

MONTANA TECH SPORTS PREVIEW


PRESSING ON

Some sports are proceeding, others are postponed. Either way, Tech's teams are moving forward.

Montana Tech running back Blake Counts hits the hole during the Orediggers' 23-10 win over Eastern Oregon at Bob Green Field last October.

EVAN REIER
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INTRODUCING THE TECH FALL PREVIEW

Tech's fall sports season will be quieter than usual, but there's still plenty to cheer for



MEAGAN THOMPSON, THE MONTANA STANDARD

Tech's Kenny Lafayette carries the ball as Jed Fike blocks for him last season during Montana Tech's home win over Eastern Oregon.

Even as the first reported cases of coronavirus reached Montana just in time to derail the high school state basketball championships, I still considered this whole COVID thing some sort of once-in-a-lifetime aberration that would momentarily disrupt life but then quickly cede into memory, a short-lived phantom

LUKE SHELTON

blip on the radar.

On the Saturday that the Butte Central boys basketball team was supposed to get a shot at Hardin for the Class A title, I instead spoke with head coach Brodie Kelly and some of his nine shell-shocked seniors as they tried to wrap their minds around how abruptly the rug had been yanked out from under them.

I, meanwhile, tried my best to ask questions that were empathetic and didn't make me sound entirely obtuse. After all, inquires such as "How does it feel to have your chance at a championship ring wiped by a novel virus that society is still trying to understand?" aren't in a sports

writer's standard playbook.

While the cancellation of the state tournaments was stunning — and, in retrospect, a pretty clear-cut harbinger of things to come — I spent that weekend believing that this whole global pandemic thing would blow over by the end of the month and that the high school spring sports season would begin on time without nary a hiccup. Order would soon be restored to the universe, I was sure. I certainly wasn't contemplating the idea of a Butte summer without the Folk Festival or a Montana fall void of college football.

That was in March. Wow was I wrong. Wow is it obvious that I am not an expert in the field of epidemiology.

So here we are in September, over six months after phrases like "social distancing", "contact tracing" and "community spread" began creeping into our vocabularies.

For the administrators, coaches and players that make up the athletic program of Montana Technological University, the past half year has posed a whirlwind of challenges as all teams spent the summer preparing for a fall season that would ultimately come to exclude football and volleyball.

Because of their sport's ability to space out athletes, Tech's cross country and golf teams have already kicked off their seasons with winning results under golf coach Sean Ryan and cross country coach Zach Kughn. But Alumni Coliseum will not feel the electricity of hosting a college football game in 2020 and Tech volleyball's aspirations of returning to the national tournament are shelved at least until spring.

While this special section serves a preview of the upcoming seasons for cross country and golf, the state of limbo that football and volleyball are in mean that providing more traditional overviews of those seasons isn't exactly possible. Instead, those articles were a chance to catch up with Kyle Samson and Brian Solomon — the former heading into his first season as Tech's head football coach, the latter going into his 10th season as Tech's volleyball coach — and discuss how they've handled the obstacles of the past months and how they plan on preparing their programs for what lies ahead.

While all sports hold a unique place in a college athletic program, it has always been the game of football that draws a university family together like no other. And if absence makes the heart grow fonder, the sight of an empty Bob Green Field on a cool Saturday afternoon in October should make the Tech faithful — including the illustrious Coach Green himself — all the more excited for the day that the Orediggers finally come surging out onto the gridiron again. v

‘We’ll be READY TO GO’

Montana Tech football shaking off uncertainty, looking toward spring

Montana Tech head coach Kyle Samson is shown instructing a player during a fall camp last August.

JORDAN HANSEN,
406MTSPORTS.COM



LUKE SHELTON
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When Kyle Samson was hired as Montana Tech's next head football coach in January – becoming just the third person to lead the Oredigger's program in the past 34 years following Bob Green and Chuck Morrell – there was no way for him, or anybody for that matter, to anticipate the seismic shifts that would soon knock the sports world off kilter.

Then March happened, and Tech's spring football camp was jettisoned. And following a summer of uncertainty and doubt, the Frontier Conference on Aug. 13 made the decision to postpone its football season to the spring.

For Samson, whose interim tag lasted just over two weeks before he was officially given the reins, this wasn't exactly how he envisioned his first season as a college head coach unfolding.

But, then again, this is the year

Montana Tech 2019 Season Recap

Overall Record: 6-4

Win Percentage: .600

Conference Record: 6-4

Home Record: 3-2

Away Record: 3-2

2020, a surreal time where the only thing that's certain is that nothing should be expected to go as planned. Samson, like much of the world, has learned to roll with the punches.

"It's been a difficult time, but it's taught me a lot about dealing with adversity and staying positive," Samson said. "That's all we can do because everything changes on a daily basis. But if we can bet through all this stuff together as a team, as a program and as a school we feel like we can get through anything after this year."

Whenever the day arrives that Tech finally plays a football game

again, the Orediggers will be looking to build on a 6-4 season that began promisingly but ultimately ended in disappointment. Tech opened the season with a 28-14 loss to the College of Idaho and then responded to that defeat by reeling off four straight wins, including a 35-12 thrashing of rival Montana Western in front of a packed Alumni Coliseum on Oct. 12.

The Orediggers dropped their next game on the road to the Yotes as COI kicker Kyle Mitchell drilled a walk-off 58-yard field goal to take a 16-14 win. Despite two losses, Tech was still very much in the playoff hunt and went on to win its next two games to carry a 6-2 and No. 17 ranking into its second-to-last regular season game against arch-rival Carroll College.

Tech's playoff aspirations soon evaporated as the Saints took a 10-point halftime lead and went on to win 30-19. Any hopes of sneaking into the postseason as a

Please see **FOOTBALL**, Page H6



GARY MARSHALL, BMGPHOTOS.COM

Montana Tech's Blake Counts runs through Carroll's defense on Nov. 9, 2019.



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Football

From H5

three-loss team were trounced in the final week as the Diggers were routed by Rocky Mountain College 38-23.

Tech's quiet offseason was broken on Jan. 6 when Morrell was hired as an assistant coach by FBS program Fresno State after serving as the Orediggers' head coach for the past nine seasons. Immediately after, Samson was promoted to interim head coach at Tech and soon after had the interim tag removed.

Samson has been a fixture in Treasure State football for the better part of two decades. He was an all-state quarterback at Helena Capital as a high school player and a three-time all-conference selection for MSU-Northern as a college player. As a coach, Samson worked as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at his alma mater MSU-Northern for seven seasons and then served as the head coach at Kalispell Flathead for five years before arriving at Tech in January 2019 where he was originally hired as the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach.

While restrictions imposed by COVID-19 have caused headaches and logistical challenges for every college football program across the country, Samson said that one of the biggest adjustments for him has been the lack of camaraderie with his players. Even in the digital age, Zoom meetings and FaceTime can't seem to replicate the bonds that are built from true face-to-face meetings.

"I miss that daily contact," Samson said. "As a coach that's why you coach is for those relationships and with a brand new staff our goal has been to build those relationships. That's been the toughest thing is to not be with your kids everyday."

As of now, no date has been set for when the Frontier Conference's spring season will begin, though Samson said he's hoping that his team can begin running drills at Alumni Coliseum sooner rather than later.

"In the next couple of weeks



MEAGAN THOMPSON THE MONTANA STANDARD

Tech's Jet Campbell looks to pass the ball in the second quarter of the Orediggers' home game against Eastern Oregon University in Butte on Sept. 21 of last year.

hopefully we can get out and do some practicing," Samson said. "But we're taking it day by day and doing our best to keep our kids safe. The hardest thing about football is how many people you have on your team."

If, when and how Frontier football will resume in 2021 still remains unclear, but Samson said he and his team have already been down this road as they spent the past summer preparing for a fall season that ultimately didn't come to fruition.

"I think to be honest with you we learned that the last six months where we were planning for the fall and then it got taken away from us," Samson said. "We're fully planning and preparing to get going in February and to play our schedule and have a chance to compete for the playoffs."

"We all know that we're not



EVAN REIER 406MTSPORTS.COM

New Montana Tech head coach Kyle Samson takes the podium during his opening press conference at Montana Tech's Student Union Building after being officially hired Jan. 21.

sure what that's going to look like in a couple months. We've got to prepare like we're playing

because if we don't we don't want to be caught in a situation where we're surprised or not ready so

we're doing the best we can to get our kids prepared."

With football shelved for the time being, Samson said that the focus has been on giving their athletes a chance to excel in the classroom, saying "our number one goal right now is helping our kids out academically."

"We're itching to get on the football field," Samson said. "We don't know quite when that's going to be. But when we get that opportunity, we'll be ready to go."

There's no timeline on when Tech will kickoff its delayed season, but Samson can already envision how it will feel when his team finally takes the gridiron.

"It's been a long time coming and I can't wait to walk out there for our first game," Samson said. "It got pushed back a couple of months but it's going to be a great feeling not only for our team for the town of Butte."




ABOVE: Tech's Tevor Hoffman catches a pass on Sept. 21, 2019 during the the first quarter of the Orediggers' home game against Eastern Oregon University in Butte.

LEFT: Montana Tech's number 20 Matthew Drake enters the field with the Oredigger football team on their way to their first home game for the 2019 season.


MEAGAN THOMPSON PHOTOS, THE MONTANA STANDARD

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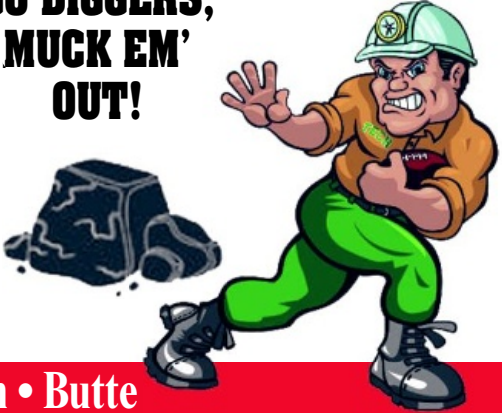


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MONTANA TECH 2020 FOOTBALL ROSTER

No.	Name	Position	Height	Weight	Grade	Previous School
1.	Jake Orvis	DB	6-1	170	R-Jr.	Billings Senior
2.	Will Hunthausen	WR	6-2	190	Sr.	Helena Capital
3.	Kaleb Winterburn	QB	6-2	205	R-So.	Helena High
4.	Alec Wooley-Steele	WR	5-9	175	R-Sr.	Missoula Sentinel
5.	Jake Standlee	QB	6-4	185	R-Fr.	Borah HS
6.	Trevor Hoffman	WR	6-4	205	R-Jr.	Kennedy Catholic HS
7.	Blake Counts	RB	5-11	225	So.	Flathead HS
8.	Jet Campbell	QB	6-4	210	R-Jr.	Billings Central
9.	Naoki Harmer	DB	5-10	180	R-Jr.	Interlake HS
10.	Kiley Caprara	WR	5-10	145	R-Jr.	Butte HS
11.	Kyle Torgerson	WR	5-10	155	R-Fr.	Great Falls HS
12.	Mitchell Norslien	QB	6-2	183	R-Fr.	Fergus HS
13.	Justin May	DB	6-1	190	Sr.	Chester-Joplin-Iverness
14.	Jase Galt	WR	6-3	210	R-Sr.	Malta HS
15.	Quade McQueary	WR	5-10	170	Sr.	Broadwater HS
16.	Cade Wyant	6-2 QB	200	R-Fr.	Rocklin HS	
17.	Tedd Croft	DB	6-2	190	Jr.	Homer HS
18.	Jaden MacNeil	WR	5-8	160	R-Fr.	Flathead HS
19.	Wyatt Alexander	WR	6-2	170	R-So.	Whitehall HS
20.	Matthew Drake	DB	6-1	180	Sr.	Moorpark College
21.	Jordan Washington	DB	5-11	170	R-So.	Cathedral HS
22.	Kade Wilcox	DB	5-11	175	So.	Billings West
23.	Colton Grange	ATH	5-11	175	R-So.	Granite HS
24.	Brandon Morley	DB	6-0	190	R-So	Sentinel HS
25.	Tyler Folkes	RB	5-10	190	R-Jr.	Eastside Catholic HS
26.	Lander Smith	WR	6-0	198	R-Fr.	Charlo HS
27.	Brett Robinson	DB	6-2	190	R-So.	Joliet HS
28.	Michael Barnes	WR	5-11	180	R-So	Timberline HS
29.	Blake Allred	LB	6-0	205	R-So	Montana State
30.	Caleb Beggerly	LB	6-1	215	R-So.	Couer D'Alene HS
31.	Kale McCarthy	DB	6-2	160	So.	Butte HS
32.	Zach Torgerson		5-10	170	R-So.	Shelby HS
33.	JR Seewald	LB	6-1	190	R-Fr.	Cut Bank HS
34.	Kaden Lahti	DB	5-8	160	R-So.	Big Sky HS
35.	Grady Koenig		5-11	190	R-Fr.	Helena HS
37.	Spencer Shock	LB	6-0	210	R-So.	Sentinel HS
38.	Paul Sundquist	LB	6-2	215	R-Sr.	Sandpoint HS
39.	Tommy Anselmo	RB	5-11	185	R-Jr.	Priest River HS
40.	Bridger Johnson	LB	6-3	210	R-Jr.	Flathead HS
41.	Nik Nunez	P	6-3	225	R-Jr.	James Madison University
42.	Zach Trumble	DL	6-3	250	R-So.	Valleyford HS
43.	Braxton Porter	RB	5-9	175	R-Sr.	Fremont HS
45.	Luke Almos	LB	6-2	215	R-Jr.	Great Falls HS
46.	Derrick Rodriguez	WR	6-2	210	R-Jr.	Moorpark HS
47.	Nate Sander	TE	6-2	225	R-Sr.	Northwest Christian HS
49.	Kenny Lafayette	FB/LB	6-1	230	R-Jr.	Newport HS
50.	Cole Wyant	LB/LS	6-1	210	R-Fr.	Rocklin HS
51.	Alaric Griel	DL	6-3	240	R-Fr.	Capital HS
52.	Cade Harris	LB	6-4	200	R-So.	Kentwood HS

53.	Carson Shuman	OL	6-2	295	R-So.	Washington State
54.	Ben Windauer	LB	170	6-1	R-So.	Columbia Falls HS
55.	Thomas Cooper	LB	6-2	200	R-Fr.	Billings Central HS
56.	Grant O'Rourke	DL	6-1	230	R-Fr.	Joliet HS
57.	Logan Kolodejchuk	DE	6-1	230	Jr.	Columbia Falls HS
58.	Brendan Kinnee	LB	6-0	215	Jr.	Minnesota-Crookston
59.	Michael Nehrin	LB	6-2	200	R-Fr.	Manhattan Christian
60.	Seif Banjemia	OL	6-4	300	R-Fr.	West Lafayette HS
61.	Triston Stauffer	OL	6-2	255	Jr.	Sam Barlow HS
62.	Eric Bledsoe	OL	6-2	295	R-Fr.	Oakmont HS
63.	Braeden Beck	OL	6-4	245	R-So.	Missoula Loyola
64.	Jared Troxell	OL	6-4	280	Jr.	Los Medanos CC
65.	Kobe Nelson	OL	6-4	240	R-Fr.	Billings West
66.	Nathan Zard	OL	6-0	250	R-Fr.	Roundup HS
67.	Will Augustine	OL	6-4	240	R-Fr.	Woodinville HS
68.	Max Toll	K/P	6-2	160	R-So	Fanwood HS
69.	Jack Hiller	OL	6-5	250	R-Fr.	LA Center HS
71.	Patrick McGeady	OL	6-2	235	R-Jr.	Whitefish HS
72.	TJ Makihele	DL	6-4	275	R-So.	E. New Mexico University
73.	Trey Copeland	OL	6-3	260	Jr.	Huntley Project HS
75.	Hunter Spartz	OL	6-3	280	R-Jr.	Green River HS
76.	Bailey Burns	OL	6-2	280	R.-Jr.	Green River HS
78.	Nick Clawson	OL	6-1	275	R-So.	Billings West HS
80.	Logan Kennedy	TE	6-2	220	So.	Laurel HS
81.	Tanner Osborne	Sr.	6-2	230	Sr.	Columbus HS
82.	Cody Gagnon	K	5-9	160	Jr.	Billings West HS
83.	Ty McGurran	WR	5-11	175	R-Fr.	Helena HS
84.	Clay Fisher	WR	5-8	155	R-So.	Butte Central HS
85.	Colton Eliason	WR	6-4	205	R-So.	Billings Senior HS
86.	Grant Kelly	ATH	6-4	210	R-Fr.	Central Valley HS
87.	Jaylen Taggart	TE	6-3	220	R-Jr.	Hamilton HS
88.	Cooper Waters	WR	6-4	180	R-Fr.	Missoula Loyola
90.	Brock Field	DL	6-1	215	R-So.	Missoula Sentinel
91.	Jacob Howell	DL	6-2	245	R-Fr.	Helena HS
92.	Tyler Padilla	K/P	5-11	210	Sr.	Kentlake HS
93.	Spencer Schumacher	DL	6-5	235	R-Fr.	Prairie HS
94.	Esai Longoria	DL	6-3	320	Grad	U. of Montana
95.	Zeek Fromel	DL	6-1	265	Jr.	Mountain View HS
96.	Ryan Lowry	K	6-0	195	R-Fr.	Chiawana HS
97.	Gunner Bartlett	DL	6-2	215	R-So.	Cheyenne East HS
98.	JP Fitzpatrick		6-1	315	R-So.	Anchorage
99.	Gabe Zanetti	DL	6-1	220	R-So.	Coeur D'Alene HS

COACHING STAFF

Head Coach: Kyle Samson	Defensive Backs: Khalin Anderson
Assistant Head Coach: Doug Schleeman	Offensive Line: Dan Thatcher
Defensive Coordinator: Nick Brautigam	Defensive Line: Jorge Magana
Offensive Coordinator: Travis Dean	Student Manager: Nathan Haglin

RESTARTING THE CLOCK

With fall season postponed, Tech volleyball drawing out calendar for spring start

LUKE SHELTON
406mtsports.com

As far as Brian Solomon is concerned, if the greatest obstacle he and his players have so far faced on this earth is a delayed start to their season, they've lived pretty charmed lives.

"This isn't real adversity," said the 10th-year Montana Tech head volleyball coach. "There are true challenges in life and I don't think this is one of them. That's the perspective I'm bringing."

While coronavirus restrictions — in-

cluding the cancellation or postponement of various college sports — has led to some heated protests across the state, the perhaps aptly named Solomon has taken a more astute approach to analyzing the significance, or lack thereof, of the disruptions that COVID-19 has brought on his program.

For a broader context on what constitutes a truly life-altering challenge, Solomon looks to his old college friend from Hope International, Jay Hewitt

Please see **VOLLEYBALL**, Page H10



LUKE SHELTON, 406MTSPORTS.COM

Montana Tech's Sydney Parks (13) celebrates a point against The College of Idaho during the Big Sky Volleyball Challenge last August.

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Volleyball

From H9

who is battling terminal cancer while simultaneously training for a 140-mile virtual Ironman triathlon that he plans to compete in on Oct. 9.

“What Jay is doing, in the middle of a terminal diagnosis, is something that changes my perspective on being better as a person and as a father,” Solomon said. “He’s a good inspiration for my family and my children and I’m crossing my fingers for him that he can go ahead and attempt this race.”

Hewitt will be competing in the virtual race in Orange County, and Solomon said he’s hoping to take his family on a road trip to Southern California to cheer him on and maybe even “post up and tailgate Montana Tech-style.”

The postponement of Frontier Conference volleyball has certainly afforded Solomon more time with his family than he would have in a normal fall but he



5518 DESIGNS

Montana Tech's volleyball team huddles up during the Frontier Conference Tournament in Great Falls.

said it's still been strange watching other NAIA programs kick off their seasons. It's been especially surreal for him considering he hasn't seen his whole team together in one place in half a year.

“I haven't had my team in the gym since March, we're going on six months,” Solomon said. “We've approached it that way to help maintain a safe campus.”

On Aug. 7, the Frontier Confer-

ence announced that it would be pushing its volleyball season to the spring following news that the the University of Providence would be transitioning to an on-line-only fall semester. All of the practice and training that Tech's players had been doing was essentially wiped out meaning that they are now rewriting the timeline as they eye a spring return to the court.



LUKE SHELTON, 406MTSPORTS.COM

Montana Tech head volleyball coach Brian Solomon is heading into his 10th season with the Orediggers.

“We've mapped out a potential calendar,” Solomon said. “We'll start with some light optional workouts and then some high-intensity stuff in a few weeks. With the buildup mentally and physically, I don't think that's something you can maintain now until the end of April.

“We're going to start that gear-up process in the next couple of weeks and establish what we do and how we do it on the court to-

gether. We won't be staying slow for too long.”

Tech may have to wait until spring to begin writing its next chapter but when they do they'll be looking to build on a tremendous 2019 campaign that saw the Orediggers finish with at 27-8 overall, 9-3 in conference play and reach the NAIA National Tournament after taking second place at the Frontier Tournament.

With a decade at the helm of Tech's program, Solomon has begun to see the impact that former players have had on his current roster.

“When I look at some of our positions or the groups that we have we have some that'll they're carrying forward what those great players before them did,” Solomon said.

“I was really impressed with the preparation that went into that August start,” Solomon said. “Now it's just a matter of restarting the clock. If they put in the work to start in August, they'll do it again.”

MONTANA TECH 2020 VOLLEYBALL ROSTER

No.	Name	Position	Height	Grade	Previous School	12.	Karina Mickelson	OH	6-0	Sr.	Trabuco Hills HS
1.	Hannah Oggerino	L/DS	5-7	So.	Galena HS	13.	Sydney Parks	MB	6-3	Jr.	Post Falls HS
2.	Maureen Jessop	OH	6-1	So.	Corvallis HS	14.	Kiya Loobey	OH	5-11	Jr.	Cypress HS
3.	Alexis Umland	MH/OH	5-10	Fr.	Sentinel HS	15.	Shelby Draper	MH/OH	6-1	Fr.	Cheney HS
4.	Kamaile Moody	S	5-7	Sr.	Southridge HS	16.	Hudsyn Dibrito	DS	5-4	R-So.	Florence HS
5.	Emma Carvo	S	5-4	So.	Idaho Falls HS	17.	Megan Benton	OH/RS	6-0	Fr.	Billings West HS
6.	Logan Reed	MB	5-9	R-Fr.	Oakesdale HS	18.	Kaylene Davis	L/DS	5-4	So.	Notre Dame De Namur
7.	Taylor Henley	MB	6-1	So.	Flathead HS	22.	Mackenzie Davis	S	5-8	Fr.	Villa Park HS
8.	McKenna Kaelber	S	5-11	So.	Chiawana HS						
9.	Sarah Hopcroft	L/DS	5-8	Fr.	Florence HS						
10.	Portia Cortner	OH/MB	6-0	Jr.	Red Lodge HS						
11.	Zoe Cortner	OH/MB	6-0	R-So.	Red Lodge HS						
COACHING STAFF											
Head Coach: Brian Solomon						Assistant Coach: Kristi Arntson					

COACHING STAFF

Head Coach: Brian Solomon

Assistant Coach: Kristi Arntson



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AIMING HIGH

Oredigger golf starting strong, but remains focused on championship aspirations

EVAN REIER
406mtsports.com

The Orediggers didn't need much of a tune up as the Frontier Conference golf season got under way.

Hosting the Montana Tech Invite at Butte Country Club, head coach Sean Ryan and his team didn't just show that their squad is going to be one to watch at the eventual Frontier Conference championship, but might just be the team to beat.

The men took a 19-shot victory over second-place finishers Rocky Mountain College, with the team's "B" squad even tying the Battlin' Bears for a second-place finish.

If it wasn't already clear, Ryan said it's a very positive sign for the levels of strength the team has.

"The nice thing is that we have so much depth," Ryan said. "A number of guys who were in the 4-5-6-7-8 have been playing well and it shows that we have depth. To be able to look at the lineup and realize that we could have shot even better is incredible. We were one off the school record."

The dynamic duo of Sean Ramsbacher and Trey Hoagland, the latter of which went for an eye-catching 64 in the one-day tournament, are truly some of the best young



SARA DIGGINS, MISSOULIAN

Montana Tech golfer Sean Ramsbacher helped the Oredigger men to a first place finish at the Montana Tech Invitational on Sept. 14.

golfers in the state, but as Ryan points out, the Orediggers' team success can't just rely on their hottest players.

But while it's easy to get caught up in the strength of victory and play on both the men's and women's side, with the women finishing third and seven shots behind second-place Carroll College that Monday, it's important to remember how they got there: hard work through a tumultuous summer.

"Whatever our team did leading into the season," Ryan said. "I was focused on staying healthy through the pandemic. But many of them played all over the state and

Montana Tech 2020 Golf Schedule

Sept 27	Old Works Invitational
Oct. 4	Battlin' Bear Invitational
March 21-23	NNU Nighthawks Invitational
April 11-12	Oredigger Shootout Dual
April 18-21	Frontier Conference Championship

we had the most numbers of players of any college at the State Men's Amateur and had great representation at the Women's State Amateur."

After Ramsbacher's sixth-place finish at the State Amateur, the Orediggers saw the Butte native Hoagland start his collegiate season off with his eye-catching 64, which Ryan says was pretty special to see a Mining City kid make an early statement for Tech.

"He hit the ball as good as he could hope for," Ryan said. "He was mentally engaged, and he was seven-under through 12 holes and then bogeyed a couple holes. He could've easily turned in a 68 but instead

birdied 15 and 16 and showed why he's of one of our seniors and one of our leaders. A Butte kid winning the Montana Tech invite is pretty cool."

But while starting the season off strong was encouraging, the Orediggers aren't resting on their laurels. The goal isn't to just win the events you host, but to compete for the conference title, and that takes more than just one or two impressive rounds.

The kind of consistency needed to be successful in golf at any level is a near-perfect requirement, and the Orediggers recognize that.

Ryan says that while the team needs to continue bringing their best game week-in and week-out through the fall and the ensuing spring, it shouldn't take away from their early start and that his squads are proving what Tech's program is about.

"We host at Old Works on September 27," Ryan said. "We proven that we can do it and that wins aren't flukes. They are setting that expectation and want to be the team that competes for Frontier Conference Championships and the women's team isn't far behind that. Montana Tech isn't a school where you come to play golf, it's a golf school and we're looking to win."

MONTANA TECH GOLF ROSTER

MEN

Name	Grade	Previous School
Jhett Braley	Fr.	Billings Senior
Brady Cady	Fr.	Billings Senior
Blake Hasquet	So.	Missoula Sentinel
Trey Hoagland	Sr.	Butte HS
Matt Hobbs	Fr.	Polson HS
Blake Loberg	Fr.	Billings West

Bridger Martin	Sr.	Shelby HS
Kaven Noctor	Fr.	Butte HS
Sean Ramsbacher	Jr.	Missoula Sentinel
Jace Rhodes	Fr.	Billings West
JR Small	Fr.	Bozeman HS
Isaiah Weldon	So.	Butte HS
Gabe Weitham	Fr.	Helena Capital

WOMEN

Tanna Campbell	Sr.	Sweet Grass County HS
Emily Garden	Fr.	Missoula Sentinel
Emily Kelly	Fr.	Butte HS
Skyler Martin	Fr.	Shelby HS
Reyla Williams	Fr.	Helena HS

Heach Coach

Sean Ryan

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MIKE CLARK, BILLINGS GAZETTE

First-year Montana Tech cross country coach Zach Kughn set a high bar for his team to reach for this past summer, racing to a first-place finish at the Montana Mile in July.

STARTING FAST

Montana Tech cross country happy to learn, but eager to win in first year

EVAN REIER
406mtsports.com

It's not easy to start a new college athletics program, and it's certainly not easy to win. But for Montana Tech cross country head coach Zach Kughn, the tall task of competing for a Frontier Conference title in his opening year isn't daunting, it's the type of bar he's set for himself and the Orediggers in their first ever season.

"We want to let people know that we're not just starting," Kughn said. "We're competing and we're able to beat teams on both sides. We're not going to take a five year process... It's cool to start a team no matter what, but it is way cooler to start a team and win right away."

While it didn't translate to full team wins, the Orediggers earned a win in their first competition, going up to Havre for the MSU-Northern Invitational on September 12 and seeing Becca

Richtman clock a 18-minute, 57-second finish and take first as an individual in the women's side of the event.

However, while seeing one of his own take first place is something to be proud of and excited about, it's not really the main goal.

Kughn wants to see each and every member of his team excel, because that's what's required for the Orediggers to win team events as a whole, rather than the respectable third-place finish each side of the program took in their first event.

"I always have high expectations," Kughn said. "It's hard to focus on the good, you're always focused on what went wrong. It was by no means a failure, it was a successful day and a win of any kind is a good way to start."

It's a tight line to walk for a head coach that is the first leader of a program. On the one side, Kughn knows what it takes to compete at the

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highest levels in the state from his time with the Montana State Bobcats. On the other side, he also knows that this is the very earliest steps of the program.

To put it simply, it's a learning process. That thought keeps the coach and the Orediggers tethered to reality, but reality doesn't mean not winning. In fact, it's that desire to win that is fast-tracking Tech in their first-year education.

The early lessons? Get out the gate early.

"Focus on the early stages of the race," Kughn said. "What our team learned is that if you are in that position at that point of the race, it's hard to lose, but it's

hard to pass people too.

"I got to see how we stack up. When you are only competing against each other, you don't really know how you match up. Our front runners are as good as we expected and our back have some work to do. We want those guys to look closer to our one and two and not just settle for competing with each other."

It's not only a crash course on competition in the Frontier for his runners, but also for the coach himself.

Learning the ins and outs of running a program is complemented by learning about the locations the team will be running at and what the competition

looks like.

However, Kughn knows he only has so many chances before the team's big test arrives later this fall in the conference championship, and the coach's expectations first year grades for himself as well as his squad rides solely on that event.

"I hope I'm learning something," Kughn said. "I preach to the team that the four meets are practice quizzes and the conference final is the final exam. It's a way for them to learn something and for me to learn something. We go into each meet with a different strategy as a group, and we hope that by when we get to the conference championship, we'll be ready."



EVAN REIER 406MTSPORTS.COM

Butte High senior Hailey Nielson signed for Montana Tech's cross country program on Aug. 28.

MONTANA TECH 2020 CROSS COUNTRY ROSTER

MEN

Name	Grade	Hometown	Previous School
Ian Barville	Fr.	Spokane Valley, Wash.	University HS
Charles Carriker	Fr.	Lacey, Wash.	North Thurston HS
Henry Kakalecik	Fr.	Great Falls	Great Falls HS
River Sheppard	Fr.	Portland, Ore.	Grant HS
Jake Vetter	Fr.	Butte	Butte HS
Drew Williams	Fr.	Red Lodge	Red Lodge HS

WOMEN

Karolyna Buck	Fr.	St. Ignatius	St. Ignatius HS
Raychel Hoerner	Fr.	Columbia Falls	Columbia Falls HS
Payton Huss	Fr.	Lacey, Wash.	North Thurston HS
Carlin Manning	Fr.	Kalispell	Flathead HS
Averi Parker	Fr.	West Yellowstone	West Yellowstone HS
Alyssa Plant	Fr.	Clancy	Helena HS
Becca Richtman	Fr.	Elburn, Ill.	Kaneland HS
Jessa Steele	Fr.	Manhattan	Manhattan HS

Head coach: Zach Kughn

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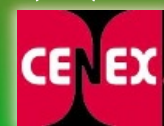
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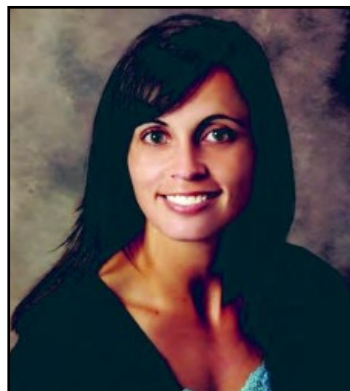
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