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Game Day Kaimin, September 6, 2003

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Saturday September 6, 2003

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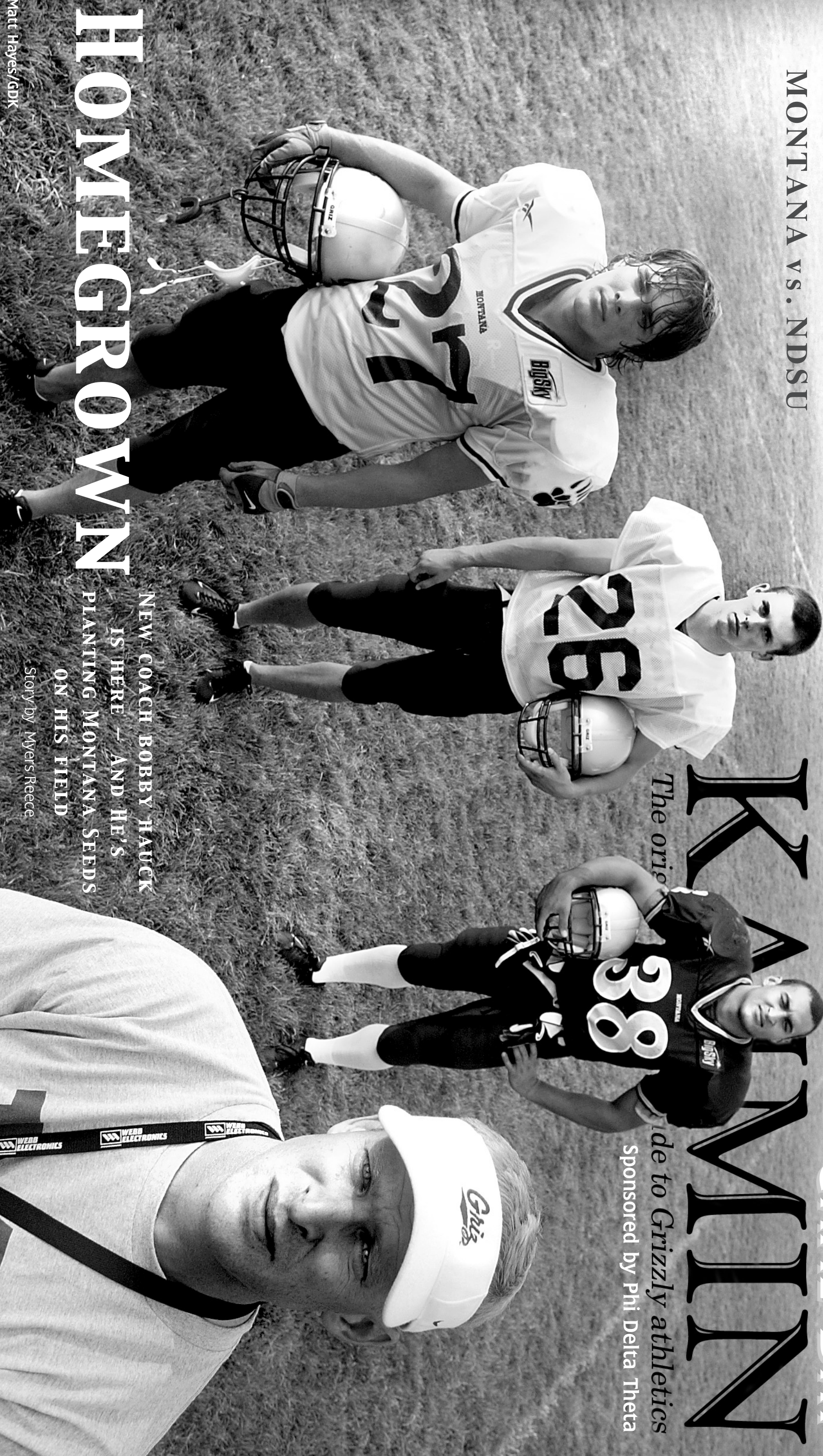
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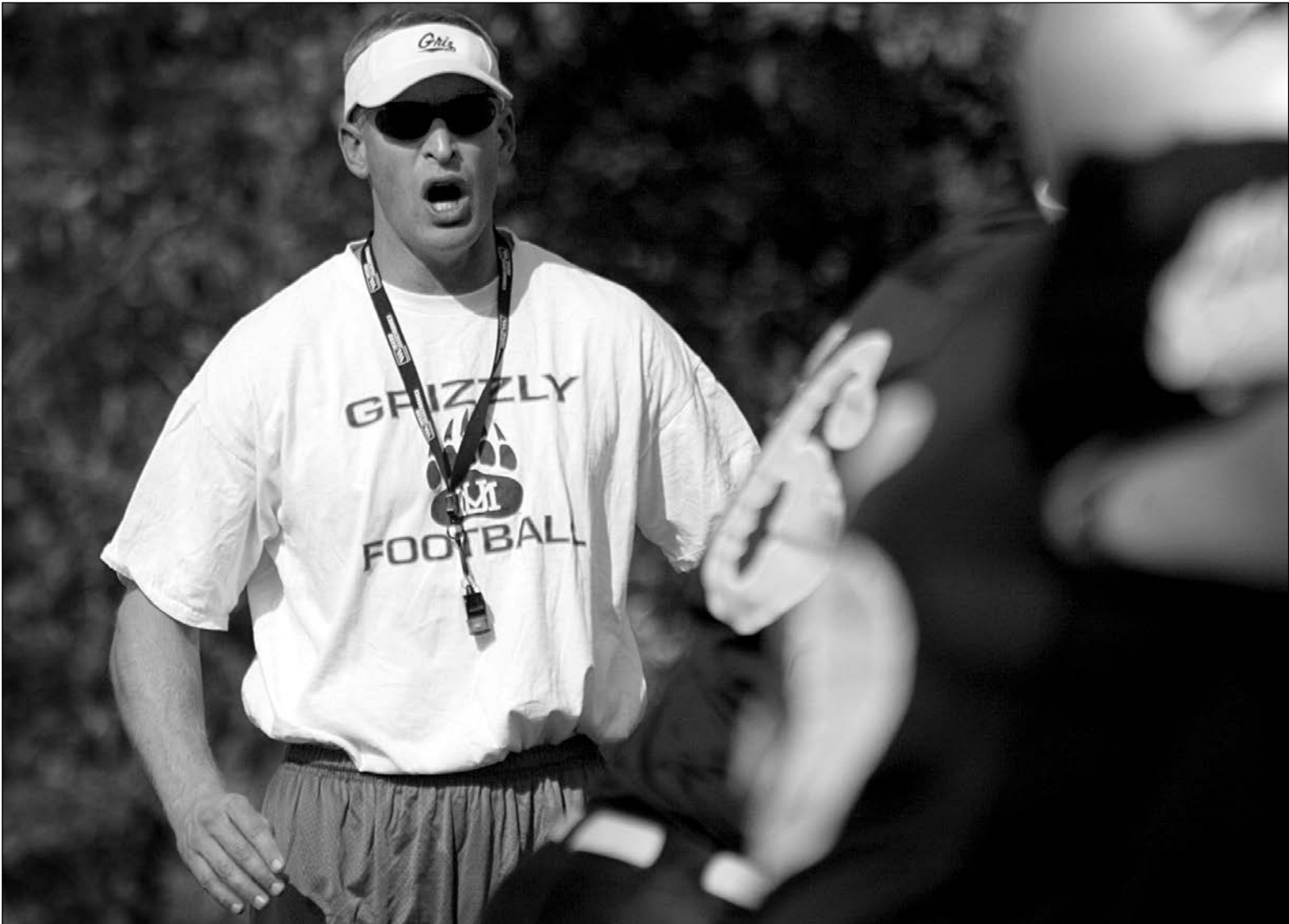


HOME GROWN

NEW COACH BOBBY HAUCK
IS HERE — AND HE'S
PLANTING MONTANA SEEDS
ON HIS FIELD

Story by Myers Reece

Matt Hayes/GDK



Mike Cohea/GDK

Head coach Bobby Hauck encourages linemen during blocking drills in preparation for Saturday's game. This will be Hauck's first home game since taking over the Griz from Joe Glenn last year.

Staying close to home: Hauck sticks to Montana

Myers Reece
Game Day Kaimin

There must be a mistake on the Montana Grizzlies football roster. Nine out of this year's 14 new recruits are from the state of Montana. Trouble recruiting out-of-state prospects? Is Montana losing appeal to distant high school stars? Actually, not at all, says head coach Bobby Hauck.

This is exactly the way he wants it.

"We are the University of *Montana*," Hauck said. "Our philosophy is to recruit Montana kids first. We evaluate them and then decide if they're right for our team and if they can help us win the national championship. If not, then we look elsewhere."

Hauck said his plan coming to Montana was to recruit in-state. Hauck, a Big Timber native, said he has always been a Grizzly fan as well as enjoying Montana high school football.

"I've always loved the Grizzlies and Montana football has always been important to me," Hauck said. "I think it's important to keep Montana players close to home whenever possible."

Six of the new recruits are redshirting this season, but three are expected to make contributions this season. Stevensville native Tyson Johnson is the first-string punter, while Kalispell standout Lex Hilliard is a backup running back and Billings Skyview star Matt Lebsock is a backup safety. Lebsock saw playing time in the season's opener against Maine.

Lebsock shared the Class AA Defensive Player of the Year award his senior year in high school with Billings West's Kyle Ryan, who is also a Grizzly this season.

Lebsock said he's always been a Grizzly fan, which isn't surprising considering his roots. His dad, Ron, was an offensive lineman for the Grizzlies from 1974-1977, winning the team's MVP award his final season. Ron also coached his son at Skyview.

"I've always wanted to play here because I grew up loving the

Grizzlies," Lebsock said. "And now it feels like such an honor just to be able to be part of this great tradition. It's really nice to see that coach Hauck gives Montana kids such good opportunities to play here."

Only one game into his freshman season, it looks like Lebsock is going to be a big part of Grizzly football.

Lebsock's high school teammate, redshirt offensive tackle Ryan Gustafson, said he feels a special bond with some of the Montana players, in particular his teammate and the two Billings West recruits, Kyle Ryan and Eric Michel.

"We were such fierce rivals for so long that now we have earned a lot of respect for each other," Gustafson said. "There definitely is a different bond between some of us because of that respect and because we know each other."

Gustafson, a second team all-state selection his senior year, said he was recruited by other schools

including Montana State University and the University of Wyoming, but he chose Montana because of the way Bobby Hauck and his staff treated him during the recruiting process.

"I grew up in Minnesota so I wasn't necessarily a Grizzly fan before I came here," Gustafson. "Mostly what got me here is that I was impressed with how coach Hauck and the other (Montana) coaches came directly to me and made me feel welcome and like I had a home here. Some coaches from other schools just acted indifferent."

Hilliard didn't grow up a Montana fan either, but he still feels being a Grizzly is definitely what's right for him.

"It's great to be a Grizzly," Hilliard said. "I'm just excited to

be in the stadium and step out on that field. It already feels great."

Hilliard was one of the most dominating running backs at any level during his stay at Kalispell. As a senior he rushed for 1,139 yards and 18 touchdowns, finishing his career with 4,410 all-purpose yards and 46 touchdowns. He was named all-state three years in a row.

Hilliard said that although there is a common ground between Montana players, he is quick to point out that it doesn't matter once everybody's on the field.

"It's definitely nice to have Montana kids and I'm glad Hauck recruits here first," Hilliard said. "But now we're all the same. We're all on the same team for the same reasons. We all have the same goals."

Lebsock agreed, "When we're on the field we're all just teammates and football players then."

All nine of the new recruits bring with them impressive high school resumes.

Billings West's Ryan, a linebacker, was selected to two all-state teams to complement his Class AA Co-Defensive Player of the Year award. West's other recruit, 6-foot-six offensive lineman Michel, was a two-year starter for the Bears.

Johnson, the starting punter, was an all-state selection at Stevensville at free safety, kicker and punter. Kelly Kain, CMR's standout from Great Falls, was a first team all-state selection as well as being a two-time Academic All State honoree. Loren Utterback, from Fort Benton, was two-time all-state selection and four-time all-confer-



Mike Cohea/GDK

Tyson Johnson mimes a punting motion as the return team practices its blocking during Griz practice. Johnson, a Stevensville native, had seven punts for an average of 37.6 yards during the game against Maine last Saturday.

ence selection running back who ran for 4,032 yards and 55 touchdowns in his illustrious high school career.

Let's not forget about little Kyle Sampson, only 5-foot-8 and 165 pounds. All he did was win "Montana's Gatorade Player of the Year" his senior year as Helena Capital's quarterback, throwing for over 2,000 yards and rushing for over 1,200 yards to lead his team to an unblemished 12-0 Class AA championship season. Oh yeah,

he's pretty versatile too; he's playing wide receiver for the Griz.

With credentials like those, it's not hard to see why Hauck is so excited about them.

"I'm very happy with these guys," Hauck said. "They're all great kids and even though not all of them are going to play right away, I expect them all to contribute in the future. They're real well-disciplined, well-coached and hard workers."



Mike Cohea/GDK

Kalispell native Lex Hilliard tucks the ball away as he finishes up a run after an offensive play. Hilliard, a Kalispell standout, rushed for 1,139 yards and 18 touchdowns, finishing his career at Kalispell with 4,410 all-purpose yards and 46 touchdowns.



Mike Cohea/GDK

Safety Matt Lebsock reads the offense during practice for Saturday's game against North Dakota State University. Lebsock, son of former Grizzly Ron Lebsock, shared the Class AA Defensive Player of the Year award during his senior season at Billings Skyview.

Game Day Kaimin

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AROUND THE SKY

Current and former Grizzlies get recognition



Grizzly wide receiver and return specialist Levander Seagers gets relief from the hot August heat during practice for the home opener against the North Dakota State Bison. Matt Hayes/GDK

Will Cleveland
Sports Reporter

This week, it was announced that I-AA football will hold an All-Star Classic for departing seniors in Florida at the end of December.

Among the 50 players initially selected to compete are four members of the University of Montana Grizzly football team: defensive end Tim Bush, kicker Chris Snyder, offensive tackle Dylan

McFarland, and cornerback Vernon Smith.

Fifty more players will be selected by a committee of media members, coaches, and administrators at the end of October.

Once all 100 players are picked, the pool will be split into two teams, one named after former Grambling State coach Eddie Robinson and the other named for the late Walter Payton, a product of Jackson State.

The Big Sky Conference led all leagues with 11 selections, including four players from Montana State. Leagues with seven selections include the Southland,

Gateway, and Atlanti 10 conferences.

Rounding out the selections from the Big Sky were Idaho State's senior defensive end Jared Allen, Montana State's safety Kane Ioane, offensive guard Mataio Toilolo, offensive tackle Brent Swaggert, and cornerback Joey Thomas, along with Northern Arizona University wide receiver Clarence Moore and center Matt Raivio.

Following the opening weekend of football action, the Big Sky Conference named its Players of the Week.

NAU true-freshman quarterback Jason Murrietta was named Offensive Player of the Week for his 287-yard, three-touchdown performance in a 44-3 slaughter of

Saint Mary's of California.

Meanwhile, Jared Allen of ISU was named Defensive Player of the Week due to his one sack, one forced fumble, four passes defended, and six tackles. His impressive numbers came in 54-20 win over Montana-Western in the Tigers' opener.

Allen is also one of the leading candidates for the annual Buck Buchanan Award. This award is given each year to the best defensive football player in I-AA football.

Special teams honors were split between Levander Segars of Montana and James McGowan of Weber State.

Segars, a junior from Colorado Springs, returned one kickoff 91 yards for a touchdown in UM's win over the Black Bears of

Maine.

McGowan, on the other hand, also returned a kickoff for a touchdown of 94 yards. For the game, McGowan set a WSU record by returning four kicks for 164 yards.

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SCOUTING REPORT:

No. 9 Villanova

With a strong defense and a new QB at the helm, the Atlantic 10 Conference's forever-mediocre team may get respect

Will Cleveland
Sports Reporter

Coach Andy Talley and his Villanova Wildcats can't seem to get any respect in the world of I-AA football. Last season his team was picked to finish sixth in the Atlantic 10 Conference preseason coaches' poll, and all the Wildcats did was make it to the I-AA semifinals before losing to national runner-up McNeese State, the current No. 1 team in the country.

This year, Villanova is predicted to finish fifth, an improvement over last season, but that doesn't matter to Talley and his team. The most important thing to him is where his team ends the season, not where it is predicted to finish.

"We had a great year last season," Talley said. "But this is a new year and we think we have a really good team and replacing Brett Gordon is the key."

Gordon is a legend in the Atlantic 10 Conference, similar to the status of Montana's Dave Dickensen in the Big Sky Conference.

Last season as a senior, Gordon passed for 4,290 and 36 touchdowns in 15 games — all-world numbers that Talley doesn't think need to be repeated, just reached for.

"Joe Casamento, a sophomore, is our starting quarterback," Talley said. "For the past seven or eight years, the Villanova quarterback has been a traditional drop-back passer and Joe doesn't fit that mold. He can pass, but he can also make thing happen with his feet on broken plays."

In his debut, Casamento did his best Gordon impression, completing 24 of 30 passes for 252 yards and three touchdowns in a 41-6 romp of Hampton, — good enough for A-10 player of the week honors.

Villanova is not a strictly passing team, as shown by the

Currently ranked No.9



Matt Hayes/GDK

Grizzly wide receiver Tyler Peterson finishes out a pass play during preparation for the Grizzlies' first home game of the season Saturday against North Dakota State University.

running back tandem of junior Terry Butler and sophomore Moe Gibson. Against Hampton, this two-headed running attack combined for 178 rushing yards.

Matt Chila, Talley said, is Villanova's best receiver. As a junior, this tight end had 48 catches for 514 yards and was selected to participate in the annual I-AA all-star game.

The rest of the offense is anchored by four of five starters on the offensive line returning from last season's playoff team.

While the balance of the offense is apparent, Talley said the strength of his team lies on the other side of the ball.

"We are a defensive team," Talley said.

Led by junior strong safety Ray Ventrone, the defense features speedy players off the edge of the defensive line, including defensive ends Jamil Butler, Darrell Adams, Terence Taylor, and linebacker Brian Hulea.

Ventrone is the gem of the Villanova defense.

Last season, Ventrone tallied 102 tackles, forced two fumbles, and recovered two more.

"Ray is a physical defensive back," Talley said. "He can run, cover, and fill the gaps with the best of them. I see him as a pro prospect."

Hulea is the heart of the

defense as evidenced by the team's performance in the playoffs last season. He totaled 70 tackles, including 10 for a loss, despite missing the playoffs due to an injury.

"We struggled against the run without Brian," Talley said. "With him back and healthy, we fully expect the defense to be even better."

A fifth-place finish as predicted by the coaches of the A-10, however, might not be all that bad, as the conference features three top-25 teams and three teams that made the playoffs last year — Villanova, Maine, and Northeastern.

"The A-10 is a bruising league," Talley said. "Our schedule this year is very favorable, because the outcome of the league sometimes depends on what teams you play on the road and this year we are lucky enough to have some of the tougher teams at home."

Included in that home schedule are Massachusetts and Northeastern, two teams that defeated Villanova on the road last season.

While the home schedule appears favorable, the next game in the out-of-conference schedule could prove to be the team's most daunting challenge, a road game against I-A Big East Conference member Temple.

"This game should be a tough one," Talley said. "They won four conference games last year, including one against Syracuse. Plus they gave Miami fits and almost beat Penn State at home last weekend."

While Villanova might not get the proper respect it has earned, one thing remains obvious: the Wildcats are a team that must be reckoned with.

"I think we will be good this year," Talley said, which is an understatement as evidenced by the way that the Wildcats disposed of the competition last year and have already started to do this year.

Maybe this year Villanova will get some of that respect.

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