2010 Missouri Valley Football Conference Preview
By Kent Schmidt

Predicted Order of Finish

1. Southern Illinois
2. Illinois State
3. Northern Iowa
4. South Dakota State
5. North Dakota State
6. Youngstown State
7. Missouri State
8. Western Illinois
9. Indiana State

Offensive Player of the Year: Kyle Minett, RB, Sr., South Dakota State
Defensive Player of the Year: Mike McElroy, S, Sr. Southern Illinois

Biggest Shoes to Fill: Deji Karim, RB, Southern Illinois
Karim led the FCS with 1,694 rushing yards and guided Southern Illinois to its second straight Missouri Valley Football Conference Championship and the quarterfinals of the FCS Playoffs. He broke the SIU single-season record for all-purpose yards (2,339) and showed his versatility by averaging 30.9 yards on 14 kickoff returns with one touchdown. He finished his SIU career with 2,080 rushing yards, 26 rushing touchdowns, 10 career 100-yard rushing games and averaged 6.58 yards per carry. Karim had only one fumble in 351 career touches at Southern Illinois. He was drafted in the sixth round of the NFL draft by Jacksonville Jaguars.

While two teams made the postseason a year ago, the Missouri Valley Football Conference has not had a team reach the title game since Northern Iowa made the championship in 2005 and has not won the title since Western Kentucky won it in 2002. WKU has since moved to the FBS Sun Belt. The last champion among the current MVFC teams was Youngstown State in 1997.

This year hopes to be different for the top-to-bottom tough league. The two teams that made the 2009 postseason were Southern Illinois and South Dakota State. SIU won the battle in Brookings last year to finish the MVFC with an undefeated league record for just the ninth time in conference history.

SIU won its opening-round FCS playoff game at home against Eastern Illinois 48-7, while SDSU nearly defeated Montana on the road but allowed 34 fourth-quarter points to fall 61-48. The Salukis lost in the second round to William & Mary 24-3.

Two teams that nearly made the playoffs last year will look to better their records in 2010 in Northern Iowa and Illinois State.

Those four teams appear to be the top candidates to win this year's MVFC title, but they could see opposition from Youngstown State, North Dakota State and Missouri State - all of which should have improved, younger teams from a season ago.

Southern Illinois, however, seems like the class of the league again this year. The Salukis return just nine starters but also several nonstarters that have seen action in the hopes of an eighth straight FCS playoff appearance. SIU will see a new home this year as it opens a new 15,000-seat stadium to replace McAndrew Stadium. The yet-to-be named stadium should give SIU a better home-field advantage as it has the highesst number of season tickets in the program's history.

The Saluki offense will have a battle at quarterback between senior Chris Dieker and sophomore Paul McIntosh. Dieker was the starter to begin 2009 but was injured in the Salukis' seventh game that forced McIntosh into the lineup. Dieker finished the year with 1,326 passing yards and 10 touchdowns with 77 yards and three scores rushing while McIntosh tossed for 888 yards and eight touchdowns. He had another 588 yards and six scores on the ground.

The normal running game also will see a battle after the graduation loss of Deji Karim. This appears to be a three-headed battle with senior Lucien Walker (243 yards, 1 TD), sophomore Steve Strother (154 yards) and FBS Pittsburgh transfer junior Shariff Harris (16 yards at Pitt) being the candidates. The starter will be joined by All-MVFC fullback junior John Goode and two All-MVFC junior offensive linemen in tackle David Pickard and center Bryan Boemer. The top receiver for SIU should be another All-MVFC in senior Joe Allaria (52 rec., 697 yards, 4 TDs).

The Saluki defense will return just three starters but should find leadership from two senior All-American members of the secondary. These two will be cornerback Korey Lindsey and safety Mike McElroy. McElroy was second on the team in tackles a year ago with 78 and led the team in interceptions with seven. Lindsey added six interceptions and 63 tackles. Junior defensive end Chance Coda (27 tackles, 3.5 TFL) should be the leader upfront with third-leading returning tackler junior Connor James (42 tackles) the linebacker leader.

SIU will have a solid special team performer in placekicker Kyle Dougherty, who is just two field goals away from breaking the Saluki team record for the most in a career. Last year, the senior made 19-of-25 of his field-goal attempts.

The surprise team in the Missouri Valley this year likely will be **Illinois State**. The Redbirds finished 2009 with a 6-5 mark in Coach Brock Spack's first season in Normal. This year's team welcomes back 19 starters that were an improving, young team — winning four of its last five contests. ISU hopes to return to the playoffs for the first time since 2006.

The Redbirds, like SIU, have a quarterback controversy. Last season's starter Drew Kiel was injured in the opener and saw freshman Matt Brown take over. Brown finished as the MVFC Freshman of the Year after passing for 2,369 yards and 11 touchdowns. Brown helped the ISU pass offense rank first within the MVFC and 20th in the nation with an average of 246.4 yards per game. In total, he set ISU freshman records for completions (226), attempts (352) and yards (2,369); while leading the league in passing yards per game (215.4). Kiel set a school single-game record by completing 20-of-22 passes in his only start before injuring his wrist. Regardless, the eventual starter will have all five offensive linemen returning, led by junior All-MVFC member Nick Bledsoe, who saw time at guard and center a year ago.

The ISU running game will see a few new faces behind the quarterback. Two FBS transfers, sophomore Erik Smith (Wisconsin) or junior Ashton Leggett (Michigan State) might play key roles. The leading returning rusher is junior Cliffton Gordon, who had 542 yards and scored a team-high eight touchdowns (7 rush, 1 pass) in 2009. ISU will miss graduated Eyad Salem, who set a school single-season record with 92 catches last season. Sophomore Tyrone Walker, a 2009 MVFC All-Newcomer Team selection, returns as the top receiver after ranking second in receptions (37) and yards (485). The receiving position also might see help from FBS transfer, junior Marvon Sanders, who moves to Normal from Eastern Michigan. Sanders had 14 receptions for 124 yards at EMU, and he could help with kick returns, too.

The Redbird defense likely will determine whether the team will improve its victory total. ISU yielded more than 25 points per game so bettering this mark will be a top priority. As with the offense, the defense will have a FBS transfer to help out with Nickcaro Golding, a junior defensive end from Purdue. He played in 12 games through two seasons for the Boilermakers and recorded 15 tackles. He will be joined by junior Eric Brunner on the other side. He ranked fifth on the team in tackles and second in tackles for loss last season while earning All-MVFC Second Team honors. All three linebackers return in Josh Howe (51 tackles, third on the team) and sophomores Austin Davis (60 tackles, second on the team) and Mike Zimmer (48 tackles, fourth on the team).

Junior Kelvyn Hemphill heads up the secondary. He led the Redbirds in tackles with 71 and recorded 7.5 tackles for loss. Senior cornerback EJ Jones, who led the team with six interceptions, also returns.

While ISU returns several players, the team it beat to end the 2009 regular season, **Northern Iowa**, returns very few. The Panthers need to replace 13 starters from a disappointing season. UNI nearly won at eventual FBS Big 10 co-champion Iowa, but had two last-second field goals blocked that would have given it a triumph. That loss was the only one in its first six games and looked almost like a lock at that point. The Panthers, however, would lose three of their last five to finish just out of the playoffs at 7-4. Coach Mark Farley's team, however, generally does not need to rebuild. It just seems to reload and that's the likely case again this year.

Taking over the quarterback duties, however, is not a total newcomer to the starting lineup even though there are just three returning starters on offense. Junior Zach Davis has played in both of his two seasons when now-graduated Pat Grace was injured. A year ago, Davis threw for 230 yards and two scores. Another position that also is not new to action is the runningback position as now-sophomore Carlos Anderson started the first game of the season at Iowa a year ago while starter Derrick Law sat out on suspension. In total, Anderson rushed for 541 yards and four touchdowns and added another score through the air. The actual wide receiving duties will go to two returning starters in juniors Josh Collins and Maurice Turner. The entire offensive line will be new starters.

The Panther defense will fare a little better in the experience department than their offensive teammates. UNI gets six starters back but still will need to replace two All-American performers in end James Ruffin and linebacker Josh Mahoney to keep the best-ranked total defense statistic in the conference. UNI will look to senior linebacker Jamar Thompson to be a team leader after he was second to Mahoney on the team in tackles with 86. He will be joined by fellow linebacker in junior L.J. Fort, who had 70 tackles. Two sophomores, Terrell

McBride and Andre Martin, will be the keys at either cornerback spot.

The Panthers should have excellent special teams play with senior kicker Billy Hallgren, who made 13-of-17 field-goal attempts in 2009. He led the team in scoring a year ago with 82 total points.

South Dakota State was a team that took the entire nation by surprise a year ago. The Jackrabbits, in their second season of being playoff eligible, made the FCS playoffs and outplayed eventual finalist Montana in an opening-round game through three quarters before collapsing in the final quarter. Even with the disappointing loss, South Dakota State had an impressive season in finishing 8-4. This year's team will face a tough regular season where it will travel to perennial FCS power Delaware before later visiting FBS Nebraska. In addition, the Jacks also have traditional top MVFC teams on the road this year — including road contests at SIU, UNI and rival NDSU.

SDSU loses a few key members from last year, but the offense should again revolve around senior runningback Kyle Minett, who ran for 1.304 yards and 16 touchdowns. The quarterback position also should be consistent with sophomore Thomas O'Brien back after starting six games last year in place of the injured and now departed Ryan Crawford. O'Brien threw for 1,448 yards and 11 scores. The offensive line should be led by senior center Ryan McKnight and sophomore tackle Jonathan Fick.

The wide receiver position will be open after the departure of leading pass catcher Glen Fox as well as the next two leading receivers. Senior tight end Colin Cochart is the leading returning receiver after he caught 26 balls for 240 yards and five scores in 2009. The leading wide receiver returning is sophomore Aaron Rollin, who accounted for 11 catches for 113 yards in limited playing time.

SDSU's defense in 2009 was led by defensive end Danny Batten, who was drafted in the NFL by the Buffalo Bills. With Batten gone, the leadership for this year's team likely will come from senior linebacker Derek Domino, who led the team in tackles with 100 and tied for the interception lead with five. The secondary will be headed by senior strong safety Conrad Kjerstad, who tied Domino for the interception team lead and was third on the team in tackles with 81.

The Jackrabbits' special teams has a consistent performer in senior punter Dean Priddy, who has handled the duties each of the last three seasons in Brookings. In 2009, he ranked second in the league with an average of 41.2 yards per punt, including a career-long 64-yarder.

SDSU's Dakota Marker rival in **North Dakota State** has not seen much success from the move to the MVFC. Prior to entering the league in 2008, NDSU enjoyed two straight 10-1 seasons. Last year, however, it finished with a losing record for the first time in Coach Craig Bohl's seven-year tenure in Fargo with a 3-8 mark. Last year's team was quite young so 2010 should be better at least from an experience standpoint.

NDSU's defense likely will be the area that must improve for a better record. Gone is defensive coordinator Mike Breske, who left for the same position at Montana. He has been replaced in Fargo with Scott Hazelton, who is set to return to the old style of NDSU defense, which is a ball-hawking 4-3. His goal is to stop teams from being able to run and cut down on that 29-point average that occurred under Breske's 3-4 alignment in 2009. The Bison likely will be led by senior tackle Matthew Gratzek and junior linebacker Preston Evans, both of whom were named to the All-MVFC team. Sophomore linebacker Brandon Jemison was selected to the Valley's All-Newcomer team. Gratzek had a team-high 10.5 tackles for loss. Evans led the defense with 96 tackles and added six tackles for loss while Jemison added a team second best 61 tackles last season.

The Bison offense had few issues moving the ball last year, especially on the ground. The ground game, however, will need a new primary ball carrier with the graduation of Pat Paschall. Expect junior D.J. McNorton to take over this role after rushing for 282 yards and two scores a year ago in a backup role. Running the offense will be sophomore Jose Mohler, who won the quarterback battle in spring ball over freshman Brock Jensen and junior Dante Perez. He started the team's last four games in 2009 and showed promise with 635 passing yards with six touchdowns He rushed for another 140 yards.

Junior center Austin Richard received honorable mention on the all-league team and should anchor the line. North Dakota State was eighth in rushing offense (219.82 ypg) and 19th in total offense (400.09 ypg) in the FCS. The wide receiver positions again should be filled by Warren Holloway (33 receptions, 514 yards, 1 TD) and Gary Williams (12 receptions, 271 yards, 2 TDs). Junior tight end Matt Veldman (15 receptions, 191 yards, 3 TDs) also returns.

The lone completely new coach in the Valley this year is that for **Youngstown State**. The Penguins' prior coach, Jon Heacock, stepped down after last season. He compiled a 60-44 overall mark at YSU, including just one playoff appearance during his tenure at the prestigious FCS program. New Coach Eric Wolford returns to Youngstown (near his hometown) after a 16-year assistant coaching career. His most recent stint came as the running-game coordinator and offensive line coach at South Carolina. The Penguins will return a team that finished 6-5 a year ago so the rebuilding will not be steep.

The Penguin defense hopes to be quicker under Wolford as it yielded more than 22 points a game in 2009. The linebacker group should be the unit's focal point with four talented athletes in sophomore Taylor Hill and senior Na'eem Outler. Hill became the first freshman to lead the team in tackles (65) since 1986 while Outler led the position in tackles for losses (7) and sacks (2.5).

The line upfront should be headed by junior end John Sasson (50 tackles, 3 TFL), who was converted from the linebacker spot. Senior All-MVFC member Andre Elliott returns and has started each of the last two years at free safety. A year ago, Elliott tallied a team second best 63 tackles and also had an interception.

The YSU offense will see a new quarterback under center with senior Marc Kanetsky (30 yards, 1 TD on four total attempts in 2009) and freshman Kurt Hess as the leading two candidates to take over this spot from the departed Brandon Summers. Summers leaves the program with the record for career and season completion percentage. The prime target for the new quarterback will be Dominique Barnes, who led the conference in touchdown receptions with eight and caught 60 passes in total for 762 yards. The runningback also will be a new performer after the graduation of last year's leader Kevin Smith. The new starter looks to be sophomore Jamaine Cook (111 yards in 2009) or freshman Torrian Pace. The line will be paced by senior guard Eric Rodemoyer, who was an All-MVFC performer a year ago. It returns four of the five starters.

Missouri State always seems to be on the verge of a breakout season for Coach Terry Allen. This breakout, however, has not yet happened in his first four seasons in Springfield, which is nothing like he had at UNI. As the Panthers head coach, Allen won or shared seven consecutive MVFC titles from 1990 to 1997. This year might be the season Allen gets his Bears to this mark as 16 starters return from last year's 6-5 team. They hope to eclipse the six-win total for the first time since 1993 (7-4) and to the playoffs for the first time since 1990.

The Bears defense was the main reason it turned around the win total from 2008 to 2009 as it allowed just over 22 points - down from 35 from the year before. To improve even further, it will have three main seniors in linebacker Antoine Wilkinson, end Waylon Richardet and safety Skylar Smith to provide leadership in their respective areas. Wilkinson led the squad with 113 total tackles, making him the first MSU player since 2004 to hit the century mark. Richardet finished with 43 tackles, tops among MSU linemen, with six tackles for loss. Smith accounted 94 tackles, with 3.5 for a loss, and five defended passes.

MSU's offense again will be led by quarterback Cody Kirby, back for his senior year. Last season, he ranked fourth in the conference in total offense (2,116), passing yards (2,114), and pass efficiency (123.8). Senior David Arkin should lead the line after being named to the first team All-MVFC squad. He started every game last season, beginning the season at guard before finishing at tackle, the position where he likely will start in 2010. Kirby will be without the luxury of All-American tight end Clay Harbor, who was a fourth-round NFL draft pick by the Philadelphia Eagles. Two sophomores likely will be the skill position starters at wideout in Cadarrius Dotson (28 receptions, 244 yards, 2 TDs) and runningback Mikael Cooper-Falls (424 yards, 2 TDs).

The Bears have one of the top punter in the MVFC in junior Jordan Chiles. He averaged 40.1 yards/punt, which was the 24th best in the nation.

A team that hopes to rebound from a dreadful season is **Western Illinois**. The Leathernecks finished just 1-10 with the lone win coming in the season opener. One thing that will be more consistent will be the head coaching position that had been a source of controversy as interim head coach. Following 11 years as offensive coordinator, including 10 seasons as assistant head coach, Mark Hendrickson officially took over as head coach after last season. As an acting head coach parts of the past two seasons, Hendrickson has tabulated a 5-10 mark. This year's team will have 14 starters back in which to turn their fortunes.

The offense will be headed by senior quarterback Matt Barr, who is coming off an injury that took him out in game four last year. Freshman Wil Lunt was forced to play in his absence. Barr still accounted for

914 yards and five scores in his limited play in 2009 and was able to play spring ball so he should be the starter this fall. The passing game will be aided by wide receiver Lito Senatus, who caught 65 passes for 819 yards and five scores. The running game likely will be by committee after the graduation of former All-American Dre Gibbs. FBS Michigan State transfer Caulton Ray is in camp as a sophomore after starting the first four games for the Spartans and accumulated 156 yards and touchdown in his time there. At fullback, Josh Gabelmann earned Honorable Mention All-MVFC honors despite missing time with a concussion. He also averaged nearly four yards per carry and scored a touchdown in his limited time with the ball in his hands.

WIU's defense will be headed by All-MVFC senior linebacker Kyle Glazier. He paced the team in tackles the last two seasons, including 120 last year that tied him for ninth nationally. He will joined by fellow senior linebacker Brandon Kreczmer, who was second on the team with 88 tackles and a team-leading nine for a loss and seven sacks. The defense must improve to better its 27 point per game average.

The streak is over for **Indiana State**. The losing streak, overall (33) and within the conference (22), was snapped last year with a victory over Western Illinois. The one victory was an improvement over the two previous winless seasons. But Coach Trent Miles' team will need to improve on both sides to better last year's win total. The offense last year scored just nine points per game while the defense allowed more than 35.

The Sycamore defense will be headed by sophomore linebacker Aaron Archie, who led the team in tackles with 117. Junior Alex Sewall should lead the secondary after he was third on the team with 84. Junior Rod Hardy will anchor the line from his tackle spot. Hardy was the team leader in tackles for loss with 11 and added 42 tackles overall.

The ISU offense likely will be led by junior quarterback Ronnie Fouch, a FBS Washington transfer. Fouch saw little action a year ago but started the last eight games of the season and completed 113-of-250 passes for 1,339 yards and four touchdowns. The running game should be headed by junior Darrius Gates, who rushed for 266 yards and totaled another 124 yard through the air. Senior Bryant Kent returns this year after being ISU's top receiver a season ago. He had 20 receptions for 326 yards and two touchdowns.

Missouri Valley Games of the Week

Eastern Kentucky @ Missouri State, Sept. 4
The Bears open up with a tough contest against the OVC's Colonels. Will the home field be enough to come away with a win for MSU?

North Dakota State @ Northern Iowa, Sept. 11
These two teams don't seem to like each other even though the MVFC series is just two games old. It is the season opener for the Panthers, who will see several new starters. Can the Bison steal a win in Cedar Falls this year?

Illinois State @ South Dakota State, Sept. 18
The Redbirds appear as if they will have a good team. This trip to Brookings should give us an early indication if the prognostications are correct.

Indiana State @ Western Illinois, Sept. 25
Last year, the Sycamores finally broke a long losing streak within MVFC play against the Leathernecks. Can Indiana State make it two wins in a row over WIU this year?

Southern Illinois @ Illinois State, Oct. 2
This early season battle between these two Illinois schools should give us an idea of the conference front-runner.

Northern Iowa @ Southern Illinois, Oct. 9
The second tough game in a row for the Salukis. Will the new Salukis stadium be kind for the visiting Panthers or will SIU be able to win this tough contest?

South Dakota State @ Southern Illinois, Oct. 16
The Jackrabbits' loss at home last year to the Salukis gave SIU the MVFC crown. Can they repay the favor with a victory in Carbondale this year?

Youngstown State @ South Dakota State, Oct. 23
The Penguins should be another improved team, but this will be a tough road contest in Brookings.

Southern Illinois @ Missouri State, Oct. 30
The Bears always seem to be good on paper and should be ready for the visiting Salukis in this one.

Southern Illinois @ North Dakota State, Nov. 6
Coach Lennon visits his home state again. Two years ago, the Bison handed SIU its lone MVFC loss that season. Can he get revenge in this homecoming game for him?

South Dakota State @ North Dakota Sate, Nov. 13
The Dakota Marker contest has gone to the Jackrabbits the last three seasons. Can the

Fargodome help the Bison break this losing streak?

Northern Iowa @ Western Illinois, Nov. 20
These two have a rivalry game to end the regular season. Will either be in a position for a playoff spot?

Conference Capsules

Illinois State Redbirds
Location: Normal, Ill.
Stadium: Hancock Stadium (12,500 capacity)
Head Coach: Brock Spack (6-5 @ ISU & overall), 2nd Season
Who's Gone: RB Geno Blow, WR Eyad Salem, K Zach Kutch, DB Chris Garrett, DE Doni Phelps.
Who's Back: QB Matt Brown, QB Drew Kiel, OL Nick Bledsoe, DL Eric Brunner, DB Kelvyn Hemphill, CB EJ Jones, WR Tyrone Walker, LB Austin Davis, LB Mike Zimmer.
Historical Fact: The Redbirds have made the FCS playoffs three times in their history (1998, 1999, 2006). The 1999 team made it to the semifinal round before bowing out to eventual champion Georgia Southern.
Last Season: Illinois State went 6-5 in Coach Spack's first season, which was a three-game improvement over the 2008 season. It was the Redbirds' first winning season since 2006.
This Season: Coach Spack hopes to build on last year's young squad.

Indiana State Sycamores
Location: Terre Haute, Ind.
Stadium: Memorial Stadium (12,764 Capacity)
Head Coach: Trent Miles (1-22 @ ISU & Overall), 3rd Season
Who's Gone: DB Donye McCleskey
Who's Back: RB/RS Darrius Gates, DB Alex Sewall, DB Larry Carter, DB Ryan Roberts, LB Aaron Archie, DL Rod Hardy.
Historical Fact: Coach Miles was a wide receiver for the Sycamores from 1982-86. His 1983 and 1984 squads each won nine games and advanced to the NCAA FCS playoffs. The 1984 Sycamores were ranked No. 1 in the nation for most of the season.
Last Season: The Sycamores picked up their first victory in four years with a triumph at home against Western Illinois, but that was the one win in a 1-10 season.
This Season: ISU hopes to build on the budding momentum of getting a MVFC victory last year to improve even further.

Missouri State Bears
Location: Springfield, Mo.
Stadium: Plaster Field (16,300 capacity)
Head Coach: Terry Allen, (18-26 @ MSU, 107-80 Overall) 5th Season
Who's Gone: TE Clay Harbor, RB Jonathan Davis, DE Mike Daniels, WR Jared Emery, K Matt Hottelman.
Who's Back: OG David Arkin, LB Antoine Wilkinson, DE Waylon Richardet, SS Skylar Smith, P Jordan Chiles, QB Cody Kirby, RB Mikael Cooper-Falls, WR Cadarrius Dotson, LB Adam Beauchamp, LB Michael Keck, LB Antoine Wilkinson.
Historical Fact: The Bears were last in the FCS playoffs in 1990 - a home loss to the then Big Sky's Idaho 41-35.
Last Season: Missouri State finished 6-5 in its fourth season under Allen and the Bears tied for fifth place in the Missouri Valley.
This Season: Allen hopes to continue to improve on the six-victory total from a season ago to return to the playoffs for the first time in Springfield.

North Dakota State Bison
Location: Fargo, N.D.
Stadium: Fargodome (18,700 Capacity)
Head Coach: Craig Bohl (52-25, NDSU & Overall) 8th Season
Who's Gone: NG Mike Fairbairn, RB Pat Paschall, OG Keith Buckman, QB Nick Mertens, CB Richard Bowman.
Who's Back: DT Matthew Gratzek, LB Preston Evans, OG Ryan Foster, OC Austin Richard, QB Jose Mohler, RB D.J. McNorton, WR Gary Williams, LB Brandon Jemison.
Historical Fact: NDSU has won eight national titles in its history - the last being at the DII level in 1990.
Last Season: The Bison finished with their first losing season under Coach Bohl, finishing 3-8 overall.
This Season: NDSU hopes to build on last year's young team to get in the upper half of the MVFC standings.

Northern Iowa Panthers
Location: Cedar Falls, Iowa
Stadium: UNI-Dome (16,324 capacity)
Head Coach: Mark Farley (82-34 @ UNI & Overall), 10th Season
Who's Gone: QB Pat Grace, DE James Ruffin, LB Josh Mahoney, OL Austin Howard, DB Quentin Scott.
Who's Back: WR Josh Collins, WR Maurice Turner, LB Jamar Thompson, LB L.J. Fort, RB Carlos Anderson, QB Zach Davis, LB L.J. Fort, LB Jamar Thompson.
Historical Fact: UNI reached the NCAA I-AA national championship game for the first time in school history in 2005. The Panthers have reached the I-AA semifinals on six occasions.
Last Season: The Panthers started 6-1 but lost three of their last four to finish 7-4 and miss out on the

FCS playoffs.
This Season: Coach Farley's team hopes to rebound from last year's disappointment and return to playoffs, but it will need to do so with 13 new starters.

South Dakota State Jackrabbits
Location: Brookings, S.D.
Stadium: Coughlin-Alumni Stadium (15,000 Capacity),
Head Coach: John Stiegelmeier (83-60, SDSU & Overall), 14th Season
Who's Gone: DE Danny Batten, WR Glen Fox, OT Casey Knips, LB Chris Johnson, LB Jimmy Rogers.
Who's Back: RB Kyle Minett, LB Derek Domino, OC Ryan McKnight, SS Conrad Kjerstad, TE Colin Cochart, P Dean Priddy, OT Jonathan Fick, QB Thomas O'Brien.
Historical Fact: Before last year, SDSU last made the postseason in 1979 — a 50-7 loss to Youngstown State in the DII playoffs.
Last Season: SDSU finished 8-4 and made its first FCS playoff appearance. It nearly defeated top-seeded Montana but fell 61-48 after leading through three quarters.
This Season: The Jacks hope to duplicate last year's playoff appearance, but it will have to win at most of the top contenders' venues to achieve a second straight berth.

Southern Illinois Salukis
Location: Carbondale, Ill.
Stadium: New Stadium (un-named) (15,000 capacity)
Head Coach: Dale Lennon (20-5 @ SIU, 122-37 Overall) 3rd Season
Who's Gone: RB Deji Karim, LB Chauncey Mixon, S Marty Rodgers, DT Chris Arthurs, TE Ryan Kernes.
Who's Back: FB John Goode, OL David Pickard, WR Joe Allaria, OL Bryan Boemer, K Kyle Dougherty, DB Korey Lindsey, DB Mike McElroy, QB Chris Dieker, QB Paul McIntosh, DE Kyle Russo.
Historical Fact: The Salukis have made the postseason eight times in their history with an 8-7 overall record. They won the FCS title in 1983.
Last Season: SIU was the 2009 MVFC champions but lost in the quarterfinals of the FCS playoffs after defeating Eastern Illinois in the opening round.
This Season: Coach Lennon hopes to continue the Saluki playoff streak, which stands at seven straight seasons, but it will have to do so with 13 starters lost.

Western Illinois Leathernecks
Location: Macomb, Ill.
Stadium: Hanson Field (15,000 capacity)
Head Coach: Mark Hendrickson (5-10 @ WIU & career), 3rd Season (was acting coach for two years)
Who's Gone: DB Patrick Stoudamire, RB Dre Gibbs, LB Buddy Dudczak.
Who's Back: LB Kyle Glazier, QB Matt Barr, WR Lito Senatus, FB Josh Gabelmann, WR Justin Rideau, LB Brandon Kreczmer, WR/RS Todd Speight.
Historical Fact: WIU has made the FCS playoffs eight times.
Last Season: The Leathernecks finished just 1-10 with their lone win coming in the season opener at Sam Houston State.
This Season: Hendrickson, who coached parts of the last two seasons as the acting coach, takes over as permanent coach and hopes to rebound after a poor showing in 2009.

Youngstown State Penguins
Location: Youngstown, Ohio
Stadium: Arnold D. Stambaugh Stadium (20,630 capacity)
Head Coach: Eric Wolford (0-0 YSU & Overall) 1st Season
Who's Gone: WR Donald Jones, DE Mychal Savage, CB Lenny Wicks, QB Brandon Summers
Who's Back: OG Eric Rodemoyer, WR Dominique Barnes, S Andre Elliott, OC Andy Kowicki, OT Andrew Radakovich, SS Sir Demarco Bledsoe, LB Taylor Hill.
Historical Fact: YSU has won four national titles and finished second twice in its FCS history.
Last Season: The Penguins finished 6-5 and prior coach Jon Heacock resigned after the season.
This Season: In Coach Wolford's first head coaching position, he hopes to rekindle the winning ways for the Penguins.■

Northeast Conference Preview
By Charles Burton

Predicted Order of Finish
1. Central Connecticut State
2. Robert Morris
3. Monmouth
4. Wagner
5. Albany
6. Duquesne
7. Sacred Heart
8. Bryant
9. St. Francis

Players of the Year
Offense: QB Nick Doscher, Wagner, So.
Defense: SS Alondre Rush, Central Connecticut State, Sr.

Biggest Shoes To Fill: Monmouth RB David Sinisi
The NEC was known for having outstanding runningbacks in 2009, but one back meant more to his team than Central Connecticut State's James Mallory or Albany's David McCarty. The Cedar Grove, N.J., native was one of the top backs in FCS last year, finishing with 1,437 yards rushing and 13 TDs. The Hawks' workhorse averaged more than 130 yards per game, good for second in all of FCS. He leaves West Long Branch with every significant rushing record for the Hawks, including career rushing yards (5,049) and rushing touchdowns (65).

NEC Respect

To observers of FCS playoff football, they'd rather the NEC stay home.

They wonder where St. Francis can be found in Pennsylvania and where Sacred Heart is in Connecticut. They wonder why a conference whose members can offer up to 32 scholarships to their players – a number that will go up to 40 starting in 2011 – deserves a spot in the FCS playoffs. And they're also not happy that the NEC's insistence on a shot at the postseason party has caused the symmetrical 16-team playoff bracket to now become a 20-team entity, pushing the championship game out past January and giving teams bye weeks during Thanksgiving weekend.

Ask the coaches of the NEC, though, and you get a different story.

Start with the tenure of many of the league coaches. Albany's Bob Ford started his journey at Albany in 1970, back when the Great Danes had only a club team. Wagner head coach Walt Hameline started his Seahawk coaching career in 1981, guiding the Seahawks to a Division III championship. Monmouth's Kevin Callahan, along with Robert Morris head coach Joe Walton (who was once the head coach of the NFL's New York Jets), have coached their teams for almost 30 years and are the only coaches those programs have ever known.

With the exception of St. Francis, which promoted young offensive coordinator Chris Villareal to head coach, every NEC head coach has been at their position for at least the last four years.

"We have great coaches in this league," Ford said a few years ago. "The coaching in this league is tremendous. You have a lot of guys with grey hair in this league. I get better from coaching against them."

That great coaching has translated into a competitive league – and one that can boast impressive nonconference scalps. Since 2003, a NEC team has beaten a foe every year from a conference with an autobid to the FCS playoffs, including Albany's 20-16 triumph over Maine in 2009.

"Everyone is scheduling tough nonconference games, and I think that was a key component in us getting that automatic bid," Monmouth head coach Robert Callahan said a few years ago. "The level of play in the league has improved, you can see that. It's brought it up to the point where it's a tossup every week now."

Plus, with the addition of Bryant, the NEC has solidified its solid base with a team that had four NEC conference victories in its inaugural year.

Building on the legacy of the late Brenda Weare, new NEC commissioner Noreen Morris inherits a nine-team conference that has gone from need-based aid to limited scholarships – and one that is excited to receive its first bid to the FCS playoffs.

To the rest of FCS, the NEC's clear message is: Ignore the league at your playoff peril.

Central Connecticut State fans are obviously hoping for back-to-back NEC championships and the FCS playoff spot that it will bring – but it might not be easy. With its top two quarterbacks Aubrey Norris

and Hunter Wanket gone along with runningback James Mallory, it has to hope new offensive coordinator Tim Stowers can get transfer quarterback Gunnar Jesperson ready to run Jeff McInerney's triple-option offense. With solid performers such as safety Alondre Rush and wideout Josue Paul returning, however, the Blue Devils still look to be a formidable team. They'll know where they stand early, with tough road trips to New Hampshire of the CAA and Youngstown State of the Missouri Valley Football Conference. But they'll enjoy home games agaisnt Division II Bentley and NEC foes Bryant, Duquesne, Wagner and St. Francis (Pa.).

Is this the year Joe Walton's Robert Morris Colonials finally get consistent enough to challenge for the NEC title again? After another early season collapse in 2009, the Colonials ended strongly with five straight victories and seemingly finding a quarterback, sophomore Jeff Sinclair, to complement runningback Myles Russ. They've seen all-NEC lineman Mark Szymanski graduate, but linebacker Alex DiMichele returns to lead the defense. Could this combination of talent and experience give Joe Walton's squad its first playoff appearance? Robert Morris will be challenged early on the road against perennial Pioneer League power Dayton, as well as being challenged at home versus Liberty of the Big South - a team that spent time in the Top 25 last year. The Colonials also will enjoy tough NEC home games versus Monmouth, Albany, Central Connecticut State and nearby rival Duquesne.

Monmouth was so reliant on workhorse runningback David Sinisi to generate offense last year that it's difficult to see who is going to step in to take his place. Head coach Kevin Callahan hopes quarterback Andrew Mandeville and runningback Bobby Giles can pick up where Sinisi left off. Defensively, however, with free safety Jose Gumbs prowling the field, Monmouth might have the best defense in the NEC. Will it be enough to get to the playoffs? At home this year, Monmouth will be entertaining Maine of the CAA and independent Old Dominion in interesting nonconference action while in NEC play, Monmouth will host Bryant, St. Francis (Pa.), Sacred Heart and Central Connecticut State.

Behind the play of quarterback Nick Doscher, Walt Hameline's Wagner Seahawks were a major surprise in 2009, knocking off eventual NEC champion Central Connecticut State. Wagner finished 6-5. If Doscher can stay healthy all year, Seahawk fans have to wonder: Could this be the team that makes it to the playoffs for the first time since Wagner won the Division III championship in 1987? It'll need to overcome a disappointing end to last year – riding two losses – and improve on defense behind the play of linebacker Julian Stanford. Can the Seahawks do it? They have several home games in early fall as they welcome Cornell of the Ivy League and NEC foes Robert Morris and Bryant in three consecutive weeks. Filling out their NEC schedule is Duquesne and Monmouth later in the year.

Can the Albany Great Danes reload? With a dominant team since the NEC has allowed limited scholarships, Bob Ford is faced with a daunting rebuilding project where he's facing the graduation of his top quarterback (Vinny Esposito), the top runningback in program history (David McCarty), his top receiver (Tim Bush), an all-NEC center (Kevin Richards) and eight starters on last year's defense (including free safety Gerald Casale and linebacker Justin Brancaccio). The cupboard is hardly bare – quarterback/"slash" back Andrew Smith returns as does defensive end Mike Kelly, but the Great Danes' chances of winning the league depend on how many unproven players mesh. Bob Ford's philosophy of playing "anyone, anyplace, anywhere" means the Great Danes will be again playing three intriguing nonconference games on the road versus Maine of the CAA, Stephen F. Austin down in the Southland, and Yale of the Ivy League. Their first home game starts league home schedule, where they will face off against St. Francis (Pa.), Central Connecticut State, Wagner and Monmouth.

Year Two of the Duquesne Dukes' move to the NEC was little different than the first: Coach jerry Schmitt's troops fell to another sub-.500 season as injuries grounded many Dukes before the season even began. But with tight end Sean Bunevich returning along with linebacker Nathan Totino and several other young Dukes, if everything comes together, Duquesne might be able to turn its fortunes around. The Dukes will enjoy a fine home slate early as they host regional rival Bucknell of the Patriot League and Pioneer league powerhouse Dayton. Soon thereafter, they embark on their NEC league slate where they will host Albany, Monmouth, Sacred Heart and St. Francis (Pa.).

In 2009, you knew Sacred Heart would put plenty of points on the board thanks to quarterback Dale Fink and wideout Steve Tedesco. The trouble was its defense, which yielded nearly 30 points a game. In 2010, Fink returns without Tedesco, who graduated, but the Pioneers' chances will hinge on improving their defense. Linebacker Chris Mandas will be counted upon to slow down opponents enough to give Fink's offense a chance to win. Georgetown of the Patriot League is the only nonconference foe that

will invade Campus Field this year. Robert Morris, Central Connecticut State, Albany and Wagner round out the Pioneers' home schedule. An interesting nonconference trip to Dartmoouth of the Ivy League also dots the schedule.

Led by new head coach Chris Villareal, the St Francis Red Flash hope to start a new chapter after finishing last year with a 2-9 record. The new coach definitely has solid young players to build with: runningback Jude Yearwood and linebacker Scott Lewis, for starters. Villareal hopes to build a winning attitude and culture at Loretto. In its nonconference road schedule, St. Francis will face two teams that spent time in last years FCS Top 25: Liberty of the Big South and Cal Poly of the Great West Football Conference (as well as a team it beat last year, Morehead State of the Pioneer Football League). In NEC play, the Red Flash welcomes Sacred Heart, regional rival Robert Morris, Wagner and Bryant.

NEC Games to watch in 2010

Sept 4, Bucknell at Duquesne. The Dukes haven't won since 2002 in this Pennsylvania rivalry with Bucknell of the Patriot League – but last year's 48-42 barnburner was a close one, finally settled when the Bison recovered Duquesne's onside kick at the end. In the Dukes' season opener, they'll hope to build off quarterback Connor Dixon's performance in last year's game, where he fired six touchdown passes.

Sept 11, Maine at Monmouth. On the brink of their first triumph over a CAA team in 2008, Black Bear QB Adam Farkes' miracle touchdown pass in the closing minute gave Maine a 21-17 victory over the Hawks in West Long Branch. Two years later, they return – and Monmouth hopes this time to deliver the victory.

Sept 18, Sacred Heart at St. Francis. If the Red Flash or Pioneers hope to be heard from in the league race, this early NEC game is a must-win contest. In three starts versus St. Francis, Sacred Heart QB Dale Fink has led an offense that has averaged more than 33 points against the Red Flash.

Sept 25, Robert Morris at Wagner. Last year, in a battle of freshmen quarterbacks, Colonial QB Jeff Sinclair outdueled NEC first-team selection Nick Doscher as Robert Morris' physical defense pounded Wagner into submission in a 27-10 victory – knocking it out of the NEC title chase. The rematch happens in Week Four, and this promises to be a tough-fought game.

Oct 2. Bryant at Wagner. The Bulldogs' young program has owned the Seahawks in their first two meetings in 2008 (24-14) and 2009 (6-2). If Bryant can keep up its mastery of Walt Hameline's team, it just might find itself in the NEC title hunt.

Oct. 9, Monmouth at Robert Morris. The crowning achievement of Joe Walton's Colonials last year was holding Monmouth RB David Sinisi under 100 yards in a 23-9 pasting in the final game of the 2009 season. Kevin Callahan's Hawks will be circling this day on the calendar in an effort to exact revenge.

Oct. 16, Albany at Robert Morris. Last year, Colonials PK Garrett Clawson's last-second field goal not only gave Robert Morris a 13-10 victory – it also broke Albany's 12-game home winning streak and dealt a fatal blow to its title hopes. Can Bob Ford's Great Danes repay Robert Morris the favor this year?

Oct. 23, Central Connecticut State at Albany. For the last two years, this game has effectively been for the NEC championship, and for the last two years, this game has come down to two-point conversion tries in the last two minutes. Will it happen again this year?

Oct 30, Wagner at Central Connecticut State. The Blue Devils' only conference loss last year came to the Seahawks, which received a late touchdown pass to win.

Nov. 6, Central Connecticut State at Robert Morris. This crucial NEC matchup is made more interesting by the fact that the Blue Devils have won only once at Joe Walton Stadium, a 34-21 victory in 2004. Overall, they are 1-6 at Robert Morris.

Nov 13, Monmouth at Central Connecticut State. Down 19-0 going into the fourth quarter, a 20-point Blue Devil outburst, punctuated by WR Josue Paul's 69-yard touchdown run with just under three minutes to play, gave Central Connecticut State an improbable 20-19 victory and the inside track to the NEC championship. Can this year's game match last year's drama?

Nov 20, Monmouth at Albany. The Hawks and Great Danes will be hoping that their first FCS playoff appearance is on the line in this game. Bob Ford's Albany squad hopes to keep its current streak going against Monmouth as it has taken the last three games in the series.

Conference Capsules

Albany Great Danes
Location: Albany, N.Y.
Stadium: University Field (5,000)
Head Coach: Bob Ford (232-147-0, 241-169-1 overall)
Key Losses: QB Vinny Esposito, RB David McCarty, WR Tim Bush, C Kevin Richards, DE Tony Sparano, LB Justin Brancaccio, LB Dave Nicomini, FS Dave Casale
Key Returners: QB Dan De Lella, QB Andrew Smith, RB Ben Carl, WR Jason Poore, OL Vince Gonzales, DE Mike Kelly, DT Trevor Anderson, LB Said Gaida, CB Ross Bertrand, PK Herb Glass
Historical Note: The Great Danes have beaten at least one team from an autobid conference for the last four years running. In 2006, they beat Lehigh (17-16) and Delaware (17-10); in 2007, they beat Fordham (23-20); in 2008, they beat Hofstra (22-16), and in 2009, they beat Maine (20-16).
Last Year: Riding a six-game winning streak and with a third straight NEC title in sight, a dramatic 31-29 setback to Central Connecticut State on Halloween ultimately would stop the 7-4 Great Danes' conference championship hopes.
This Year: Despite the loss of three key skill offensive players to graduation, "slash" back Andrew Smith will make Bob Ford's offense as dangerous as ever. It will be difficult, however, to restock a defense that lost eight starters. Can DE Mike Kelly help bring the Great Danes to the NEC title once again?

Bryant Bulldogs
Location: Smithfield, R.I.
Stadium: Bulldog Stadium (3,400)
Head Coach: Marty Fine (39-24, 66-36 overall)
Key Losses: RB Jerrell Smith, RB Lindsey Gamble, WR Tim Mastrino, OL Ben Lyons, DE Don Smith, LB Aaron Bryant, DB Anthony Castelli
Key Returners: QB Mike Croce, RB Michael Canfora, WR Khahel Pritchard, TE Doug Emerzian, TE Matt Tracey, OL Bryan Brady, NG Andrew Regan, LB Jason Riffe, LB Franck Tebou, FS Addison Lynch, RS Jordan Brown
Historical Note: The Bulldogs have played only two postsesason games in their young history. In their final two years in Division II, they qualified for the playoffs, losing in 2006, 31-29 to West Chester (Pa.) and losing in 2007, 45-28 to Southern Connecticut State.
Last Year: In their first year playing in the NEC with a Division I schedule, the Bulldogs ended with a respectable 5-6 record. Four of their five victories came against NEC foes Robert Morris, St. Francis (Pa.), Wagner and Duquesne.
This Year: The Bulldogs will look for a lot more than respectability, though whether they can do it after losing DE Don Smith and RB Jerrell Smith remains to be seen. All eyes will be on RB Michael Canfora and FS Addison Lynch to see if they can.

Central Connecticut State Blue Devils
Location: New Britain, Conn.
Stadium: Arute Field (7,500)
Head Coach: Jeff McInerney (30-15, 30-15 overall)
Key Losses: QB Hunter Wanket, QB Aubrey Norris, RB James Mallory, WR Nick Colagiovanni, OL Anthony Piniero, DL Ray Saunders, DT Danny Rodrigues, CB Marcus Dorsey
Key Returners: QB Gunnar Jesperson, RB Brian Fowler, WR Josue Paul, OL Mike Allison, DL Ricardo Gibson, LB Jeff Marino, CB Dominique Rose, SS Alondre Rush
Historical Note: The Blue Devils won 59 games last decade, marking it the most successful decade in Central Connecticut State history.
Last Year: In order to become NEC champions, the Blue Devils had to do something they were unable to do for three years running: beat Albany. With their dramatic 31-29 victory, Central Connecticut State finally would get the Great Dane off their backs and qualify for their first postseason game in their history – the "Gridiron Classic" – with a 9-2 record and NEC championship.
This Year: Head coach Jeff McInerney is hoping transfer QB Gunnar Jesperson can make up for the departure of offensive coordinator Rob Likens and the graduation of RB James Mallory and most of the skill players on offense. But with a tough, experienced defense led by SS Alondre Rush, the Blue Devils still look like the team to beat in 2010.

Duquesne Dukes
Location: Pittsburgh, Pa.
Stadium: Arthur J. Rooney Field (2,200)
Head Coach: Jerry Schmitt (26-25, 54-46-0 overall)
Key Losses: QB Kevin Rombach, RB Cleodis Williams, WR Michael Rasky, OL Mike Kitka, OL Steve Kuhns, DB Bill Pohleti
Key Returners: QB Sean Patterson, RB Larry McCoy, WR Connor Dixon, WR Akeem Moore, TE Sean Bunevich, OL Ron Dunn, DL Thaimu Bangora, LB Nathan Totino, CB Justin Melhado
Historical Note: No other FCS program can boast that it has not only one, but two wins in the Orange Bowl. On New Year's Day in 1933, Elmer Layden's team destroyed the "home" team Miami 33-7, and on New Year's Day in 1937 halfback Boyd Brumbaugh's 72-yard touchdown pass would give the Dukes a 13-12 triumph over Mississippi State.
Last Year: Injuries to TE Sean Bunevich and several other Dukes grounded Duquesne's season before it really started as Jerry Schmitt struggled to a 3-8 in his second year in the limited-scholarship NEC.

This Year: With new defensive coordinator Dave Opfar (former head coach at St. Francis) – and a solid, talented core of experienced defensive players such as LB Nathan Totino – expect Duquesne to improve markedly. How far it goes will depend on how QB Sean Patterson does on offense.

Monmouth Hawks
Location: West Long Branch, N.J.
Stadium: Kessler Field (4,600)
Head Coach: Kevin Callahan (101-72, 101-92 overall)
Key Losses: RB David Sinisi, WR Ron Lauch, OL Kevin Sterling, OL Andrew Musick, DL David Kennedy
Key Returners: QB Andrew Mandeville, RB Bobby Giles, WR Nick Romeo, WR Ryan Folsom, OL Shawn Wright, DL Garrett Culloo, LB Jeff Brady, LB Joe Cella, LB Jose Gumbs, FS Kendall Haley, CB Ken Amsel
Historical Note: Monmouth has played two postseason games in its history, but has yet to win one. In 2003, the Hawks lost 12-10 in the ECAC Bowl to Duquesne after missing a 40-yard field goal attempt, and in 2006, they were dominated 27-7 by QB Josh Johnson and San Diego in the "Gridiron Classic."
Last Year: Despite Sinisi's heroics, the young Hawks limped to a 5-6 record. Kevin Callahan's offense eclipsed the 20-point barrier only five times all season.
This Year: With several defenders returning, led by LB Jose Gumbs, Kevin Callahan's Hawks deserve to be in the championship conversation – if QB Andrew Mandeville can survive the loss of Sinisi and get the offense back on track.

Robert Morris Colonials
Location: Moon Township, Pa.
Stadium: Joe Walton Stadium (3,000)
Head Coach: Joe Walton (96-67-1, 96-67-1 overall)
Key Losses: QB Camdin Crouse, TE Shadrea King, WR Sherrod Evers, DE Mark Szymanski, LB Adam Lawrence, CB Marvin McCalla
Key Returners: QB Jeff Sinclair, RB Myles Russ, FB Jeff Link, WR Anthony Coleman, OL Carlos Andrade, NG Chris Roberts, LB Alex DiMichele, LB Elias Navarro, CB Rolf Bathold, FS Michael Landers, PK Garrett Clawson
Historical Note: The Colonials' two ECAC bowl wins in 1996 and 1997 – a 28-26 triumph over Duquesne and a 35-13 victory over Georgetown, respectively - are the only two postseason appearances in the Colonials' young history.
Last Year: A young Colonial team, which struggled to an 0-6 start, righted the ship at the end of the year, winning five straight, including victories over Albany, Wagner and Monmouth.
This Year: Can Joe Walton's group build on the great success at the end of last year? With RB Myles Russ pacing the offense and LB Alex DiMichele pacing the defense, they could have a shot.

Sacred Heart Pioneers
Location: Fairfield, Conn.
Stadium: Campus Field (4,000)
Head Coach: Paul Gorham (25-38, 25-38 overall)
Key Losses: RB Brian Friedman, WR Steve Tedesco, CB Andre Isla, K Joe Schroeder
Key Returners: QB Dale Fink, RB/KR Garry Coles, WR Tony Patterson, OL Justin Smith, DE Justin Embler, DE Bill O' Brien, LB Chris Mandas, LB Brian Flumere, CB Titus McIntosh
Historical Note: Nine years ago, the Pioneers won the Northeast Conference championship with a perfect 10-0 record. In their only postseason appearance, they dominated Duquesne 31-15 in the ECAC Bowl.
Last Year: Fink kept the high-flying Sacred Heart offense clicking for the most part, but a porous defense had the Pioneers struggle to a 2-8 record.
This Year: Paul Gorham's offense will undoubtedly fly once again with Fink, but the same questions with the defense remain. Can LB Chris Mandas and the defense improve enough for the Pioneers to make a run at the title?

St. Francis Red Flash
Location: Loretto, Pa.
Stadium: DeGol Field (3,500)
Head Coach: Chris Villarrial (first year as head coach)
Key Losses: WR Antoine Rivera, OL Cody Kekipi, DE Russel Fisher, DT Zackary Adama, SS Siafa Lavala, CB Terrance Long
Key Returners: QB John Kelly, RB Jude Yearwood, WR/KR Omar Winston, OL Nick Peterson, DE Chris Shepard, LB Scott Lewis, LB Matthew Parker, FS Jordan Harper
Historical Note: Despite their long and storied football history, the Red Flash have only appeared in one postseason game: in 1992, when they would lose 48-6 to Wagner in the ECAC Bowl.
Last Year: The Red Flash did better then their winless 2008 campaign, but after struggling to a 2-9 finish, head coach Dave Opfar resigned as the head man at St. Francis.
This Year: Under young head coach (and former offensive coordinator) Chris Villarrial, the Red Flash hope to get back on track with building blocks QB John Kelly and LB Scott Lewis.

Wagner Seahawks
Location: Staten Island, N.Y.
Stadium: Wagner College Stadium (3,300)

Head Coach: Walt Hameline (195-110-2, 195-110-2 overall)
Key Losses: RB Shane Smith, WR Lon Woods, OL Matthew Martin, NG Joseph Harkins, LB Olatunde Ogunlana
Key Returners: QB Nick Doscher, RB Dominique Williams , WR David Crawford, OL Cleveland Green, DE Derrick Forrest, LB Julian Stanford, FS Stefen Gage, DB Chaz Legette, DB/KR Frantz Placide, P Kyle Muir
Historical Note: The Seahawks are no stranger to postseason play. In 1987, they won the Division III championship over Dayton 19-4, and won two ECAC Bowls in 1992 and 1993 over St. Francis (PA) and Iona, respectively.
Last Year: Undefeated in league play going into the final two weekends and fresh off a 32-27 upset of Central Connecticut State, Wagner had a real chance at the NEC championship. Two disappointing losses to Robert Morris and Albany, however, meant Wagner would finish at 6-5.
This Year: With NEC rookie of the year QB Nick Doscher to lead the offense, you know Walt Hameline's squad will be able to put points on the board. Whether it contends will depend on how the defense, led by LB Julian Stanford, comes together.■

Pioneer Football League 2010 Preview
By Kent Schmidt

Predicted Order of Finish
1. Butler
2. Dayton
3. Drake
4. Jacksonville
5. San Diego
6. Marist
7. Davidson
8. Campbell
9. Morehead State
10. Valparaiso

Offensive Player of the Year: Steve Valentino, Dayton, QB, Senior
Defensive Player of the Year: Dain Taylor, Drake, DE, Senior

Biggest Shoes to Fill: Wes McDermott, Morehead State, LB
He won the league's Defensive Player of the Year honor in 2009 after finishing the season ranked second in tackles (9.9 pg) and third in tackles-for-loss (1.50 pg). He led all PFL linebackers in tackles (109), posting 14 more than the next closest follower. McDermott led a Morehead State defense that finished the season ranked second in total defense, allowing just 266.3 yards per game, and led the league in rushing defense, permitting a paltry 72.5 yards per game on the ground.

As the FCS playoffs expand by two more automatic bids, the Pioneer Football League also is looking to join this postseason party as the league has applied for an automatic bid to the FCS playoffs per some league schools. The PFL, which for the last four years has played one of the two new playoff automatic qualifiers in the Northeast Conference, will not partake at least for now in the postseason even though the PFL won three of the four contests that pitted the NEC and PFL champions.

A year ago, Butler defeated Central Connecticut State in the Grid Iron Classic in what appears to be the final such game between the two conferences.

Now the PFL will stay with the 10 teams that comprised the league a year ago. This year's PFL race looks even after Butler and Dayton tied for the league crown a year ago. Those two along with Drake, Jacksonville and San Diego all appear to be candidates to win the league.

The story of **Butler** is one of great turnaround stories in all of FCS and not just that story of the basketball team making it to the national title game this spring. The Bulldog football team also has a great story to tell. In 2006, the Bulldogs were winless and a year later in 2007 only had victories outside of PFL play in Coach Jeff Voris' first season in Indianapolis. The turnaround really started in 2008 when Butler finished 6-5. Last year it went 11-1 enroute to the PFL title and the school's first postseason victory in the Grid Iron Classic. The two straight winning seasons for the Bulldogs were a first for the team since the 1991-92 seasons. The surprising thing is that the Bulldogs were such a young team a year ago. It returns 10 of the 14 All-PFL performers from 2009 so all looks promising to repeat as PFL champions in 2010.

The Bulldog offense is led by junior quarterback Andrew Huck, who finished 2009 with 21 touchdown passes and 2,454 passing yards, the third-highest single season total in Butler history. Huck completed 233 of 371 passes with 11 interceptions. His completions and pass attempts were the most in the PFL and his passing yards were the second most in the circuit. His main target again should be junior Zach Watkins, who turned in a record-setting performance in his first season as a starting wide receiver. He finished with a league-leading 78 catches, which was the most in Butler history. Watkins' total stands second on the PFL single season list for receptions. He finished fourth in the PFL in receiving yards with 818 yards, and he tied for fifth in the league in scoring with 10 touchdowns.

The running game also will have a familiar face in Indianapolis with senior Scott Gray, who rushed for more yards in 2009 than any Butler player in the last seven seasons. The Butler rushing leader picked up 868 yards on 169 attempts (5.1). Gray wound up third in the PFL in rushing (72.3 yards per game). Opening the holes will be two All-PFL linemen in seniors Donnie Gilmore and Mike Staniewicz. The line last year yielded just 14 quarterback sacks on the season, a PFL best.

The Bulldog defense will be led by senior linebacker Nick Caldicott, junior lineman Grant Hunter and junior safety Mark Giacomantonio. Caldicott led the team with 70 tackles. Hunter wound up second in the PFL in quarterback sacks (0.83). Giacomantonio led the league in pass interceptions with five. Helping out the defense is All-PFL punter

sophomore Michael Wilson, who led the PFL in 2009 in punts inside the 20-yard line (29).

Dayton finished tied with Butler in the PFL standings but lost the head-to-head matchup to send Butler to the Grid Iron Classic. Dayton has been the most prolific team in the PFL's 17-year history, gaining at least a share of 10 titles in the league's history. The Flyers return 14 starters with 10 starters back on offense.

PFL Offensive Player of the Year quarterback Steve Valentino is back under center for his senior season. He started last year as wide receiver but was pressed into service at quarterback. Valentino ended the season with 2,101 yards and 12 touchdowns with eight interceptions. His top target, Justin Watkins, also is back after tallying 814 yards and six touchdowns. Up front, senior guard Tyler Friedrich and junior guard Justin Griffis will anchor the line after both were named to the All-PFL teams.

The Flyers running game will feature Valentino as well as sophomore Brian Mack, who steadily moved up the depth chart to finish second on the team in rushing (485 yards, four TDs) behind Valentino, who had 650 yards and nine touchdowns a year ago. In total, Valentino led the league with 281.6 yards total offense per game.

Defensively the team's top two tacklers – senior safety James Vercammen and senior linebacker Joe Ries, and the Flyers' 2009 sack leader, senior defensive end Brandon Wingeier are back. Vercammen led the team with 123 tackles with 15 of those for a loss. Ries was second with 65 and led the team with three interceptions. Wingeier totaled 38 tackles and 6.5 sacks and 11.5 tackles for a loss. Junior safety Ben Welsh will be another key member on the Flyer defense after totaling 24 tackles a season ago.

After being down slightly for a few seasons, Coach Chris Creighton's **Drake** team turned things around last year with an 8-3 overall record and a tie for third in the PFL standings. The Bulldogs, however, did lose their last two games to the two teams that finished ahead of them (Dayton and Butler). Drake finished 6-5 in Creighton's first year as it did for interim coach Steve Loney in 2007. This year's team will have 14 starters overall returning.

The strength of this year's team likely will be the Bulldog defense despite being under the direction of a new defensive coordinator Tom Allen. The Bulldogs allowed just over 17 points per game. Former DC and assistant head coach Neal Neathery left to become the defensive coordinator at upstart Texas-San Antonio — a team that will begin play in 2011 at the FCS level before moving up to the FBS level. There are eight starters returning on this side of the ball, including first-team all-PFL senior end Dain Taylor, who led the PFL in tackles for a loss a year ago with 19.5 to go with 38.5 tackles and 11 sacks.

Elsewhere on defense, the linebacker group will have last year's PFL Freshman of the Year back in Tyler Moorehead, who ranked in the PFL's top 30 in tackles (6.1 pg) in his first season of action. He will be joined at a linebacker spot by senior Ben Morrison (55 tackles, 14.5 TFL, 4.5 sacks). Senior end Josh Walkup (22 tackles, 13.5 TFL, 8 sacks) will lead the line along with junior noseguard David Witkiewicz (12 tackles, 2 TFL, 1 sack).

The Bulldog offense will be led by two-time first-team All-PFL performer senior J-Back Stephen Platek, who led the team in receptions (49) and receiving yards (553) to go with 147 yards on the ground (9 TDs). Quarterback Mike Piatkowski returns for his junior season in Des Moines after finishing the season with the best total for a Bulldog quarterback since 2004. He recorded 2,139 yards passing with 14 touchdowns. Junior tackle Evan Lawrence will head Drake's offensive line.

A team that hopes to rebound in the PFL race is **Jacksonville**. The Dolphins won the PFL crown in 2008 but finished 2009 with a 7-4 overall mark and tied Drake for third. The Dolphins, however, were in the thick of the title hunt as they handed champion Butler (36-7) their lone loss. The seven-victory season was the second-best mark for Coach Kerwin Bell's team since beginning football in 2001.

The Dolphins expect 10 starters to return on offense, highlighted by record-setting junior quarterback Josh McGregor, senior runningback Rudell Small and junior wide receiver Josh Philpart. Small led the PFL in rushing yards with an average of 97.6 yards per game and became the first Dolphin to put up two straight seasons with 1,000 yards rushing. Philpart rewrote the JU record book last season, setting single-season records for touchdown catches (13) and receiving yards (912). McGregor led the PFL in passing with 2,693 yards and a whopping 31 touchdown passes with just seven interceptions. Senior Leonard Payton will lead the offensive line from his tackle position.

The defense, unlike the offense, will need to reload as the Dolphins lose five starters from last year's squad – most notably All-PFL members in safety

Jason Wood, along with linemen Aaron Frye and Haywood Range. All is not lost, however, as senior linebacker Joseph Fennell is one All-PFL member back this fall in north Florida after he led the team in tackles with 86. He will be joined by senior defensive lineman Shaun Lewis (team-leading 14.5 TFL and 8 sacks) and senior linebacker Will Perry (55 tackles, 3 TFL) as team leaders.

The Dolphin special teams will feature All-PFL senior punt returner/wide receiver Elliott Finkley. In total, Finkley had five touchdowns a year ago.

San Diego is another team that hopes to get closer to the top of the PFL standings after a season that saw it finish without a winning record (4-7) for the first time since 2002 (5-5). The Toreros had been the preseason selection to win the league last year, but close losses doomed Coach Ron Caragher's team where five of its seven losses were by seven points or less. USD hopes to rebound with 13 starters returning.

Offensively, USD will need to replace all-time leading rusher JT Rogan, who had 3,559 career yards along with six other starters. The Toreros will have sophomore quarterback Bo Stompro running the offense after starting the last four games in 2009. He was named the PFL Player of the week after the final game against Southern Utah and totaled 824 yards and eight touchdowns in his brief stint as the Torero starter. He will have PFL Offensive Freshman of the Year in Kyle Warren (11 receptions, 338 yards, 6 TDs) and All-PFL junior John McGough (49 receptions, 680 yards, 6 TDs) as his main targets.

The Torero defense will be led by senior tackle Paul Tremblay (40 tackles), who is the lone returning All-PFL member on this side of the ball. Fellow senior Loka Kanongataa will head the linebacker group and is the leading returning tackler with 64. Junior cornerback Al-Rilwan Adeyemi will head the secondary after he recorded 41 tackles and two interceptions in 2009.

USD has two fine special teams members returning in junior punter Kyle Negrete, who led the PFL with a 42.4 yard/punt average a year ago, and sophomore placekicker in Mike Levine, who led the team in scoring (46 points). He made 7-of-8 field-goal attempts.

Marist enters its second season in the PFL and found its past winning ways of when it was in the now-defunct MAAC after a single sub-par season (4-7) as an independent. The Red Foxes finished 7-4 overall and finished fifth in the PFL standings with a 5-3 league mark. The seven victories tied for the best ever by a Red Fox team and it had a six-game winning streak for the first time in team history.

The Marist defense will be the more experienced side this year and will be highlighted by seniors, nose tackle Terrence Turner (27 tackles, 5 TFL), end Matt Snow (12 tackles, 1.5 TFL), and safeties Rory Foley (69 tackles, 7 TFL, 3 sacks) and John Van Aman (26 tackles). Junior cornerback Jaquan Bryant, who was an All-PFL selection a year ago after leading the PFL with five interceptions (two for TDs), also returns. Fellow junior free safety Brandon Kicklighter (41 tackles, 1 INT) is another team leader on this side of the ball.

The Red Fox offense will be headed by wide receiver James LaMacchia, who set program single-season records for receptions (62) and yards (1,075) last season (5 TDs). He will be joined by senior tight end Chris Ortner (9 receptions, 115 yards, 2 TDs) as another receiving threat. Marist must find a quarterback after the graduation of Chris Debowski. The new quarterback likely will be sophomore Tommy Reilly, who is the only Red Fox player to see game action under center. He totaled 379 yards and touchdown in a backup role a season ago.

Another team that looks to rebound is **Davidson** after finishing just 3-7 in 2009 and 4-7 in 2008. The Wildcats were a surprising 6-4 in 2007 for Coach Tripp Merritt. To finish above the .500 mark, Davidson will need the help of 15 returning starters.

The Wildcat offense must step up as it scored just above 12 points a game a year ago. Leading the way will be senior runningback Kenny Mantuo, who led the team in rushing with 626 yards and five touchdowns a year ago. Another offensive weapon will be senior wideout Mark Hanabury, who led the team with 32 receptions and 309 yards (1 TD).

Davidson's defense will be led by senior linebacker Daniel Astrop, who led the Wildcats and ranked 12th in the league in tackles (68). He also recorded 3.5 sacks and five tackles for loss. He will be joined by junior defensive back Peter Kidwell, who ranked third in the league with three interceptions, and his 105 return yards on the picks led the conference. The sophomore defensive back also had 53 tackles and did return one of those interceptions for a touchdown. On special teams, the Wildcats have a dependable punter in senior Andrew Wohler, who ranked second in the league in punting, averaging 40.5 yards per kick, and tied for third in the conference in placing 22 punts inside the opponents' 20-yard line.

A team making strides is **Campbell** after just its second season of play. The Camels finished 2009 with a 3-8 record and recorded their first PFL victory over Morehead State 31-22 at home and their first PFL road victory (at Valparaiso 17-3) after a winless conference slate in their opening season. Being a new team, there were no seniors last year so the squad will return all starters to continue to grow, especially with its nine All-PFL team members.

The Camels led the PFL in rushing (189.73 yard per game). The team placed three individual players (C.J. Oates, Daniel Polk and Carl Smith) in the league's top 11 in rushing and ranked 13th nationally overall. Juniors tackle Sam Issermoyer and center Troy Horan are the leading offensive linemen to open the running holes. The leading Camel receivers are senior tight end Mike Stryffeler, who had 29 receptions for 355 yards and two touchdowns, and junior Harrison Jordan, who led the team in receiving yards with 404 yards on 23 receptions (3 TDs).

The defense is the area that likely will need to improve for the Camels. Last year they allowed more than 28 points a game. Four All-PFL performers are back to lead the improvement. They are linebackers, senior Lee Stanley (led the team with 88 tackles) and junior Milton Brown (third on the team with 61 tackles and tied for second with 5.5 TFL) and junior defensive backs Brandon Chandler (tied for the team lead with 3 INT) and Jared Hart (ranked fourth on the team overall with 58).

Another team that degraded a year ago was **Morehead State**, which finished just 3-8 as almost every part of the team suffered a key injury. Coach Matt Ballard hopes to get back to the winning ways he guided MSU to the PFL South Division (when the PFL was split into two divisions) from 2002 to 2005.

Ballard will need to replace three key defensive players in linemen Andrew Doan and Derik Steiner, along with PFL Defensive Player of the Year linebacker Wes McDermott, who have all finished their careers. The defense will look for a new leader and that might be senior safety J.D. Cecil (42 tackles, 10 TFL, 2.5 sacks, 2 INTs). He helped an Eagle defense that finished the season ranked second in the PFL in total defense, allowing just 266.3 yards per game, and led the league in rushing defense, permitting just 72.5 yards per game.

The Eagle offense likely will be led by sophomore quarterback Zach Lewis (813 yards, 4 TDs), who started the last three games in 2009. On the ground, MSU is led by junior Desmond Cox, who rushed for 305 yards and one touchdown. The Eagles main pass catcher should be junior Ronnie McDermott, who had 30 grabs in 2009 for 309 yards and three touchdowns.

The lone PFL team to see a coaching change this year is **Valparaiso**. Former coach Stacy Adams stepped down after five seasons as the Crusaders head man while accumulating just a 15-40 overall mark during his tenure. The new coach is Dale Carlson, who comes to Valpo from Ohio Dominican University, in Columbus, where he guided the NAIA — transitioning to DII —school to a 36-27 record during the last six seasons, including 7-3 marks in each of the last two years. The new coach will need to replace 16 seniors from last year's team that finished just 1-10 overall and winless within PFL play.

Two All-PFL players return to be the leaders on their respective sides of the ball. Both units will need to improve to reach the PFL win column as the offense averaged just 11 points per game and the defense yielded more than 32 points per game. On offense, junior offensive lineman Nate Blair and sophomore quarterback Bobby Wysocki should emerge as the unit's leaders. The young quarterback tallied 783 yards and three touchdowns for the Crusaders. While on the defensive side, the leader is junior Nikko Carson, who had 43 tackles, including a team-best 11 for loss and five sacks.

Pioneer Football League Games of the Week

Lehigh @ Drake, Sept. 4
The Bulldogs lost out in Pennsylvania two years ago 19-0. Will the rematch in Iowa have better results for Drake?

Old Dominion @ Campbell, Sept. 11
The Camels will be home against the soon-to-be CAA Monarchs, who finished their first football season at 9-2. Can Campbell stay with this scholarship team?

Drake @ Montana State, Sept. 18
Coach Rob Ash and the Bobcats host his old school in Bozeman. Will this be a friendly visit?

Butler @ San Diego, Sept. 25
These two title contenders meet early in the season with the winner getting a leg up on winning the title.

San Diego @ Jacksonville, Oct. 2
The Toreros get the second leg of a tough three-week road stretch.

Dayton @ San Diego, Oct. 9
This is USD's third straight tough game. Will this be too much to handle the Flyers?

Dayton @ Butler, Oct. 16
Last year's two co-titlists meet in Indianapolis this year. The Bulldogs won in Dayton last year so will the road team get two in a row or will Butler hold serve at home this year?

Marist @ Jacksonville, Oct. 23
The Red Foxes are improving and might just be in the title chase at this point. Will a trip to the Dolphins come back with them still in the running?

Butler @ Valparaiso, Oct. 30
The Pioneer League's two Indiana schools meet for the Hoosier Helmet.

Davidson @ Marist, Nov. 6
The Wildcats narrowly lost to the Red Foxes last year in Davidson. Can the trip to Poughkeepsie change their fortunes?

Butler @ Drake, Nov. 13
The battle of the Bulldogs will be in Des Moines this year. This might just decide who will be the PFL champion for 2010.

Campbell @ Morehead State, Nov. 20
The Camels and Eagles meet in the last PFL game of the year in Morehead.

Conference Capsules

Butler Bulldogs
Location: Indianapolis, Ind.
Stadium: Butler Bowl (3,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Jeff Voris (24-21 @ BU & 39-55 Overall) 5th Season
Who's Gone: WR Dan Bohrer, DB Spencer Summerville, OL Brian Crable, LB Derek Guggenberger.
Who's Back: OL Donnie Gilmore, RB Scott Gray, WR Zach Watkins, OL Mike Staniewicz, LB Nick Caldicott, DL Grant Hunter, QB Andrew Huck, DB Mark Giacomantonio, P Michael Wilson, RS Jordan Koopman.
Historical Fact: The Bulldogs competed in the Division II playoffs three times —1983, 1988 and 1991. BU was 0-3 all-time in postseason play before winning last year's Grid Iron Classic.
Last Season: Butler won the PFL title and defeated C. Connecticut State to finish 11-1 — the best record in Bulldog history.
This Season: With several key components returning, Butler hopes to duplicate last season's record.

Campbell Fighting Camels
Location: Buies Creek, N.C.
Stadium: Barker-Lane Stadium (5,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Dale Steel (4-18 @ CU & Overall) 3rdSeason
Who's Gone: None
Who's Back: OT Sam Issermoyer, TE Mike Stryffeler, K Adam Willets, WR Harrison Jordan, OC Troy Horan, LB Milton Brown, LB Lee Stanley, S Brandon Chandler, CB Jared Hart.
Historical Fact: Coach Earl Smith led Campbell to three consecutive North Carolina
Junior College Championships from 1946-1948. The football program was dropped in 1950 but was reinstated in 2008.
Last Season: Campbell improved to a 3-8 record and won its first PFL contests after going winless within the league in 2008. The Camels defeated Morehead State and Valparaiso a year ago.
This Season: Basically, the entire roster is back again this fall, as Steel's team hopes to continue tom improve upon its win total.

Davidson Wildcats
Location: Davidson, N.C.
Stadium: Richardson Stadium (6,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Guy "Tripp" Merritt (23-28 @ DU & Overall) 6th Season
Who's Gone: FB Kirk Benedict, OL Mark Iafrate, DL Alex Griswold, LB Tyler Lemons.
Who's Back: RB Kenny Mantuo, P Andrew Wohler, LB Daniel Astrop, DB Peter Kidwell, WR Mark Hanabury, DB Matt Guerrieri.
Historical Fact: The last conference championship for the Wildcats came in 1959 as a Southern Conference member.
Last Season: Davidson dipped to a 3-7 mark a year ago after a similar mark of 4-7 in 2008.
This Season: Coach Merritt hopes to get back to a winning record in 2010 with 15 returning starters. The last winning season they saw was in 2007 (6-4).

Dayton Flyers
Location: Dayton, Ohio
Stadium: Welcome Stadium (11,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Rick Chamberlin (18-5 @ DU & Overall) 3rd Season
Who's Gone: DT Kalen Hemmelgarn, CB Scott Horcher, S Matt Smyth, S Dan Sullivan.
Who's Back: QB Steve Valentino, WR Justin Watkins, OG Tyler Friedrich, OG Justin Griffis, RB Brian Mack, S James Vercammen, LB Joe Ries, DE Brandon Wingeier, S Ben Welsh.
Historical Fact: The Flyers claimed the co-championship in the PFL a year ago, the school's 10th league title in the last 17 years.

Last Season: The Flyers were 9-2 in 2009 and tied Butler for the PFL crown, but lost to the Bulldogs to give them the PFL Grid Iron Classic bid.
This Season: Dayton looks to get another PFL crown but will have to do it with several key components from last year graduated.

Drake Bulldogs
Location: Des Moines, Iowa
Stadium: Drake Stadium (14,557 Capacity)
Head Coach: Chris Creighton (14-8 @ DU, 109-32 Overall) 3rd Season
Who's Gone: OL Quinn McVey, TE Frank Pucher, K Brandon Wubs, LB Cale Hunt.
Who's Back: DE Dain Taylor, LB Tyler Moorehead, LB Ben Morrison, RB Steve Platek, NG David Witkiewicz, QB Mike Piatkowski, OT Evan Lawrence, DT Andrew Asbell.
Historical Fact: The 1922 Bulldog team, considered by many to be the greatest in Drake history, is to date the only undefeated Bulldog team (7-0). Drake capped the historic season with a 48-6 triumph over Mississippi State on Nov. 25, 1922. It received votes as the No. 1 team in a poll and were invited to the White House for its accomplishments. The Bulldogs were coached by legend Ossie Solem.
Last Season: The Bulldogs finished 8-3 overall but lost their last two games to Dayton and Butler to finish out of the PFL championship running.
This Season: The Bulldogs hope to finish atop of the PFL standings for the first time in six years and build upon last year's improvement.

Jacksonville Dolphins
Location: Jacksonville, Fla.
Stadium: D.B. Milne Field (5,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Kerwin Bell (19-16 @ JU & Overall) 4th Season
Who's Gone: DB Jason Wood, DB Keenan Bowe, DL Haywood Range, LB Allen Fennell.
Who's Back: QB Josh McGregor, WR Josh Philpart, WR/RS Elliott Finkley, RB Rudell Small, OT Leonard Payton, LB Joseph Fennell, DL Shaun Lewis.
Historical Fact: In 1996, the program was instated. The Dolphins began play in 1998. JU had one PFL South title (when the league was split into two divisions) in that time in 2001 before winning the title in 2008.
Last Season: Coach Bell's team finished 7-4 overall — the teams' third winning record but were within two games of repeating as PFL champions — losing to Marist and Drake each by seven or less.
This Season: The Dolphins return much of last year's talent and will be a threat to win the PFL again.

Marist Red Foxes
Location: Poughkeepsie, N.Y.
Stadium: Tenney Stadium at Leonidoff Field (5,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Jim Parady (96-88-1 @ MU & Overall) 18th Season @ MU
Who's Gone: QB Chris Debowski,
Who's Back: WR James LaMacchia, S Rory Foley, NT Terrence Turner, S John Van Aman, DE Matt Snow, CB Jaquan Bryant, S Brandon Kicklighter, TE Chris Ortner, QB Tommy Reilly.
Historical Fact: The Red Foxes won three MAAC champions before becoming an independent in 2008 after that league dissolved. Last year was their first in the PFL.
Last Season: The Red Foxes finished 7-4 overall with a 5-3 mark in its first season as a member of the PFL. The Red Foxes tied a program record for victories in a season and set a program mark with six straight victories last year.
This Season: Coach Parady hopes another year in the PFL gets his team even further up the conference standings.

Morehead State Eagles
Location: Morehead, Ken.
Stadium: Jayne Stadium/Jacobs Field (10,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Matt Ballard (90-84 @ MSU & 125-109-1 Overall) 17th Season
Who's Gone: LB Wes McDermott, DT Derik Steiner, OL Jake Nail, DE Andrew Doan.
Who's Back: S J.D. Cecil, OL Brad Seger, QB Zach Lewis, RB Desmond Cox, RB Ronnie McDermott, WR Kevin Thomas, WR Andre Williams, WR Donte Sawyer.
Historical Fact: Former Eagle quarterback Phil Simms was the Ohio Valley Conference's Offensive Player of the Year in 1977. He finished his MSU career with 5,545 passing yards and 32 touchdowns. After his playing days at MSU, he was the New York Giants' first selection (seventh overall) in the 1979 NFL Draft where he won two Super Bowl titles.
Last Season: Coach Matt Ballard's Eagles finished a disappointing 3-8, but it was a season in which almost every part of the team suffered a key injury.
This Season: This season will see several new starters. Morehead will need to fill the void left by the loss of PFL Defensive Player of the Year Wes McDermott.

San Diego Toreros
Location: San Diego, Calif.
Stadium: Torero Stadium (7,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Ron Caragher (22-9 @ USD & Overall) 4th Season
Who's Gone: RB JT Rogan, S Derek Pilkington, LB Derek Marten, CB Gabriel Derricks.

Who's Back: P Kyle Negrete, WR John McGough, DT Paul Tremblay, K Mike Levine, WR Kyle Warren, TE Zach Lewis, WR John McGough, WR Godfrey Smith, CB Al-Rilwan Adeyemi, LB Loka Kanongataa, DE Mario Kurn, LB Joe Martin.
Historical Fact: Former Torero quarterback Josh Johnson became USD's first player to be selected in the NFL Draft when the Tampa Bay Buccaneers picked him in the 5th round (160 pick overall) in 2008.
Last Season: USD finished a dismal 4-7, the first nonwinning record for the Toreros since 2002 (5-5).
This Season: The Toreros will need to replace 11 starters, but the young team will look to rally around late-season starting quarterback Bo Stompro.

Valparaiso Crusaders
Location: Valparaiso, Ind.
Stadium: Brown Field (5,000 Capacity)
Head Coach: Dale Carlson (0-0 @ VU, 110-103-3 Overall) 1st Season
Who's Gone: FB Josh Lynn, DB Anthony Curry, DB Kyle Himmelwright
Who's Back: OL Nate Blair, DL Nikko Carson, QB Bobby Wysocki, WR Tim Bennett, K Chris Smith, DB Eli Crawford.
Historical Fact: The Valparaiso football program was started in 1919. Before this point, the administration believed athletics were a distraction from academic pursuits. George Keogan, who also coached the men's basketball team, was the first coach. The first game was Oct. 4 at Brown Field, a victory over the Chicago YMCA team 26-0.
Last Season: Valparaiso finished its sixth straight losing season at 1-10 and former Coach Stacy Adams resigned at the conclusion of the season.
This Season: New Coach Dale Carlson hopes to get back to the winning ways. The Crusaders were the 2003 PFL champions, but that was the last season they finished .500 or better.■