Windsor, Calif.
21	Dejuan Butler	Gr.	NB	5-11	195	Antioch, Calif.
22	Elias Mullican	Jr.	CB	6-1	176	Rocklin, Calif.
22	Jaquail Smith	Fr.	RB	5-11	171	Orlando, Fla.
23	Elias Brown	Jr.	RB	6-0	234	Antelope, Calif.
23	Lamont Johnson-Burrell	Jr.	CB	6-3	196	Sacramento, Calif.
24	Lono Chouteau	Fr.	S	6-4	178	Sacramento, Calif.
24	Michael Johnson	Sr.	RB	5-7	189	Oxnard, Calif.
25	Naytel Mitchell	Fr.	S	5-10	203	Pittsburgh, Pa.
26	Max Susini	Fr.	LB	6-2	215	Los Angeles, Calif.
27	Mike Taylor	Fr.	ILB	6-3	187	East St. Louis, Ill.
28	Sam Adams II	Sr.	RB	6-2	224	Kirkland, Wash.
30	Pita Vi	Jr.	OLB	6-2	237	Elk Grove, Calif.
31	Jackson Cahoon	Fr.	ILB	6-1	215	Mountain View, Calif.
32	Matthew Eskridge II	Jr.	ILB	6-1	228	Las Vegas, Nev.
33	Alex Rocha	Jr.	ILB	6-2	221	Bakersfield, Calif.
34	Dylan Gooden	R-So.	OLB	6-3	220	Columbia, Md.
35	Hunter Boeddeker	Jr.	ILB	6-0	218	Santa Barbara, Calif.
36	KJ Jefferson	Fr.	S	6-0	201	St. Louis, Mo.
37	Connor McDowell	Sr.	LS	6-0	186	Los Angeles, Calif.
38	Diesel Gordon	R-So.	S	6-0	175	Arlington, Texas
38	Sammy Norris	Sr.	FB	6-0	262	Las Vegas, Nev.
39	Jayden Robinson	Jr.	CB	6-2	185	Suisun City, Calif.
40	Caleb Reese	Fr.	CB	6-0	185	Oceanside, Calif.
42	Luke Slater	R-Fr.	FB	6-2	271	Bellevue, Wash.
44	Diego Davis	Jr.	ILB	6-0	236	Napa, Calif.
45	Xavier Williams	Sr.	DL	6-4	246	Gustine, Calif.
46	Mike Melanson	Sr.	P	5-11	186	Las Vegas, Nev.
47	Adam Johnston	R-So.	LS	6-0	215	Ripon, Calif.
48	Jojo Solis	Fr.	S	5-11	191	Adelanto, Calif.
49	Grant Meadors	So.	K	5-11	181	Bakersfield, Calif.
51	Joseph Speno	Jr.	OL	6-3	279	San Jose, Calif.
52	Dean Abdullah	Sr.	OL	6-4	295	Sacramento, Calif.
53	Elijah Ortiz	R-Jr.	OL	6-1	304	Union City, Calif.
55	Miles Bailey	Jr.	DL	6-4	286	Vallejo, Calif.
56	Dylan Hampsten	R-So.	DL	6-3	245	Santa Clarita, Calif.
58	Jayland McGlothen	So.	DL	6-2	282	Las Vegas, Nev.
59	DeSean Watts	So.	DL	6-2	318	Fresno, Calif.
62	Kenndel Riley	Sr.	OL	6-3	321	Lincoln, Calif.
63	Graysen Lee	Fr.	OL	6-6	280	Bakersfield, Calif.
64	Brandon Sousa	Jr.	OL	6-4	307	Pleasanton, Calif.
65	Cade Gretlein	So.	OL	6-4	294	Bakersfield, Calif.
66	Giovanni Kovacs	R-Fr.	OL	6-4	300	Pleasanton, Calif.
68	Davis May	So.	OL	6-4	339	Bakersfield, Calif.
70	Jaxon Moore	Fr.	OL	6-6	329	Roseville, Calif.
71	Bryson Summers	Jr.	OL	6-5	312	El Dorado Hills, Calif.
72	Sawyer Hays	Sr.	OL	6-6	295	Sacramento, Calif.
73	Jose Soto	R-Fr.	OL	6-3	312	Tulare, Calif.
74	Aidan Meek	Sr.	OL	6-5	300	Bakersfield, Calif.
75	DeAnthony Sheffield	Jr.	OL	6-4	310	Los Angeles, Calif.
77	Jeremiah Stallworth	Fr.	OL	6-6	315	Palo Alto, Calif.
78	Richard McKay	So.	OL	6-6	287	Vallejo, Calif.
79	Jordan Herman	R-Jr.	OL	6-8	346	Fort Mill, S.C.
80	Trey Bass	Fr.	WR	5-10	193	St. Louis, Mo.
81	Guy "Tre" Fernandez III	Fr.	WR	6-0	172	Sherman Oaks, Calif.
83	Jaxon Fresques	Jr.	WR	5-7	169	Layton, Utah
84	Dontae Robinson	Jr.	TE	6-5	213	Tacoma, Wash.
85	Elijah Huddle	Fr.	TE	6-3	209	Citrus Heights, Calif.
86	Davis Ambuehl	Jr.	TE	6-7		

## LAWLER

From page 2

Kenzel had wanted to play at Oregon too. He ended up at Utah, which was also in the Pac-12 at the time, before he came to Montana in 2024. He has long strived to make his father proud and is now having a career season.

“Even in the midst of my college career where I maybe wasn’t getting as much of the spotlight, he’s always stood by my side,” Kenzel said. “He’s always congratulated me for just continuing my journey and not giving up.

“I think just having that type of role model in my life, it definitely kind of just validates who I am as a football player and as a person when he’s able to tell me that he’s proud of me.”

Kenzel also idolized his brother Kenny Lawler, who is about eight years older. He first watched on as Kenny became a high school All-American and four-star recruit at Upland High School in Southern California’s Inland Empire.

He then followed along as Kenny starred as a receiver at Cal, earned All-Pac-12 first-team honors, finished second in school history for touchdown catches and was drafted by the Seattle Seahawks in the seventh round in 2016.

He still looks on as Kenny is now playing his sixth season in the CFL. His brother was another role model who Kenzel pulled inspiration from and has still gotten guidance from during college when times were tough as a backup.

“The advice that he’s given me is just stay humble, stay grounded and just always stay ready because you never know when that opportunity’s going to come,” Kenzel said. “He’s just consistently preached that to me. Like, don’t worry about it little bro.

“Whether you’re on scout team or you’re starting, just keep preparing, keep staying ready. He’s always kept me in that mindset even when it was times where I didn’t want to even be in that mindset. He definitely kept my head on straight in those ways.”

It’s not just his father and brother in his corner. He has eight older siblings — four brothers and four sisters — and is the youngest of nine children. They’re half-brothers and half-sisters, but they consider everyone one family, he said.

Being the baby of the family gave him many people to look up to growing up. It also forced him to step up his game when it came to sports. It built up his competitive mindset to prove he could compete with them.

He felt a lot of love as his family ral-



SHANNA MADISON, MISSOULIAN

Montana cornerback Kenzel Lawler (8) tackles an Idaho player on Sept. 27 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. The California native has already set career highs with 17 tackles and nine passes defended this season.

lied around their baby brother. They kept him driven in his football journey, which started with his father as his first coach and saw him move from high school quarterback to college cornerback.

“My family obviously motivated me a lot, they kept me going,” Kenzel said. “I think that deep down I just knew that there was something inside of me that was special. A lot of people may have given up on me, a lot of coaches may have felt like I wasn’t the best guy.

“But I think for me I always had something inside of me that would tell me like hey, you can do this, you can make these plays, you are capable, you just got to keep working and keep getting better and stay focused. That voice inside of me was right.”

He’s making those plays now as he got his first shot to be a college starter. His role has been elevated even higher due to injuries at the position and he has come through as the defense’s first Big Sky Conference player of the week.

He also has already set career highs in tackles and pass breakups just over halfway through this season. While making those plays, he’s also leaned on lessons he learned in the classroom to help form his mentality on the field.

He earned his bachelor’s degree in psychology in the fall of 2023 while at Utah. As a grad transfer at UM, he has gotten a certificate in entrepreneurship while working toward a master’s degree in clinical mental health counseling.

“Those classes have definitely helped me with just understanding my own triggers, my own emotional regulations,” he said. “I think that when you’re out there on the field and you’re playing corner and you’re on that island, you get a ball caught on you, it’s very easy to allow yourself to get emotionally unstable because tons of people just watched a guy make a play on you.

“Being in those classes, it’s helped me with forming the mentality that I need to have. I’m more so embracing anything that comes my way instead of trying to control or think it should go this way or that way. It’s more so me being in that moment, being present and allowing it to come to me. Whatever happens, I got to have the ability to regulate myself and move on to the next play.”

Lawler’s goal beyond his playing days — however long that may extend after college — is to aid other athletes. That could mean being a life coach who can help mentor people along their journey in order to assist them.

The inspiration for that stems back to a middle school counselor, Cory Hansen. Lawler credited Hansen with helping to mold him and is excited for that mentor to get to see him play against Eastern Washington next month.

As Lawler honed his inner drive outside of his father and brother, he proved to himself he’s capable of achieving what he sets his mind to because he kept belief. In doing so, he has added to his family’s proud football tradition.

“I’ve learned that I am different in a lot of aspects and that that’s OK,” he said. “I may not be the perfect, ideal corner or the perfect, ideal person. I’ve kind of learned that I’m different. The way I attack things is different. The way I navigate things is a little different. And that’s OK.

“Everybody may not like that, but like, at the end of the day, am I getting results? I’ve kind of just learned to just accept that that’s just who I am and I just have to be OK with that. And I’ve kind of accepted that. Just learned to be myself instead of trying to be something that I’m not.”

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.

## OTLEWSKI

Continued from page 3

**Q: Take me through the interception against Cal Poly, what did you see on the play?**

**A:** It's something I really was looking forward to. I just dropped back, read the quarterback's eyes and jumped it. I should have ran further, I tried to switch the ball to my other hand, and I just kind of wanted to get the ball to the offense.

**Q: That was my next question for you, what did you see on the interception return? It looked like one of the Cal Poly players caught you at your legs.**

**A:** Yeah, I was trying to. I wanted to take it back, but I saw him (Cal Poly wideout Brooks Wheatley), the ball kind of juggled in my arm. So honestly, I just was like, 'All right, just tackle me.' I really just wanted to make sure the offense got the ball.

**Q: What were the conversations with UM like coming out of San Diego State and what made you interested in Missoula?**

**A:** Definitely the culture and having the same defense that I learned my freshman year over there (San Diego State). It was kind of similar to the defense here, so it's kind of easy for me to just get used to it. And then definitely the fan base, the culture and coach (Tim) Hauck, really coach Hauck and coach Coop (linebackers coach Roger Cooper), man. Coach Coop is a really good coach. I don't think I've had any other coach out there that can teach the defense like coach Coop.

**Q: Vai Kaho was also a San Diego State transfer that ended up in Montana last year, did you have any sort of relationship with him?**

**A:** Vai and I were pretty close at San Diego State, and I didn't even know he was at Montana until Montana hit me up and told me Vai was here. I got on FaceTime with Vai, and Vai told me, 'You'll love it here,' and then got really close to him. I looked up to Vai. The first thing we did was get straight into the meetings. He was kind of like my bigger brother over here, just helped me get acclimated with the defense, weight room, everything like that.

**Q: How different is the climate in Missoula from Mellisa?**

**A:** Man, if I had one thing I hate about Montana, it's got to be the cold. But the views like this (pointing at Mount Sentinel), you'll never see (in Texas), the

clouds on the mountains and stuff like that. I think it's very cool. I love the snow. I got two dogs at home, so when they get to see the snow — my first dog, when he gets to see the snow, he loves it. I think it's like a winter wonderland when I see it.

**Q: What do you think the coldest game you've played in was?**

**A:** The Cat-Griz game last year was pretty cold, it just started raining snow out of nowhere. You guys keep the roads very clean (of snow) out here. Like in Texas, if it snows, nobody's going to school. We're not going to classes. But if it snows here, it kind of sucks. You got to go to class. You got to go to school. Everything's open still, which is cool, though. Like you guys are used to it.

**Q: What types of dogs do you have?**

**A:** I have one labrador retriever mix, we got him from the Humane Society up here, and then I have a standard poodle. Me and my girl, we went home and visited and our next door neighbor was like, 'Hey, would you want this?' They just had a litter of poodles. And we're like, 'How much you want it for?' And he was like, 'For you, we'll give it to you for free.' All right, well, I can't pass it up. So we got a poodle. The boy's name, the labrador is named Bear, and the poodle is named Teddy, so it's like "teddy bear."

**Q: Coming from North Texas, does that make you a Cowboys fan?**

**A:** I don't know if I'm a Cowboys fan anymore. They got rid of Micah Parsons, and Micah Parsons is one of my favorite players, so I might be a Packers fan now.

**Q: What do you miss most about home?**

**A:** I would say I miss just being with the family. I miss my little brother a lot because I feel like he hasn't seen me, and he's always calling me, telling me he's playing soccer and stuff like that. My mom called me the other day and was saying he's messing up at soccer practice. And he's like, 'Well, Caleb is so good at it (football). Why is he so good at it?' My mom's like, 'Because he's practiced. You got to practice! I just wish I was kind of there, just so he could get a little more of someone to look up to, which I still am someone he could look up to out here, but just someone close for him because he doesn't have a father figure. I just miss my little brother.'

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



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana linebacker Caleb Otlewski (45) lines up on the line of scrimmage during the college football game against Sacred Heart on Oct. 18 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. The Texas native has started in six of seven games this year.

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