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Game Day Kaimin, October 4, 2003

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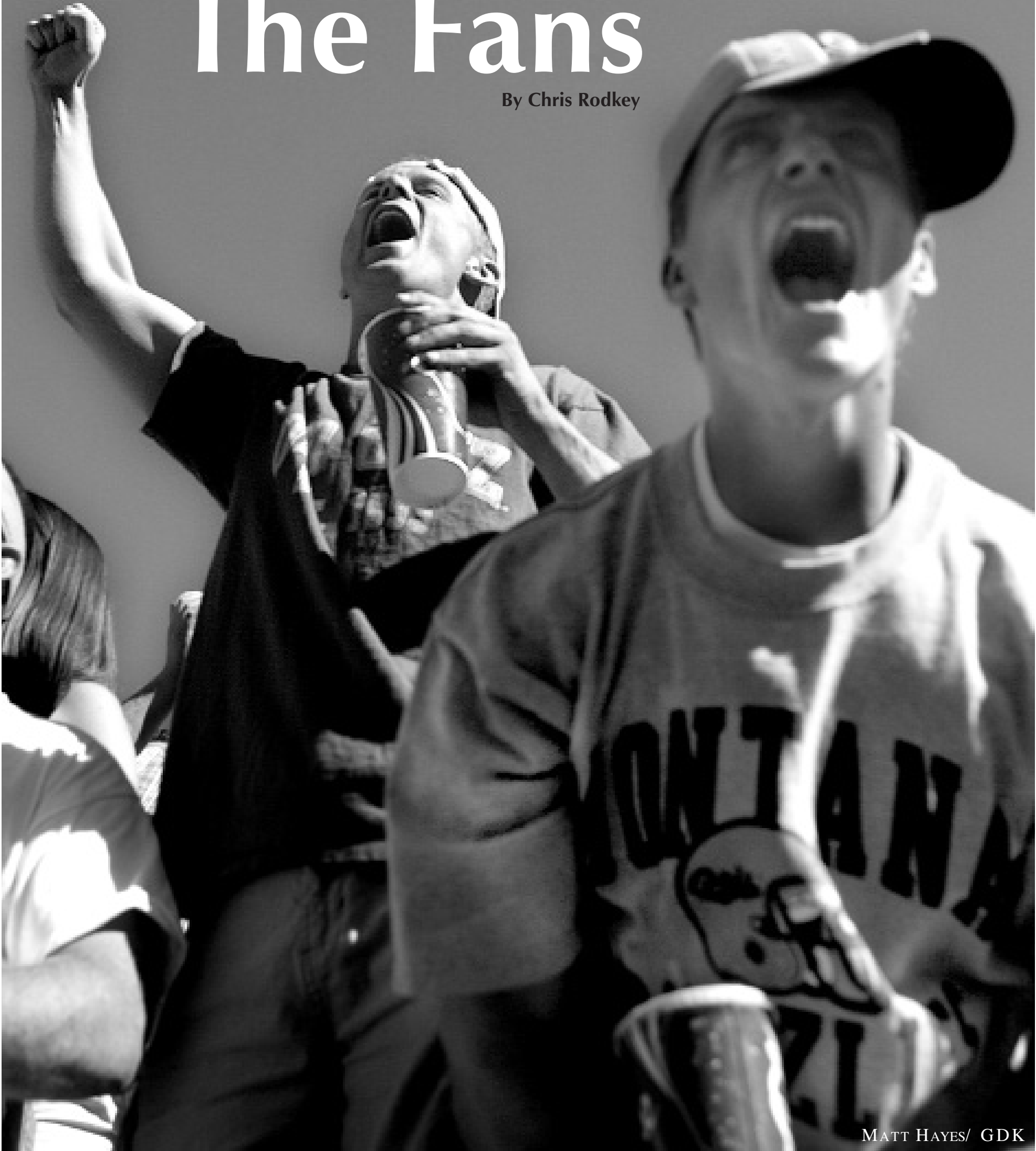
KAIMIN

The original, complete guide to Grizzly athletics

Here's to

The Fans

By Chris Rodkey



MATT HAYES/ GDK



Watchful eyes observe football action at Washington-Grizzly Stadium. More than 23,000 fans — more than the population of 85 percent of Montana’s counties — attend the Saturday games. Matt Hayes/GDK

The best fans in football

It’s a September Saturday in Missoula. As morning light spills through the Hellgate Canyon, a horde of bleary-eyed fans begins to file out of an armada of RVs parked around Washington Grizzly Stadium.

Folding tables are arranged, the “click, click” of barbecue igniters resonates under the overhang of north end zone seats and coolers are filled with ice.

Within hours, at least 23,000 sports fans will descend on this little section of Missoula, Mont., and take it over. Some will have traveled from the far edges of the state. Others from dorm rooms on campus.

The fans will come because of what they all have in common: an undying love for Grizzly Football, and a passion for the event that celebrates the team —

Game Day.

By Chris Rodkey

Amid a crystal-clear blue sky on a warm autumn afternoon, young boys wearing Grizzly hats that are slightly too large toss footballs sky-high, creating a constant cloud of leather that zips above tailgaters’ heads.

A sudden noise erupts as a weed whacker — modified to serve as a blender to mix margaritas — stirs up a drink.

It’s 10:30 a.m., and while the game against the Idaho Vandals is still a few hours away, a hefty crowd mills about the grounds.

Standing near the door of his maroon and silver 1972 Champion RV, Tom Hobbs sips on a can of Coors Lite while mingling with friends. He and his wife Kathy renovated the vehicle for the 1996 season, all in the spirit of supporting their home team.

“We love the game and do everything we can to support them,” Tom Hobbs says. Every game, the couple drive from their home in Potomac to Missoula. The night before the big event, they pull the “Griz Mobile” out of the barn and park it in front of the house next to Highway 200.

“People honk at it all night long,” Kathy says. When the Griz aren’t playing, she says, “we have to park it in the barn, or we couldn’t sleep at night.”

Inside, pictures from games coat the walls. Monte’s autograph graces the

wall, along with other famous Grizzly players.

The Hobbs’ RV is parked under the near-perpetual shadow of the north end zone, where Bill Willis and his wife Kathy arrange their seats and proudly wear T-shirts describing them as part of the “North End Zone Crazy’s,” a name meant to describe the unruly nature of fans who sit in the stadium’s cheapest seats.

“Everybody here just grew together,” says Willis, who has been sitting in the seats for games since they first opened. “We have a good time.”

On the field below Willis, Rick Reeves arranges bottles of Pyrodex and assorted issues of the Kaimin. He is prepping the cannon for a day of use.

“If it wasn’t here, there would be something missing,” says the Griz fan of 31 years. He carefully puts black powder into the barrel, along with pieces of the newspaper to create a “confetti effect.” A large metal plate stands in the blast zone, ready to

cushion a blow every time the Grizzlies score and the cannon is lit.

The loudness of both cannon and fans is probably the defining element of Grizzly games, says Paul Scott, an Idaho Vandals fan seated with other visitors who tried not to attract too much attention to themselves.

“You haven’t heard anything until you’ve heard them,” Scott says.

He’s not alone.

Jason Barfield, assistant sports editor of the Huntsville, Texas, newspaper, wrote last month that Grizzly football fans were unlike any others in college sports.

“Incredible. Truly incredible. Those are the only words that come to mind when thinking about the crowd at Washington-Grizzly Stadium on Saturday,” he wrote.

Barfield lavished praise on the loud fans in the Huntsville Item.

“Everyone has always said Montana has the best crowd in Division I-AA,” he wrote. “Well, I’m willing to go one

better — Montana has the best crowd in all of college football.”

In seats straddling the 50-yard line, Andrew Marcure and his friend Weston Esterby have the best spot in the house, and they couldn’t agree with the Texas writer more.

“They’re such a good team,” Marcure said. “There’s no other fans like this around.”

Marcure came down from Charlo, where he said he might be the envy of his fellow classmates because of his great seats.

“Very few students are Montana State fans,” he says, “and if they are, they get teased.”

From his luxury sky box on the opposite side of the field from Marcure, UM President George Dennison enjoys drinks while wearing a white Grizzly polo shirt and maroon loafers.

Earlier he had entertained U.S. Sen. Max Baucus, and now he mingles among various wine-sipping alumni and staff.

“Montana fans really get into it,” Dennison says, noting that research shows 60 percent of all game-goers hail from outside Missoula County.

“If you look at the highways outside of town in the morning, what you would see is a stream of cars coming in,” he says.



Fans in the seats farthest from the field — in the north end zone bleachers — watch the game, some with binoculars. Mike Cohea/GDK

Across the field from the booth, tucked into a corner of the stadium where bleachers are for decoration only, the student section is filling, beginning the slow but steady compression to the railing of the field.

A mix of aromas fills the air: rum, body odor, Coke and urine waft under inebriated nostrils. The students are docile now, and the most rowdy are still outside loading up on intoxicants before the game.

Wearing a yellow security shirt that allows no doubt as to his strength, Sam Riggins watches over the congregating fans. He’s making sure the students follow the rules in a job he describes as “fun and very interactive.”

Most of the time students behave, and “even the rowdy fans are in good spirits,” he says.

Stadium celebrity Jason Jury, whose “Cotton Eye Joe” jig has landed him at least two commercials in Missoula, says he doesn’t need alcohol to enjoy the game.

“I’m just another guy at the game,” he says. “None of us drink. It’s just good fun.”

Jury stakes out his spot in the front row early in the day. Students then crowd around him. He can’t remember any specific games where fans were any more excited than others.

“Every game in the student section is crazy,” he says.

Students in the stands around Jury have put their hands on their foreheads to shield their eyes from the sun as they look up to see the Silvertip Skydivers plummet from an airplane.

Bob Smith, a 65-year-old former teacher of Russian language at UM, says hurtling to the ground and landing softly via parachute on the large Grizzly emblem in Washington-Grizzly Stadium is the best way to express his love for the team.

“We feel like we’re a real part of this game,” he says. “The days we’re not able to jump, the kids really miss us.”

As Smith walks out of the tunnel at the northwest end of the stadium, the Idaho Vandals football team is lining up and ready to enter.

The “National Anthem” is played, Rick Reeves’ cannon is sounded, and the fans move into their places.

The Hobbses close the door to their Grizzly-themed RV and head for the gate, tickets in hand.

Andrew and Weston stand on their feet, ready to absorb a game that they will undoubtedly

brag about to their friends for days.

Dennison positions himself next to a window to look at the UM marching band, lined up and in position.

Riggins turns his back to the students for a moment to watch Monte bounce around the inflatable entrance to the stadium.

The announcer wails his call across the masses, and out from the tunnel pour the Montana Grizzlies.

Everybody is cheering.



Mike Cohea/GDK

(Above) Sitting is a rare occurrence in many sections of Washington-Grizzly Stadium. Visitors of all ages watch the games.

(Left) Traditionally, the Grizzlies sing the UM Fight Song to the fans after every game, win or lose.



Mike Cohea/GDK

Note: Last week’s Game Day Kaimin story about Vernon Smith was written by Natalie Storey.

Game Day KAIMIN
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GRIZ VISION

For UM alum, there’s no place like home

Fifty years after his arrival, graduate returns to alma mater through Alumni Association

Alisha Wyman
Kaimin Reporter

In the fall of 1953, when Griz colors were silver, copper and gold, tuition was \$900 per year and a street full of potholes circled the Oval, Clark Hamor was beginning his college career at the University of Montana.

Like many students today, he felt unprepared to set out on his own but eventually adapted to his home within the freshly renovated walls of Craig Hall and his classes in the new grand piano-shaped music building.

“It was all bright and shiny brass, brick and steel,” he recalled. The recital hall of the building was particularly impressive. He smiled as he recounted a story of a fellow French horn player who emptied his spit valve full of water on the freshly polished wood-floor stage during his jury — or the end of the

semester-graded performance. “You could just see the color out in the faculty just raise,” he said. “They just got redder, and redder and redder.”

Hamor is back at UM for Homecoming, something he’s attended for the last 10 years. As a member of the Alumni Association, he volunteers at the office during the events and is involved with the house of delegates — a group that provides direction to the association and the alumni board. He also plays his French horn in the alumni band and volunteers at college fairs.

Each time he returns to UM, Hamor is struck by the numerous new buildings that have risen since he was here, which have doubled the size of the campus. With its growth, the University has become more cosmopolitan and diverse, rather than the regional school it was in his time, said Hamor, who is now retired and living in Salem,

Ore. But some things never change. Downtown was a popular hangout for students, where they also tried to get into the bars when they were underage.

“I can remember the Florence Hotel when it was in its prime,” Hamor said. “I always got carded because I looked younger than I really was.”

Hamor graduated in 1958 with a bachelor’s degree in education and music, and a minor in library science. It was Richard Darling, his library teacher, who inspired him to become a librarian, a career to which he devoted 36 years.

Darling invited him to attend a Library Association meeting during his fifth year. Earlier, Hamor realized he didn’t want to continue in music, and was unsure of his future

plans. But Darling’s influence and the librarian meeting played a large role in his decision to change majors.

“There was Dick and I and 300 ladies, and I thought maybe I’m in the right business after all,” Hamor joked.

After graduation, he worked at the UM library and went on to work at elementary school, junior high, high school and community college libraries.

Hamor is among the thousands of alumni who come for Homecoming each year and one of 10 to 20 people who help the Alumni office with the Homecoming events.

The office is responsible for giving the Distinguished Alumni Award, holding singing on the steps, the young alum tailgate, helping with the Alumni band, and

the class of ‘63 reunion, among other things.

“We just do it all,” said Linda Jesse, the administrative officer for the Alumni Office.

And Hamor enjoys being involved, he said.

“I’ve always been a worker bee — helping out here and there,” he said.

For all of his efforts, Hamor and his wife — who also volunteers at the Alumni office even though she is not an alumna — were awarded the 2003 Montana Alumni Award last February at the Charter Day Celebration, the birthday party for UM.

The award was “out of the blue,” Hamor said. He simply wants to give back to UM, a place that holds many fond memories for him.

“This is a good place,” he said. “I would move back to Montana in a second.”

Unfortunately, his wife won’t let him, he joked, “but she says I can come back as many times as I want.”



Hamor

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from the tummy of the Grizzly bear.*

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AROUND THE SKY

Myers Reece
Sports Reporter

If you have any preseason Big Sky football polls laying around your house, you should probably think about throwing them away. Weber State, Sacramento State and Northern Arizona were picked to finish in the bottom three in the Big Sky media poll, but are currently at the top of the standings, albeit very early in the conference season. Meanwhile, Montana State, the preseason pick to be runner-up in both the media and coaches polls, is struggling to find its form and a variety of other surprises have shaken up the Big Sky so far this year.

Montana
Montana, the pre-season favorite in both polls to win the conference, moved up a ranking to No. 8 in the Sports Network poll this week after defeating Division I-A Idaho 41-28 and will play its fourth straight home game against No. 20 Cal Poly. The Grizzlies, 3-1, unveiled an option offense that led to 344 yards rushing against the Vandals. Montana is still ranked last in the conference in total offense at 307.5 yards per game, but the Grizzlies have found other ways to get the ball in the end zone. The Griz are second in the conference in scoring average at 33.5 points per game. One major factor for the Grizzlies scoring without huge offensive numbers is their special teams. Montana is first in the nation in kickoff returns and have used various trick plays on special teams that have resulted in big plays. Cal Poly, coming off a 24-7 loss to Northern Arizona to drop its record to 3-1, will try to get its first victory ever against Montana. The Grizzlies have won

all eight previous meetings between the teams.
Montana State
Montana State, surrounded by the controversy involving assistant head coach Joe O'Brien's drug charges, dropped its second straight game in a loss against Northern Colorado last week. The Bobcats, now 1-3, will try to redeem themselves against 0-4 Saint Mary's.

The Bobcats are ranked first in the Big Sky in total defense but have struggled on offense. The passing game, led by highly-touted sophomore Travis Lulay, averages only 165 yards per game, which is second worst in the conference. Lulay ranks last in the conference in pass efficiency having thrown five interceptions and only three touchdowns with a 51.7 completion percentage. Senior Corey Smith is first in the nation in kickoff returns at 41.3 yards per return and third in the conference in all-purpose yards. Buchanan Award candidate safety Kane Ioane anchors the defense, averaging nearly nine tackles per game.

Montana State won the one previous meeting against Saint Mary's that was played last year.
Northern Arizona and Weber State
No. 17 Northern Arizona brings its 3-1 record to Ogden to face the 4-1 surprise Wildcats.

The NAU Lumberjacks are coming off a convincing 24-7 win over Cal Poly, ranked No. 14 at the time. The Lumberjacks are ranked first in the Big Sky in both rushing defense and scoring defense, as well as being ranked second in both total offense and total defense. NAU's potent offense is led by freshman quarterback Jason Murietta and junior running back Roger Robinson. Robinson is third in the conference in rushing

yards per game at 102.2, while Murietta is in the top three in passing efficiency, passing yards per game and total offense.

Weber State traveled to Cheney, Wash. last weekend and knocked off the Eastern Washington Eagles, 35-23. Junior running back Nick Chournos carried the ball 27 times for 194 yards to boost his average to 129.8 yards per game, second in the conference. Junior quarterback Kyle Bauer has completed only 48.5 percent of his passes, but has thrown eight touchdowns and only one interception. Weber State leads the all-time series 21-18.

Eastern Washington and Idaho State
No. 25 Idaho State, 2-2, hosts Eastern Washington, 3-2, in a Big Sky match-up between two teams coming off losses. Over the past three games, Eastern Washington has averaged over 40 points per game, while Idaho State is last in the Big Sky in scoring defense, allowing 40.5 points per game, and total defense. The Bengals gave up 47 points to Sacramento State last weekend.

The Bengals' offense has been led by two junior quarterbacks. Roman Ybarra and Mark Hetherington. Combined, the two have led Idaho State to first place in the conference in passing yards per game at 295.2. However, the Bengals are a distant last in rushing offense, averaging only 80.8 yards per game on the ground. Eastern Washington's sophomore quarterback Erik Meyer leads the conference in passing efficiency at 167.0, which ranks fourth in all of Division I-AA. The Eagles have been on an offensive tear with their last three games, after scoring a combined

Big Sky defies preseason predictions as Weber, Sac State, NAU surprise, MSU disappoints

17 points through their first two games. Idaho State has won its last eight games at Holt Arena, with its last loss coming against Eastern Washington on Nov. 24, 2001. The Eagles lead the overall series 17-7.

Sacramento State
Sacramento State, 2-2, will try to follow up its remarkable 47-21 win over Idaho State, in which the Hornets racked up 641 total yards.

Junior quarterback Ryan Leadingham threw for 366 yards and a school-record six touchdowns, one shy of the Big Sky record. Receiver Fred Amey had 180 yards receiving, putting himself first in the conference in three categories and in the top 12 in the nation in those same three. Amey, a junior, leads the Big Sky in all-purpose yards, receiving yards and punt return average. Junior running back Tyrone Gross ran for 240 yards, the most by a Big Sky player this year, to improve his conference-leading average of 135 yards per game. The Hornets are first in the conference in scoring offense,

rushing offense and total offense, while also ranking second in passing offense. Sac State hosts UC-Davis this weekend. UC-Davis leads the overall series 34-16.

Portland State
Portland State dropped out of Sport Network's top 25 with last week's 42-16 loss to Division I-A Fresno State. A bright spot in the game was the play of running back Ryan Fuqua, Big Sky's only Payton Award candidate. Fuqua rushed for 194 yards and had 331 all-purpose yards for his best performance of the season.

The Vikings, 2-2, are the best in the Big Sky in passing defense but last in rushing defense. They give up 30.8 points per game, second-worst in the conference. On offense, junior quarterback Joe Wiser leads the conference in passing average at 258.5 yards per game. Portland State will travel to Nacogdoches, Texas to take on 2-2 Stephen F. Austin. The Vikings have won the only other two meetings between the teams.

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During a first half punt return, Grizzly wide receiver Lavander Segars is almost brought down before returning the kick inside the Vandals' 10 yard — line.

Matt Hayes/GDK

SEPTEMBER 27, 2003

GRIZ: 41, VANDALS: 28

A LOOK AT THE MATCH THROUGH THE LENS
OF GAME DAY CAMERAS.



Matt Hayes/GDK

Grizzly special team members crush Vandal conerback Roderick Bryant during a Idaho kickoff return last Saturday. The Grizzly special teams hope to continue the excellent play against Cal Poly on Saturday.



Matt Hayes/GDK

Grizzly wide receiver Jon Talmage hauls in a deep pass last Saturday against the Vandal's secondary.



Matt Hayes/GDK

Grizzly freshman running back Lex Hilliard powers towards the goal line late in the fourth quarter to help seal the Grizzly victory. Hilliard and the rest of the Grizzly offense combined for 344-yards rushing last Saturday against the Vandals.