

MONTANA AT EASTERN WASHINGTON • KICKOFF: 6 P.M. MT SATURDAY • TV: MTN • THURSDAY, SEPT. 26, 2024

GRIZZI GAME DAY

Missoulian

BOLD FONTES

Aaron Fontes finds
great influence
from 'hero' brother

BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

ROSTERS, PAGE 2 • Q&A WITH DE NOAH KASCHMITTER, PAGE 4 • SPELTZ PICKS THE BIG SKY, PAGE 5



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MONTANA ROSTER

No.	Name	Year	Pos.	Hgt.	Wt.	Hometown	22	Retired in Honor of Terry Dillon	R-So.	RB	5-9	192	Laurel, Mont.	59	Hayden Opitz	R-Fr.	LB	6-2	224	Helena, Mont.
0	Monte Gillman	Fr.	ATH	5-8	153	Dassel, Minn.	23	Beau Dantic	R-So.	WR	6-0	181	Butte, Mont.	60	Dillon Botner	R-Sr.	OL	6-6	290	Whitefish, Mont.
0	Vai Kaho	R-Sr.	LB	6-1	235	Reno, Nev.	24	Cameron Gurnsey	R-Fr.	WR	6-0	181	Missoula, Mont.	62	Everett Johnson	R-Jr.	OL	6-7	301	Turlock, Calif.
2	Drew Deck	R-Jr.	WR	5-9	160	Kalispell, Mont.	25	Jaxon Lee	Sr.	S	6-1	210	Portland, Ore.	63	Dylan Cohen	R-Fr.	OL	6-1	267	Seattle, Wash.
2	Ronald Jackson Jr.	R-Jr.	CB	6-1	191	Detroit, Mich.	26	Nick Ostmo	Gr.	RB	6-0	221	Spokane, Wash.	64	Matt Hilden	Fr.	OL	6-6	278	Santa Rosa, Calif.
3	Brooks Davis	Fr.	WR	6-0	168	Brentwood, Calif.	27	Jordan Dever	R-Fr.	WR	6-0	170	Manhattan, Kan.	66	Brandon Casey	Sr.	OL	6-5	309	Sandpoint, Idaho
4	Dane Parker	Fr.	S	6-1	178	Puyallup, Wash.	28	Isiah Childs	Sr.	LB	6-1	209	Phillipsburg, Mont.	68	Torin Jeske	Fr.	OL	6-6	253	Bozeman, Mont.
4	Ryan Simpson	R-Sr.	WR	6-6	209	Bozeman, Mont.	29	Tanner Huff	R-Jr.	CB	6-0	207	Butte, Mont.	69	Noah Kaschmitter	R-Jr.	DL	6-3	253	Grangeville, Idaho
5	Junior Bergen	Sr.	WR	5-11	184	Billings, Mont.	30	Kade Cutler	R-So.	S	6-0	203	Colin Amick	Fr.	OT	6-6	264	Roy, Utah		
6	Prince Ford	R-Jr.	CB	5-11	170	Concord, N.C.	30	Tommy Running Rabbit	Fr.	ATH	6-1	202	Browning, Mont.	70	Cade Klimczak	Sr.	OL	6-1	286	Sammamish, Wash.
6	Keelan White	R-Sr.	WR	6-2	184	North Vancouver, B.C.	31	Geno Leonard	R-Jr.	LB	5-11	231	Hamilton, Mont.	73	Trevor Steinbach	Fr.	OL	6-5	290	Rockford, Mich.
7	Malae Fonoti	Fr.	RB	5-11	200	Palolo Valley, Hawaii	32	Tyson Rostad	R-So.	S	6-1	201	Cedar Hill, Texas	74	Tate Templeton	R-Fr.	OL	6-3	298	Sammamish, Wash.
7	Kash Goicoechea	Fr.	S	6-1	194	Kalispell, Mont.	33	Lekeldrick Bridges	Fr.	WR	5-11	162	Missoula, Mont.	75	Declan McCabe	R-Jr.	OL	6-4	295	Missoula, Mont.
8	Keali'i Ah Yat	R-Fr.	QB	6-1	192	Kaneohe, Hawaii	34	Talen Reynolds	Fr.	RB	5-11	161	Waco, Texas	76	Journey Grimsrud	R-Jr.	OL	6-3	302	Huntley, Mont.
8	Kenzel Lawler	R-Jr.	CB	6-0	190	Corona, Calif.	35	Grady Walker	Fr.	ATH	6-4	202	Yakima, Wash.	77	Michael Ray	R-So.	OL	6-3	289	Beaverton, Ore.
9	Chrishawn Gordon	R-Sr.	CB	5-11	191	Oceanside, Calif.	36	Ty Morrison	Jr.	KP	6-3	210	Frenchtown, Mont.	78	Lucas Freitas	R-Fr.	OL	6-6	312	Fraser, Mont.
9	Sawyer Racanelli	R-Sr.	WR	6-3	208	Brush Prairie, Wash.	36	Garrett Speer	Fr.	DB	6-0	187	Frenchtown, Mont.	79	Liam Brown	R-Jr.	OL	6-5	317	Bozeman, Mont.
10	Eli Gillman	R-So.	RB	6-0	208	Dassel, Minn.	37	Trevin Gradney	R-Sr.	CB	6-0	184	Frenchtown, Mont.	80	Brady Lang	R-Jr.	WR	6-1	179	Pilot Mountain, N.C.
10	TJ Rausch	R-Jr.	S	6-3	205	Missoula, Mont.	38	Marcus Evans	R-So.	LB	6-0	221	Frenchtown, Mont.	81	Joseph Grezmak	R-So.	TE	6-5	241	Deptford, N.J.
11	Cole Grossman	R-Sr.	TE	6-4	220	Vancouver, Wash.	39	Jace Klucwich	R-Jr.	S	5-10	166	Frenchtown, Mont.	82	Ian Finch	R-So.	WR	6-3	204	Missoula, Mont.
11	Gabe Longin	R-Jr.	S	5-11	184	Great Falls, Mont.	40	Cooper Barnum	Sr.	LB	6-2	225	Frenchtown, Mont.	83	Drew Klumph	R-So.	WR	5-11	181	Centennial, Colo.
12	Elijah Brady	R-Fr.	CB	6-1	165	Seattle, Wash.	41	Brayton Boyer	R-Fr.	KP	5-11	179	Frenchtown, Mont.	84	Evan Shafer	Sr.	TE	6-5	273	Billings, Mont.
12	Logan Fife	R-Jr.	QB	6-0	205	Tracy, Calif.	42	Riley Wilson	R-Jr.	LB	6-2	230	Frenchtown, Mont.	85	Dayton Toney	R-Jr.	WR	6-1	191	Connersville, Ind.
13	Xavier Harris	Sr.	RB	5-10	173	Oxnard, Calif.	43	Grayson Pibal	R-Jr.	LS	6-3	197	Frenchtown, Mont.	86	Joe Weida	R-So.	TE	6-4	230	Frisco, Texas
13	Ryder Meyer	R-Sr.	S	5-10	185	Fairfield, Mont.	44	Ryan Tirrell	R-Sr.	LB	6-2	235	Frenchtown, Mont.	87	Jake Olson	R-Jr.	TE	6-7	258	Missoula, Mont.
14	Aaron Fontes	Sr.	WR	6-1	170	Oxnard, Calif.	45	Caleb Otlewski	R-Fr.	LB	6-4	235	Frenchtown, Mont.	88	Erik Barker	Sr.	TE	6-4	240	Keizer, Ore.
14	Kyon Loud	Fr.	CB	6-2	172	San Mateo, Calif.	46	Jo Silver	Jr.	KP	6-0	203	Frenchtown, Mont.	89	Danny Sirmon	Fr.	TE	6-6	240	Lawrence, Kan.
15	Retired in Honor of Dave Dickenson						47	Kellen Detrick	R-Jr.	DL	6-3	235	Frenchtown, Mont.	90	Jared Ramos	R-So.	DL	6-4	285	Port Coquitlam, B.C.
16	Kaden Huot	R-So.	QB	6-4	210	Helena, Mont.	48	Hayden Harris	R-Sr.	DE	6-5	255	Frenchtown, Mont.	91	Jaxon Tucker	Fr.	DL	6-3	232	Seattle, Wash.
16	Owen Reynolds	Fr.	S	6-0	182	Red Lodge, Mont.	49	Isaac Keim	Fr.	TE	6-4	260	Frenchtown, Mont.	92	RB Wilson V	Jr.	DL	6-4	241	Billings, Mont.
17	Kade Boyd	R-Fr.	S	6-0	193	Billings, Mont.	50	Erich Osteen	R-Sr.	LB	6-2	216	Frenchtown, Mont.	93	Sloan McPherson	R-Jr.	DL	6-4	250	Henderson, Nev.
17	Luke Flowers	Fr.	QB	6-1	187	Rigby, Idaho	51	Austin Buehler	R-Fr.	OL	6-5	270	Frenchtown, Mont.	94	Brendan Murphy	R-Fr.	DL	6-2	228	Lynden, Wash.
18	Sam Alford	R-So.	WR	6-3	186	Park City, Utah	52	Cy Stevenson	R-Fr.	LB	6-2	222	Frenchtown, Mont.	95	Dylan Smith	R-Jr.	DL	6-4	248	Orange, Calif.
18	Chase McGurran	R-So.	S	6-0	196	Helena, Mont.	53	Braunson Henriksen	R-So.	OL	6-5	280	Frenchtown, Mont.	96	Henry Nuce	R-Jr.	DL	6-4	253	Whitehall, Mont.
18	Cody Schweikert	Fr.	ATH	6-3	208	Columbia Falls, Mont.	54	Cooper Walton	R-Sr.	LB	6-1	230	Frenchtown, Mont.	97	Grant Glasgow	R-So.	KP	6-1	194	Kalispell, Mont.
19	Padraig Lang	R-Jr.	S	6-1	189	Bozeman, Mont.	55	Andres Lehrmann	R-Sr.	DE	6-2	246	Frenchtown, Mont.	97	Tyson Simmons	Fr.	DL	6-3	252	Deptford, N.J.
19	Gage Sliter	R-Fr.	QB	6-1	189	Kalispell, Mont.	56	Garrett Hustedt	R-Sr.	LB	6-2	235	Frenchtown, Mont.	98	Matai Mata'aafa	R-Jr.	DL	6-1	231	Lawrence, Kan.
20	BJ Phillips	R-Jr.	WR	5-9	150	San Antonio, Texas	57	Jake Mason	R-Fr.	DL	6-2	256	Frenchtown, Mont.	99	Pat Hayden	R-Sr.	DT	6-2	285	Lynden, Wash.
21	Stevie Rocker Jr.	R-Jr.	RB	6-0	214	Tucson, Ariz.	58	Clay Oven	R-Fr.	LB	6-2	211	Frenchtown, Mont.	99	Jacob Newsom	Fr.	DT	6-1	275	Colville, Wash.

EASTERN WASHINGTON ROSTER

No.	Name	Year	Pos.	Hgt.	Wt.	Hometown	27	JT Weir	R-Fr.	WR	5-8	145	Miami, Fla.	65	Jack Seelye	Sr.	OL	6-1	289	Lafayette, Calif.
0	Anthony James II	R-Fr.	DL	6-5	275	Wylie, Texas	28	Drew Carter	R-So.	S	6-2	183	Lake Stevens, Wash.	66	Ryan Yakovich	R-Fr.	OL	6-4	289	Eugene, Ore.
0	Kekoa Visperas	R-Jr.	QB	6-0	193	Eatonville, Wash.	29	McKel Broussard	Gr.	S	6-0	195	Los Angeles, Calif.	67	Mark Johnson	Fr.	OL	6-5	260	Vernon, B.C.
1	Cage Schenck	Sr.	CB	5-8	164	Woodinville, Wash.	30	Jonathan Landry	R-Fr.	CB	5-11	174	Vancouver, Wash.	68	Alex Hach	Fr.	OL	6-4	250	Tumwater, Wash.
2	Nate Bell	R-Fr.	QB	5-9	182	Brentwood, Calif.	30	Aiden Nicholson	Fr.	WR	6-1	195	Vancouver, Wash.	69	Dane Gatterman	R-Fr.	OL	6-1	334	Lynden, Wash.
2	Kentrell Williams Jr.	R-Jr.	S	5-10	180	Chandler, Ariz.	31	Jaylon Jenkins	R-Fr.	S	6-1	180	Federal Way, Wash.	70	Nick Brown	Fr.	OL	6-5	265	Seattle, Wash.
3	DaJean Wells	R-Jr.	CB	5-11	177	Seattle, Wash.	32	Adam Cohen	Gr.	LB	6-1	228	Plainview, N.Y.	72	Dylan Conner	R-So.	OL	6-5	290	Orange, Calif.
4	Brock Harrison	Gr.	DE	6-2	250	Ridgefield, Wash.	33	Derek Tommasini	Sr.	LB	6-1	234	Eagle, Idaho	73	Aidan Corning	R-Jr.	OL	6-6	293	Whitehall, Mont.
5	Tuna Altahir	R-Jr.	RB	6-0	217	Kennewick, Wash.	34	JoJo Maxey-Johnson	R-Fr.	S	6-2	180	Tacoma, Wash.	74	Bret Fullington	R-So.	OL	6-7	312	Deming, Wash.
6	Michael Wortham	Sr.	QB	5-9	177	North Highlands, Calif.	35	Zion Jones	R-Fr.	CB	6-2	163	Spanaway Lake, Wash.	75	Noah Stewart	Gr.	OL	6-7	292	Issaquah, Wash.
7	Efton Chism III	R-Fr.	WR	5-11	200	Monroe, Wash.	36	Alphonse Oywak	R-Jr.	CB	6-1	169	Covington, Wash.	76	Matthew Hewa Badgege	Gr.	OL	6-7	324	Muskegon, Mich.
8	Darrien Sampson	R-Sr.	CB	6-0	185	South Seattle, Wash.	37	Vincent Macaluso	R-Fr.	LB	6-2	206	Upland, Calif.	77	William Buzzard	R-Fr.	OL	6-3	277	Port Coquitlam, B.C.
9	Matthew Brown	Sr.	DT	6-3	306	Hoquiam, Wash.	38	Avery Ellis	R-Fr.	DB	6-1	220	Royal City, Wash.	78	Gabe Rhue	R-Fr.	OL	6-4	301	Chandler, Ariz.
10	Aidan Carter	R-Fr.	QB	6-4	227	Pleasant View, Utah	39	Bishop Blakely	R-So.	LB	6-0	234	Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.	79	Ahmad Robinson	Fr.	OL	6-6	270	Lawrence, Kan.
10	Trevor Thurman	Sr.	LB	6-3	231	Kenmore, Wash.	40	Amdane Aboudou	R-So.	S	6-1	175	Seattle, Wash.	80	Messiah Jones	R-Jr.	TE	6-6	249	Kennewick, Wash.
11	Ayden Gutierrez	R-Fr.	WR	5-11	180	Eastvale, Calif.	41	Kevin Allen III	Fr.	RB	5-11	180	San Diego, Calif.	81	Riley Rudolfo	Sr.	WR	5-10	182	Spokane Valley, Wash.
11	Ben Voigtlaender	R-So.	DE	6-2	238	Spokane, Wash.	41	Myles Mayovsky	R-So.	LB	6-0	219	Kennewick, Wash.	82	Jaylen Garrison	Jr.	WR	5-11	175	Lynden, Wash.
12	Armani Orange	R-Jr.	S	5-11	177	Moreno Valley, Calif.	42													

Fontes living out football dream

California native, Griz senior receiver follows in brother's footsteps

FRANK GOGOLA
406 MT Sports

Aaron Fontes made an important change early on during his time with the Montana football team.

The wide receiver switched his jersey number from 16 to 14. While that may have seemed like a not-so-noteworthy update to the roster at the time, Fontes had a special reason for requesting the swap.

His older half-brother, Jamal Smith, who he considers a brother, wore the number 14 during his playing days. Fontes wanted to be just like him and donned the same number when it became available in high school and college.

"I always looked up to my brother. Always," Fontes, now a senior, said ahead of Montana's game against Eastern Washington at 6 p.m. MT on Saturday in Cheney, Washington.

"Once he finished college, I wanted to keep living it out for him because he lives it through me still. Even though I got to excel for myself, I always have it in the back of my mind that I got to do it for my family as well."

Fontes equated the relationship he has with his older brother and sister as being "best friends." He also said Smith, 33, was a "hero" to him growing up.

They're separated by 11 years, so his brother seemed larger than life as a kid. Fontes first looked up to his brother athletically when Smith was competing in football, basketball and track for Oxnard High School in Oxnard, California.

Smith began to realize that Fontes was idolizing him when the youngster was about 5 years old. He noticed how his younger brother would follow him around and wanted to be around him. They even shared a



BEN ALLAN SMITH, MISSOULIAN

Montana wide receiver Aaron Fontes (14) makes a catch against Northern Colorado defensive back Jordan Knapke (2) during the Big Sky Conference football game between Montana and Northern Colorado on Oct. 28 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. Fontes is in his senior year with the Grizzlies.

"He's living the dream through me now. That's what he tells me every time."

Aaron Fontes on his bond with half-brother Jamal Smith

bedroom at times.

"Me and him had different dads, but it's never been like that," Fontes said. "He's been in my life the whole time. Every memory of him coming back from college, I loved it because that was my older brother. Seeing him at Oxnard, I

was little up in the box watching only one person on the field and that was my brother."

Smith left for college in 2009 to play wide receiver and later cornerback for the Utah Utes but was buried on the depth chart. He transferred into the Big Sky

Conference at Sacramento State and then finished out at Dixie State (now Utah Tech), where he played in 21 games over his final two seasons.

He gave professional football a shot, but a mix of injuries, coaching politics and bad timing

negatively impacted his chances, he said. He knew he couldn't go back and do it all over again, so he tried even more to pour the lessons he had learned into his younger brother.

That was what he had craved when he was growing up. But it was something he didn't have because he was the oldest sibling and didn't have others to look up to for advice or guidance.

"He was with me everywhere," Smith recalled. "He was there when I left for school. He was there when I came home. He's literally my twin. Everything he's done he's done on his own and with his own power, and just a percentage he's taken from me."

"I gave all my juice to my boy, man. I'm living the rest of my football days through him."

There was a time when Fontes was considering not even going to college. It had nothing to do with his ability as a football player, which was evidenced by him being a 3-star recruit who had offers and interest from FBS programs.

He felt he struggled with academics early on in high school and thought he'd just go searching for a job when he got his diploma. He then felt he turned things around starting late in the second semester of his junior year.

Plus, there was still that thought of wanting to be like his older brother and go play college football.

"He's living the dream through me now," Fontes said. "That's what he tells me every time. He's so happy for me because I would definitely say through my high school career I never thought I would have come to college personally, just how I was at school."

Smith had stressed to him how a degree is something no one could take away. Fontes chose to study anthropology. He was influenced into that path, not the typical one for a UM football player, by his grandmother, who was a geologist.

See FONTES, PAGE 6

Kaschmitter looks to boost D-line

Idaho native has been highly touted by Hauck the past two offseas

FRANK GOGOLA
406 MT Sports

Noah Kaschmitter earned his first career start for the Montana football team in Week 3 after returning from injury and moving positions in the offseason.

The junior defensive end has totaled eight tackles and 0.5 tackles for loss in three games this year as his productivity has ballooned. He had accrued just 11 tackles and 0.5 TFLs over 21 games across his first four years in Missoula while playing on



Kaschmitter

the interior of the line at nose tackle.

UM head coach Bobby Hauck said during fall camp that "Kaschmitter's the guy.

I think he may be the best player" on the D-line and "he's got potential to be really good." That came as Kaschmitter continued rehabbing after he redshirted in 2023 while playing in just two games as he was limited by injury.

Hauck had said of Kaschmitter during 2023 fall camp that "he might have been the MVP of spring ball if we gave one of those." At that time, Kaschmitter was

coming off of a 2022 season in which he played in 12 games on special teams and as a backup defensive lineman.

He had seen the field quickly as he played in seven games as a true freshman in the fall 2021 season after not playing in the spring 2021 season. He had joined the team in the spring of 2020 after he grayshirted in the fall of 2019. He was a Class of 2019 signee out of Granville, Idaho (population 3,550).

Kaschmitter sat down with 406 MT Sports prior to Montana's game against Eastern Washington at 6 p.m. MT on Saturday in Cheney, Washington. This interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

Q: It's been a while since we talked, so how has life in Missoula been going?

A: "I have a pretty good time. During the summer, Journey (Grimsrud) and Hank (Nuce) and I usually go fishing a lot on the weekends. That's pretty much what I do in my off time besides football and school work. In the summer, I pretty much work for a landscaping company."

Q: I know you guys rotate a lot on the defensive line, but what did it mean to you to earn your first career start against Morehead State?

A: "It was great. First start, so I was pretty nervous at first. I've got enough snaps before in a game, so I'm like, 'Oh, it's just another snap.' But it was pretty cool to get my start ever."

Q: How would you describe your journey to this point after last year?

A: "Going through the injury, that was really annoying because you stand there watching the guys for the whole season. I got to play two games, and the adrenaline kicks in, but it's like I can still feel it because it was pretty painful. It was alright. It just sucks watching the guys grind and you can't do it with them. It was pretty tough."

Q: What had happened and how are you feeling being back from that injury?

A: "It was my lower abductor muscle. I tore that off my bone, so I had to get surgery for that. That didn't feel good. It's good now. I feel great. Still doing some rehab on it. Just strengthening it up."

Q: How did the offseason go trying to get back into football form after not playing much last year?



TOMMY MARTINO, MONTANA ATHLETICS

Montana defensive end Noah Kaschmitter tackles Morehead State's Chance Harris on Sept. 14 at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula. Kaschmitter, a junior, earned his first career start against Morehead State after an injury had kept him out most of the 2023 season.

A: "I had to really get lighter at nose is definitely pretty tough when you get double-teamed. End, I feel like I can go faster. Technique is a little bit different, but it wasn't too awfully hard."

Q: How would you describe what it is they ask of you at D-end in this defense?

A: "Just hit hard. Play hard and fast and give it your all."

Q: How much more room for improvement is there for you this season as you get back into the swing of things?

A: "I still see a lot of improvement because I got to make up for last year. That's what was hard about last year is I couldn't get better because I wasn't taking reps."

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.

A: "I was pretty light for nose, so I just maintained the weight."

Q: How have you been acclimating moving from nose to end?

A: "The biggest difference is the weight. Playing

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HOW WE SEE THE BIG SKY

BILL SPELTZ
406 MT Sports

The Montana football team has had some rough experiences on the red turf at Eastern Washington in recent years.

Actually the teams didn't even square off last year, which is a little weird considering they're just 170 miles apart. Then the year before that the Eagles came to Missoula and were clipped in a 63-7 beatdown.

It's been three years since Montana last visited Cheney, Washington. You may recall the Griz lost a heartbreaker to the Eagles, 34-28, but exacted revenge in the playoffs with a 57-41 home triumph despite 530 passing yards and five aerial touchdowns by former Eastern star QB Eric Barriere.

Interestingly, 2021 was the only time Bobby Hauck led his team into The Inferno in his second stint as Montana head coach. Prior to his arrival in 2018, Montana played at Eastern in 2016 and dropped a 35-16 decision with Bob Stitt at the helm.

Montana lost twice in Cheney in 2014. Griz coach Mick Delaney's troops dropped a 36-26 decision in the regular season and a 37-20 verdict in the playoffs.

Eastern was a national powerhouse back then, which helps explain why Montana also lost in Cheney in 2012 and 2010. The last time the Grizzlies won on the road against the Eagles was during Hauck's first stint as coach in 2008. Future CFL quarterback Cole Bergquist threw two touchdown passes to future NFL All-Pro receiver/kick returner Marc Mariani.

A lot has changed for Montana and Eastern since the last time they played in Cheney three years ago. The Eagles have fallen on hard times, relatively speaking. They're mired in a three-game skid and three weeks ago lost at home to non-scholarship Drake University, 35-32.

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



**BILL
SPELTZ**

38-7



**VICTOR
FLORES**

38-7



**FRANK
GOGOLA**

40-5

Bergquist threw two touchdown passes to future NFL All-Pro receiver/kick returner Marc Mariani.

A lot has changed for Montana and Eastern since the last time they played in Cheney three years ago. The Eagles have fallen on hard times, relatively speaking. They're mired in a three-game skid and three weeks ago lost at home to non-scholarship Drake University, 35-32.

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

No. 8 Montana (3-1) at Eastern Washington (1-3), 6 p.m., TV: Scripps Sports.

The Grizzlies are a heavy favorite to win and for good reason. The Eagles have struggled mightily on defense, so you can expect another high-scoring game for the Grizzlies, assuming starting QB Keali'i Ah Yat is healthy and able to scramble like last week. Eastern does have some scoring punch, so it's a good test for a Montana defense that has struggled with inconsistency. In the end, Montana will win by at least two touchdowns. **Speltz:** Grizzlies 44, Eagles 24. **Gogola:** Montana 42, Eastern Washington 28. **Flores:** Griz 38, EWU 17.

No. 3 Montana State (4-0) at Idaho State (2-2), 4 p.m., ESPN+. The closest thing to a sure thing in Big Sky football is the Bobcats' rushing attack. They're averaging over 330 yards per game and will try to play keep-away against the Bengals, who boast the most effective pass offense in the league, averaging 278 yards per game. Idaho State is coming off a nice home win over Southern Utah, 38-28, and the Bengals are 2-0 at home in their dome. But the Cats have been solid defending the pass and they're going to run over Idaho State. **Speltz:** Bobcats 40, Bengals 21. **Gogola:** Montana State 49, Idaho State 21. **Flores:** Cats 42, ISU 14.

No. 10 Sacramento State (2-2) at Northern Arizona (2-2), 1 p.m. The Hornets are on a roll with consecutive wins over Nicholls and Texas A&M-Commerce. The Lumberjacks are headed in the wrong direction after last week's loss at No. 15 Incarnate Word. Sacramento State has been the best in the league defending the run and Northern Arizona has been the best defending the pass. I'm giving the nod to the Hornets and their talented running back Elijah Tau-Tolliver, who averages 105 rushing yards per game. Northern Arizona's stats are somewhat misleading since the team demolished a non-NCAA independent team, Lincoln University of California, in its home opener. **Speltz:** Hornets 42, Jacks 24. **Gogola:** Sacramento State 35, Northern Arizona 17. **Flores:** NAU 28, Sac State 24.

McNeese (3-2) at No. 25 Weber State (1-0, 2-2), 6 p.m., ESPN+. With former Montana quarterback Clifton McDowell leading the way, the Cowboys have won two in a row, including last week's 42-14 shellacking of Alcorn. McNeese's only loss was on opening week to No. 16 Tarleton State. This game is going right down to the wire and I'm picking McNeese to pull

the upset over a Weber State team that might get caught looking past the Cowboys to next week's Big Sky showdown at Montana. **Speltz:** Cowboys 31, Wildcats 28. **Gogola:** Weber State 28, McNeese 27. **Flores:** Weber 27, McNeese 21.

No. 4 Idaho (3-1) at No. 14 UC Davis (3-1), 8 p.m., ESPN+. Based on the fact they've won three in a row, you'd think it would be easy to just pick the highly ranked Vandals this week without hesitation. But Idaho barely escaped with a 27-24 win at Abilene Christian (2-2) last week. The Vandals led 27-3 late in the third quarter and then coasted. Davis has also won three in a row, but the narrow victory at Southern Utah two weeks ago leaves me with question marks about the Aggies. I'm going to go with the Vandals in a close one, basically because Idaho has that road win over FBS Wyoming on its resume. **Speltz:** Vandals 28, Aggies 24. **Gogola:** Idaho 31, UC Davis 24. **Flores:** Idaho 24, UC Davis 13.

Cal Poly (1-2) at Northern Colorado (0-4), 1 p.m., ESPN+. Hmm, let's

see here: The Mustangs have the only win between the two teams, but it came against NAIA Western Oregon two weeks ago. Northern Colorado may be winless, but two weeks ago the Bears almost beat Abilene Christian, who almost beat Idaho last week. I'm going with the Bears because they're home and starved for a win. In addition, Cal Poly may start slow after a bye week. **Speltz:** Bears 27, Mustangs 21. **Gogola:** Northern Colorado 27, Cal Poly 24. **Flores:** UNC 20, Cal Poly 14.

Portland State (0-1, 0-3) at Chattanooga (0-3), 8 p.m. The Vikings haven't just lost all three of their games, they've been blown out. Plus they had to deal with that whooping cough cancellation two weeks ago. The Mocs gave then-23rd-ranked Mercer a good game two weeks ago, losing 10-3. The week before, the Mocs lost a heartbreaker to Georgia State, 24-21. Chattanooga is the better team and it's going to show this week on their home turf. **Speltz:** Mocs 24, Vikings 17. **Gogola:** Chattanooga 30, Portland State 20. **Flores:** Chattanooga 31, PSU 21.

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From 3

Anthropology, for Fontes, is another opportunity to learn about the world around him. In his major, it's learning about other people and other cultures. In Montana, opportunities abound to study Native cultures.

Fontes credited his interest in history in general and learning about his family history to his father, Ross Fontes, who had stressed that growing up. He also felt being a people-watcher and learning by observing came from his father.

He'll soon be getting his bachelor's degree. He even has an upcoming excavation trip to Egypt after he graduates, he said.

"That's what I'm mostly proud of myself about is that I got better at school and being able to lock in and buckle down and do things like that," he said.

The biggest change for Fontes from high school to college was

being on his own for the first time in his life. He was far away from southern California when he came to Missoula in 2020 right before the pandemic.

He looked to his siblings when he was figuring out how to navigate life away from home. He regularly went to Smith because his brother had gone through what Fontes was experiencing balancing football and college classes.

Those talks about time management and utilizing resources on campus have proven fruitful for Fontes.

"That's something my brother helped me out with is building that courage to lock in and really ask people for help," he said. "People here have open arms, almost like the South — another thing I love here."

Fontes grew up in Oxnard, California, a beach city about one hour northwest of Los Angeles. All three siblings excelled in high school sports for the Oxnard Yellowjackets, following in the path

of parents who played in college.

Fontes then moved far away — far in terms of distance, weather and pace of life. He's come to enjoy the slower pace in Montana and the long-term relationships he's created.

Those changes were a chance for him to bloom. He now sees himself potentially staying in Montana past his playing days.

"I never got homesick because I like to experience new things," he said. "I like to do things by myself and take it step by step and learn. One thing I learned is new experiences for me are life-changing."

Just as family is important to Fontes, F.A.M.I.L.Y. is also paramount. That acronym stands for "Forget about me, I love you."

That selfless saying comes from his former high school football coach, John Mack. That phrase has stuck with Fontes and motivated him throughout high school and college.

Mack coached Fontes for three years. The Fontes he knew could

handle such a change of scenery. The transition was eased as friend and former high school teammate Xavier Harris followed Fontes to UM.

"Aaron is a very social person," Mack said. "He has a lot of friends, gets along with a lot of people. I knew he'd immediately make friends and develop a community behind him."

Fontes, a self-described "momma's boy," took the lesson of respecting everybody from his mother, Camisca Hawkins-Fontes. The importance of working hard came from both parents.

Both of them have come to support him at UM home games. Smith has also traveled to see him work his way into a bigger role over the years.

Fontes broke out as a sophomore and experienced a career year as a junior in 2023. When he dropped three passes in the first game this season, Smith was there to offer an encouraging word.

"When I see him progress and

succeed, I see that he's listening to me and wanting to follow my lead," Smith said. "He's already winning and doing better than I've been because he didn't transfer when it got hard."

Smith will still text Fontes encouraging notes on Saturdays before games. He tries to check in on Mondays or Tuesdays to see how the week is starting off.

As Fontes makes one final push in his last season, he's proudly wearing that No. 14 jersey. It was just a random number Smith had received in high school, but it's become a symbol of their brotherhood bond.

"I think about him every day," Fontes said. "He sends me a text, 'It's go time, baby,' or, 'It's your year.' Him texting me just means a lot."

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.

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A photograph of two people playing football at sunset. The sky is filled with warm orange and yellow clouds. The players are in silhouette, one on the left throwing a football and one on the right catching it. Bare tree branches are visible in the top right corner.

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