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Grizzly defensive backfield could be better, says Elway

University of Montana--Missoula. Office of University Relations
Coach Jack Elway doesn't make any bones about it. Last year's defensive backfield at the University of Montana didn't do the job it was supposed to.

"We were young, with a lot of sophomores back there, and sophomores make mistakes," Elway said. "But with a year behind them, those sophomores are juniors and know that much more."

Elway thinks that the way things look so far in fall practice, with just a few days left until the opener against North Dakota, the UM defensive secondary could be better than last year's.

"We'll know more about that after the first couple of ball games," he said Friday.

One welcome newcomer to the secondary is senior Roy Robinson of Glasgow, for two years strictly an offensive performer with injury problems. He played defense in high school, but hasn't until this year as a collegian.

"Roy has lots of speed and talent, and a lot more to learn," Elway said. "But he's progressing well so far at defensive halfback. He's the best hitter back there, but needs technique work."

One of the junior returnees who has looked real good, according to Elway, is Pat Schruth of Billings, a halfback. "That experience really helped Pat. He's much improved over last year." Elway reported.

Transfer Karl Stein from San Anselmo, Calif., should help immensely in the secondary. Elway said he goes to the ball well from his free safety position.

Elway said junior strong safety Pat Dolan of Great Falls is an excellent, hard hitter, but added that he still needs more experience.

Sophomore safety Mick Dennehy of Butte "came back in great shape," Elway said. "He goes to the ball real well, also." Dennehy has been hampered by an ankle injury for more than a week.
Another welcome sophomore is halfback Robin Peters of Cleveland, Ohio, who played frosh ball without financial assistance, and then earned a varsity scholarship last spring.

Strong safety John Waxham, junior from Mountlake Terrace, Wash., also showed signs of vast improvement early in the fall, but his status is questionable because of a strained Achilles tendon.

Providing backup for Schruth at left halfback is junior Larry Johnson, a transfer from Galt, Calif.

Robinson and Stein will be doing double duty, working at split end with the offensive unit because of Tom McMahon's fractured arm.

Offensive halfback Jim Schillinger, sophomore for Vida, will do some backup work at defensive halfback as well. Another offensive player learning the ropes at strong safety is quarterback Steve Caputo of Seattle, Wash.