Seeds Of Change
By David Coulson

When Bob Dylan wrote his classic folk song "The Times Are A Changin," in the early 1960s he surveyed the landscape of American society and grasped the significance of the moment.

When supporters of the Football Championship Subdivision takes a glance at the 2010 season, they cannot help but see a similar future for college football. Like it or not, we enter a new era in FCS in 2010 and however this massive upheaval of events unfolds, we know that college football will never be the same.

The stage for change was set when a series of events began unfolding last season.

Among those events were:

1. The decision of the NCAA and the football playoff committee to expand the playoff field from 16 to 20 teams beginning with the 2010 season and granted automatic bids to the Northeastern Conference and the Big South Conference.

2. As a part of the playoff expansion, the NCAA and the committee also changed the playoff calendar, adding an additional week to the bracket, with eight teams playing in the first round on Thanksgiving weekend. That necessitated the move of the championship game to January.

3. After a strong 13-year run with Chattanooga, Tenn., as the championship site, the NCAA opened up the bidding process for the title game. Groups from Frisco, Texas, Little Rock, Ark., Missoula, Mont., and Spokane, Wash., joined Chattanooga in the bidding war, with Frisco outdueling Chattanooga to earn the championship contest beginning in January, 2011.

4. Fordham's announcement that it would begin offering athletic scholarships starting with the 2010 recruiting cycle, bucking the Patriot League's long-held system of giving need-based financial aid scholarships. The other PL schools began discussions on the pros and cons of following Fordham's lead, but have yet to come to a conclusion on the issue.

5. After watching the NEC and Big South successfully gain auto bids to the playoffs, the Pioneer Football League announced its intentions to seek guaranteed entry to the postseason for its champion.

6. The Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference announced that it was studying an offer to send its champion to a bowl game against the Southwestern Athletic Conference titlist in a contest that would be similar to the old Heritage Bowl. The proposed game, which has not been approved, would likely force the MEAC to forego its automatic bid and would be televised by one of the ESPN family of networks as the Legacy Bowl.

7. Winston-Salem State announced it was dropping its entire athletic program from Division I back to Division II as it reached the final year of its transition. The Rams also dropped out of the MEAC.

8. The MEAC reacted to Winston-Salem's decision by inviting two new members to join its league, North Carolina Central and Savannah State. NCCU is in its final transition year from Division II to Division I, while Savannah State has long searched for a conference home since moving to the D-I ranks in 2002.

9. Northeastern and Hofstra, both members of the powerful Colonial Athletic Association, announced they were dropping football immediately after the season. The decision at Northeastern wasn't that surprising, considering the Huskies had struggled on and off the field for years. But the move by Hofstra's administration was a stunner for a long successful program.

10. The departures of Northeasterrn and Hofstra forced the CAA to abandon its two-division setup and left the league with 10 teams. CAA officials were forced to scramble as they put together a new schedule for a league that has won the last two FCS titles and made finals appearances in all three of the years it has sponsored football.

11. Rhode Island added to the CAA's instability this year by announcing it would move to the NEC for football, beginning in 2012. The CAA will pick up Old Dominion next season and Georgia State's brand new program in 2012, giving the league 11 teams.

All of those events have impacted the FCS panorama in ways that will likely take years to interpret. But one thing is for sure, we are entering a brand new era in FCS.

Adding to all of those changes is the fact that many of the stars that made the 2009 season one of the most competitive in FCS history have moved on to the professional ranks, or to other post-graduate pursuits.

2010 NFL Draft Of Former FCS Student-Athletes
Round - Pick (overall) - Team - Player - Position - College
2 - 29 (61) - NY Jets - Vlad Ducasse - OT - Massachusetts
3 - 24 (88) - Arizona Cardinals (From Ravens) - Andre Roberts - WR - The Citadel
3 - 25 (89) - Carolina Panthers (From Cardinals through Patriots) - Armanti Edwards - QB - Appalachian State
4 - 27 (125) - Phil. Eagles (From Cowboys) - Harbor, Clay - TE - Missouri State
5 - 12 (143) - Jacksonville Jaguars - Hart, Larry - DE - Central Arkansas
5 - 21 (152) - Cinn. Bengals - Hudson, Otis - OG - Eastern Illinois
5 - 22 (153) - Jacksonville Jaguars (From Patriots through Buccaneers and Raiders) - Lane, Austen - DE - Murray State
5 - 24 (155) - AZ Cardinals (From Eagles through Jets and Steelers) - Skelton, John - QB - Fordham
6 - 2 (171) - Atl. Falcons (From Lions) - Schillinger, Shann - S - Montana
6 - 9 (178) - Buff. Bills - Moats, Arthur - DE - James Madison
6 - 11 (180) - Jacksonville Jaguars - Karim, Deji - RB - Southern Illinois
6 - 15 (184) - NY Giants - Tracy, Adrian - DE - William & Mary
6 - 23 (192) - Buff. Bills (From Eagles) - Batten, Danny - DE - South Dakota State
6 - 34 (203) - Jacksonville Jaguars (Compensatory selection) - McGee, Scotty - KR - James Madison
7 - 15 (222) - TN Titans - Mariani, Marc - WR - Montana
7 - 17 (224) - SF 49ers - Adams, Phillip - DB - South Carolina State
7 - 27 (234) - Dallas Cowboys - Lissemore, Sean - DT - William & Mary
7 - 34 (241) - TN Titans (Compensatory selection) - Howard, David - DT - Brown
7 - 48 (255) - Detroit Lions (Compensatory selection) - Toone, Tim - WR - Weber State

Foremost on that list is the first two-time Payton Award winner Armanti Edwards of Appalachian State. The record-setting quarterback with two national championship rings was drafted in the third round of the NFL draft by the Charlotte Panthers, who gave up a second-round pick in the 2011 draft to the New England Patriots for the chance to select the dynamic Edwards.

In all, 19 FCS players were drafted, with tackle Vladimir Ducasse of Massachusetts coming off the board in the second round, when he was drafted 61st overall by the New York Jets.

One player who is back, however, could have a dramatic effect on the 2010 season.

Villanova all-purpose back Matt Szczur, who was the most valuable player in the Wildcats' 23-21 victory over Montana for the national championship, is returning for his senior season.

Szczur was selected as an outfielder in the fifth round of the Major League Baseball draft by the Chicago Cubs and spent his summer rolling up a . 347 batting average and an .879 OPS for three minor league teams.

But part of his lucrative contract was a provision that allowed Szczur to return to Villanova in August and play football for the defending national champs.

With Szczur, quarterback Chris Whitney, tackle Ben Ijalana and many others back on offense and with CAA preseason defensive player of the year Terence Thomas leading a talented defense, the Wildcats are most observers No. 1 team as the season begins.

Other schools who could challenge Villanova's reign include Appalachian State, Southern Illinois, South Carolina State, Montana. Teams such as Delaware, James Madison, New Hampshire and William & Mary will push the Wildcats in CAA play and any of them could emerge as a national title contender.

But in the preseason, it is a year where even the brightest contenders have huge question marks.

Villanova must replace All-American Tim Kuckuka at defensive end, as well as several other key defensive players. William & Mary lost defensive linemen Adrian Tracy and Sean Lissemore to the NFL and must also replace quarterback R.J. Archer, who earned an NFL tryout.
Appalachian State is loaded with returners on both sides of the ball, including two-time Buchanan Award finalist Mark LeGree at safety, but needs either junior DeAndre Presley or redshirt freshman Jamal Jackson to lead the offense at quarterback with the loss of Edwards.

Southern Illinois is stout on defense, but must find someone to fill the shoes of Deji Karim, who finished third in the Payton Award balloting last season after a tremendous year as a runningback and returnman.

South Carolina State isn't likely to be tested much in the regular season, outside of an opening game at Georgia Tech and the annual battle with Florida A&M, but the Bulldogs have the talent to overcome that scheduling deficit with the likes of quarterback Malcomb Long back.

Montana returns runningback Chase Reynolds and quarterback Andrew Selle from an imposing offense, but the Grizzlies lost two huge components from a team that had made back-to-back championship game appearances.

Bobby Hauck, who was 80-17 in his seven-year tenure overall and 47-6 in Big sky Conference play as Montana's coach, has moved on to Nevada-Las Vegas.

His replacement Robin Pflugard served as an assistant at Montana, Oregon and Washington State, but the former offensive coordinator takes over a pressure-packed program that has 24 straight winning seasons, 12 consecutive Big Sky titles and an NCCA-record 17 years in a row with playoff berths.

Marc Mariani, the Grizzlies' game-changing receiver and returnman, was drafted in the seventh round by the Tennessee Titans. Montana must also rebuild its defense and offensive line, where only three of the top six performers are back.

Richmond, which has spent much of the past five years among the FCS elite, could be the team most likely to tumble in 2010. Coach Mike London, who led the Spiders to the 2008 national title and was 24-5 in two years, left for Virginia after a quarterfinal playoff loss and was replaced by former assistant Latrell Scott.

The Spiders should remain a force on defense with players such as defensive tackle Martin Parker, linebackers Eric McBride and Patrick Weldon and cornerbacks Justin Rogers and Tremayne Graham. But Richmond has holes to fill on offense, particularly with only center Drew Lachenmeyer returning on the line.

There also have been reports that Richmond's players have had a hard time adjusting to Scott and the new staff after two years with the personable London.

Delaware, James Madison and New Hampshire will put much of their hopes on the play of quarterbacks, former Penn State starter Pat Devlin for the Blue Hens, JMU signal-caller Drew Dudzik, who returns from a broken foot and UNH's R.J. Toman, who gritted through an injury-plagued 2009 season.

Individuals who could lift their teams to contention include Northern Arizona quarterback Michael Herrick, Grambling defensive end Christian Anthony and the Eastern Washington duo of Taiwan Jones at runningback and J.C. Sherritt at linebacker.■

Getting A Grasp On The Playoffs
By David Coulson

The expansion of the NCAA Division I National Football Championship to 20 teams is the most major change to the FCS tournament format since the playoffs expanded from 12 to 16 teams in 1988.

To help fans better understand the new playoff system, here is a breakdown of how things will work in the new 20-team format:

1. Four teams are being added to the field, with the Northeastern Conference and the Big South Conference being given automatic bids. The two other additional teams will be chosen as at-large teams, giving the playoff 10 auto bids and 10 at-large entries.

2. The eight leagues who had automatic berths will retain those for 2010. Those leagues are the Big Sky Conference, the Colonial Athletic Association, the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference, the Missouri Valley Football Conference, the Ohio Valley Conference, the Patriot League, the Southern Conference and the Southland Conference.

3. The Ivy League has chosen not to participate in the playoffs for football, though teams from every other NCAA sport in the Ivy League are allowed to compete for postseason honors.

4. The SWAC, which gave up its automatic bid in the 1990s, is still choosing to send its divisional winners to the league championship game in December, meaning those teams are ineligible for the playoffs. Grambling and Southern meet on Thanskgiving weekend in the Bayou Classic, which conflicts with the opening weekend of the playoffs. Alabama State meets Tuskegee on Thanksgiving Day in the Turkey Bowl Classic, keeping Alabama State out of the playoffs.

5. The other SWAC teams that don't participate in those three games are technically eligible for the playoffs, but a SWAC team hasn't been selected to the field since 1997.

6. The Great West Conference has only five teams, one less than the requirement to be eligible for an automatic bid. And two of those five teams, North Dakota and South Dakota, are ineligible until 2011 as they complete their transition from Division II to Division I athletics.

7. The Pioneer Football League officially petitioned the NCAA Division I Football Committee for an automatic bid, but that petition was rejected. The PFL can use the bridge automatic qualifier to receive an at-large bid if a team wins the PFL title, is ranked in the top 20 in a composite of the Gridiron Power Index (GPI), the Coaches poll and The Sports Network poll, and wins at least two games against teams from auto-bid conferences.

8. The committee will meet on the last weekend of the regular season and will announce its selections to the 2010 playoff field on Sunday, Nov. 21. The committee will seed five teams and determine which 12 teams will receive byes for the first weekend of the playoffs, which will be played on Nov. 27. The other eight teams will play first-round games, with the four winners advancing to the round of 16 on Dec. 4.

9. The quarterfinals of the tournament will be held on Dec. 11 and the semifinals will be played on Dec. 17-18 at campus sites. The semifinals will be televised live by ESPN and ESPN2.

10. The championship game will be held on Friday, Jan. 7 in Frisco, Texas. and will be televised by ESPN.■

So South Teams Looking to Get Big Kicks during 2010 Season
By Myron Hosea

Most fans would agree that they would prefer their team surge to such a large lead that the outcome doesn't come down to the vagaries of a snapped ball that has to be caught, planted on the ground then kicked through whatever elements in the air might impact its trajectory. Teams aren't always that fortunate, so programs aspiring to league titles and playoff berths must have a solid, reliable kicking game.

Given that, most teams of the Big South and Southern conferences have to feel good about their placekicking heading into the season. Fourteen of 16 teams have their primary kicker returning (Furman and University of Tennessee at Chattanooga saw their kickers complete their eligibility). Eight of the 14 returnees finished in the top 29 kickers in FCS last year in terms of field goals per game. Liberty's Matt Bevins – who averaged two field goals per game – tied for first in the country in that category. Bevins also landed third in FCS in scoring with 107 points and averaging 9.73 per game.

Three other So South kickers tied for 10th best in the country in field goals per game. Craig Camay of UTC (one of the two kickers not returning), Adrian Mora of Georgia Southern and John Paglia of Charleston Southern each averaged 1.45 field goals per game. Others in the top 29 group were Elon's Adam Shreiner (1.42), Stony Brook's Wesley Skiffington (1.36), Appalachian State's Jason Vitaris (1.36), Gardner-Webb's Ryan Gates (1.18) and Coastal Carolina's Justin Durham (1.18).

Also returning to boot extra points and field goals are Cameron Yaw of Samford (1.09), Blake Bostic of Western Carolina (0.73), Sam Keeler of The Citadel (0.73), Christian Reed of Wofford (0.50), Aaron Mayes of Presbyterian College (0.55) and Jeff Sexton of VMI (0.27). Furman's Matthew Cesari (1.00) is the other kicker who finished his time last year.

Of course, a solid kicking game involves much more than just the placekicker. First, you have the snapper and the holder. Just ask Bobby Lamb and Furman how important all three of those roles are after miscues cost the Paladins points a year ago. Then you need good blocking to overcome clever defensive schemes to block kicks. Check with Pat Sullivan and Samford about that after last-play kicks each of the last two years proved costly in losses to Furman.

Clearly, though, the kicking game feeds off the rest of the team – offense, in particular – while both offense and defense rely on kickers to provide those critical points. Vitaris of Appalachian State put the football through the goal posts enough to rack up 115 points (8.21 points per game), but he couldn't have done that without a high-powered offense to get him into position frequently. Bevins' kicks played a vital role in Liberty leading FCS in scoring a year ago, and he benefited from the potent Flames' offense.

Throughout 2009, we saw the importance of the kicking game. Here's a smattering of how the kicking game played a role last year.

Sept. 5 – Georgia Southern's Adrian Mora booted a field goal with 40 seconds left to lift the Eagles to a 29-26 triumph over Albany.

Sept. 5 – Jeff Sexton nailed the extra point with 1:27 left to give VMI a 14-13 victory over Robert Morris.

Sept. 19 – Wesley Skiffington of Stony Brook hit the point after with 47 seconds remaining for the Seawolves' 21-20 triumph over Brown.

Oct. 3 – Jeff Vitaris made an overtime field goal to carry Appalachian State past The Citadel on the road 30-27.

Oct. 17 – Furman blocked Cameron Yaw's field-goal attempt on the game's last play, preserving the Paladins' 26-24 victory over Samford.

Nov. 14 – Charleston Southern's John Paglia kicked field goals of 51, 46 and 43 yards – the last one in overtime – as the Bucs upset Stony Brook 30-27. Skiffington kicked two for the Seawolves.

Nov. 21 – Paglia booted three more field goals as Charleston Southern defeated archrival Coastal Carolina 30-23.

With so many talented and experienced kickers on the Southern and Big South rosters, expect a lot more examples of placekickers making the key difference in games in 2010.■

Taking The Snap At App
By David Coulson

When coach Jerry Moore looks at the depth chart for his 2010 Appalachian State football team, he sees 16 returning starters, including several preseason All-Americans such as safety Mark LeGree, linebacker D.J. Smith, defensive end Jabari Fletcher, runningback Devon Moore, wide receiver Brian Quick and tight end Ben Jorden.

But there is one big question for Moore and the Mountaineers as they prepare for another season. Who will fill the shoes of two-time Walter Payton Award winner and four-year starter Armanti Edwards at quarterback?

Edwards led ASU to two national championships and four Southern Conference titles while becoming the first Division I quarterback to throw for more than 10,000 yards (10.392) and rush for more than 4,000 yards (4,361) before being selected in the third round by the Carolina Panthers in the recent NFL draft.

Moore knows he won't be able to replace Edwards, though he is confident that he has the talent available to keep the high-powered Mountaineer offense rolling with junior DeAndre Presley or redshirt freshman Jamal Jackson taking the controls.

"While we lost Armanti - and that, of course, is a huge loss - we have a lot of talented, experienced players back on both sides of the ball," Moore said. "No matter who the quarterback winds up being, I think we will have a chance to win some ballgames this year."

Presley and Jackson battled to a dead heat in the spring as each attempted to win the starting quarterback job. The competition will continue when the Mountaineers return for training camp in August.

"DeAndre and Jamal both did a lot of things well in the spring," Moore said. "I think that it was exactly what we were looking for from both of them going into the fall. It will probably be a battle throughout camp."

Presley started two games during his first two years, leading ASU to a 35-10 victory over Western Carolina as a freshman and struggling in a season-opening 29-24 loss at East Carolina last year. He has completed 37-of-60 passes for 468 yards and two TDs and has rushed 85 times for 427 yards and eight scores.

But Presley's shaky performance at ECU (12 carries for 12 yards rushing and one TD, 7-of-15 passing for 89 yards and one interception) and a stunning second-half comeback led by reserve Travaris Cadet caused coaches to re-evaluate the quarterback depth chart. Presley was moved to wide receiver for the rest of the year.

"Our thought was that if we needed to bring someone in to backup Armanti last year that the ability Travaris had to run the ball gave us the best chance to win," ASU quarterbacks coach Brad Glenn said. "We knew DeAndre wasn't going to get much of a chance to play, so we felt like moving him to receiver gave us the chance to use his talent and keep him involved."

Presley caught three passes for 88 yards during the experiment at wide receiver, which he admits now was a challenging time.

"It was a humbling experience for me," Presley explained. "Last year was a molding opportunity."

When the coaching staff moved Cadet to receiver and approached Presley about returning to quarterback during the winter, he jumped at the opportunity.

"It was joy and thanksgiving," Presley said. "I had talked with teammates about wanting to move back to quarterback."

The position switch might have helped Presley in the long run by allowing him to understand another aspect of the offense.

"DeAndre might have a little of an edge right now because of his familiarity with the offense," Glenn said.

Jackson came to Appalachian State as a highly touted recruit from North Atlanta High School, where he completed 66 percent of his passes for 1,652 yards and 20 touchdowns. In addition, he rushed for 276 yards (7.9 average) and five scores as a senior.

"Getting a chance to be the starting quarterback at Appalachian State would mean I've work really hard," Jackson said. "I am focusing on trying to make everything (about his game) better."

The lanky, strong-armed Jackson quickly reminded Glenn and others of Richie Williams, the All-American quarterback who led ASU to its first

NCAA title in 2005 before carving out a pro career in the Canadian Football League.

"Jamal has all of the tools to be a great quarterback," Glenn said. "He can run and throw and his leadership abilities are very similar to Richie's."

Jackson's father, Greg, was an All-American at LSU and played 12 years in the NFL with the New York Giants, the Philadelphia Eagles, the New Orleans Saints and the San Diego Chargers as a safety, pulling down 32 career interceptions from 1989-2000.

Jackson's uncle, Bob Whitfield, was a star at Stanford and spent 15 years as an offensive tackle in the NFL, playing for the Atlanta Falcons, the Jacksonville Jaguars and the New York Giants from 1992-2006.

The competition between the two players has brought out the best in both in the eyes of most Mountaineer observers.

"I don't see it as a battle, I see it as a way to bring out the best in each other," Presley said. "At the end of the day, it's all about the team and all about winning."

Jackson has a similar attitude.

"It's competitive, but we help each other," Jackson said.

Whoever emerges as the starting quarterback will find themselves as just one cog in a well-oiled machine that is trying to win its sixth consecutive Southern Conference title and FCS playoff berth and its fourth national championship in six years.

"The advantage that DeAndre and Jamal have is that they are surrounded by other talent," Glenn said.

On offense, the Mountaineers can build around Moore, who rushed for 1,374 yards (5.4 average) and scored 19 touchdowns. Plus, he had 36 receptions for 282 yards. Meanwhile, there are several receivers like Quick (61 catches, 16.1 average, four TDs), Matt Cline (85 catches, 11.5 average, two TDs) and CoCo Hillary (37 catches, 13.9 average, four TDs in eight games before suffering a season-ending knee injury).

"If someone else in FCS has a better group of receivers than us, I'd like to see them," Glenn said.

Appalachian State also returns five of its top six offensive linemen.

On defense, the Mountaineers could field their best unit in recent years with seven starters returning, featuring two-time Buchanan Award nominee LeGree at strong safety and All-American linebacker Smith.

The ASU defense is likely to have schematic differences with linebacker coach Dale Jones being promoted to defensive coordinator as long-time coordinator John Wiley has moved to East Carolina as Ruffin McNeill's assistant head coach.

"I can't wait to get started with training camp," said Moore, 70, who was rejuvenated by double knee replacement surgery during the winter. "I think we have a chance to be a very good team."■

Dave's Top-25
By David Coulson

1. Villanova
The Wildcats have plenty of talent back from their 2009 title run, but will likely have to replace MVP Matt Szczur, who was drafted by MLB, leaving QB Chris Whitney, OT Ben Ijalana, SS John Dempsey and LB Terrence Thomas to pick up the slack.

2. Southern Illinois
The Salukis lost RB Deji Karim to the Jacksonville Jaguars, but return a CB Korey Lindsey-led defense and the bulk of an offense that won the Missouri Valley Conference and advanced to the quarterfinals last season.

3. Appalachian State
The loss of Armanti Edwards is huge, but the Mountaineers have plenty of other parts remaining to make another title run, led by such standouts as RB Devon Moore, SS Mark LeGree and LB D.J. Smith.

4. South Carolina State
Coach Buddy Pough has built this MEAC powerhouse into title contender, led by one of the top defenses in FCS and an offense directed by QB Malcomb Long and OG Johnny Culbreath.

5. South Dakota State
Kyle Minett returns in the Jackrabbit backfield and the stingy defense will again be strong, with LB Derek Domino heading things up.

6. Montana
The Grizzlies lost coach Bobby Hauck to UNLV and will have to rebuild their OL, but they still have RB Chase Reynolds and QB Andrew Selle back from a team that has made back-to-back championship game appearances.

7. Elon
The Phoenix has gradually become a playoff-caliber team under coach Pete Lembo and returns QB Scott Riddle, but must replace record-setting WR Terrell Hudgins.

8. New Hampshire
The Wildcats are one of the best-coached teams in FCS under Sean McDonnell and return many of the players from a squad that was the only one to beat national champ Villanova last season.

9. Delaware
Ex-Penn State QB Pat Devlin has a year under his belt for the Blue Hens and should thrive with an improved OL and running game and a stout defense, led by DBs Anthony Waters and Anthony Bratton and LB Matt Marcorelle, behind him.

10. Stephen F. Austin
The high-flying Lumberjacks won the Southland Conference and advanced to the quarterfinals last year behind a young squad that returns QB Jeremy Moses and LB Jabara Williams.

11. William & Mary
The Tribe was hard hit by NFL losses and coach Jimmye Laycock must develop a new QB, but still have a talented young nucleus, paced by RB Jonathan Grimes and CB B.W. Webb.

12. Cal Poly
The Mustangs faded to an uncharacteristic 4-7 season in coach Tim Walsh's first year, but should return to form with the likes of ex-UCLA WR Domonique Johnson and an improved defense.

13. Massachusetts
The Minutemen struggled during the first year of Kevin Morris at head coach, but the demise of Northeastern's program has given them a spark with the transfer of top-flight RB John Griffin.

14. Penn
The Quakers were reeling in the spring with the suicide death of captain and DE Owen Thomas, but the defending Ivy League champs should regroup around one of the best defenses in FCS and QB Keiffer Garton.

15. Prairie View A&M
The Panthers won the SWAC title for the first time since 1964 and coach Henry Frazier III was named the Eddie Robinson Award winner, but Prairie View should be even better this season with multitalented QB K.J. Black leading a veteran team.

16. Northern Arizona
Ex-Mississippi QB Michael Herrick is arguably the top returning passer in FCS, and he will lead a Lumberjack team that must find a way to win in November to make a run at the Big Sky title.

17. Furman
The heat is on coach Bobby Lamb with the Paladins missing the playoffs in three straight years, but LB Kadarron Anderson will lead an improved defense and ex-UCLA QB Chris Forcier should make an impact on offense.

18. Florida A&M
The Rattlers lost two big playmakers in KR/CB

Leroy Vann and QB Curtis Pulley, but coach Joe Taylor has been stockpiling young talent that will again compete for the MEAC title.

19. Colgate
The Raiders got off to the best start since their 2003 national runner-up season before fading to 9-2, but with QB Greg Sullivan and RB Nick Eaches back on offense and their usually stout defense, the team should be the class of the Patriot League.

20. Missouri State
Former UNI and Kansas coach Terry Allen has gradually rebuilt the Bears into a solid team and they should be ready to make a playoff run in 2010 behind OG David Arkin and an improving defense.

21. Stony Brook
The Seawolves ruined a possible playoff berth for Liberty with a win in the final regular-season game to share the Big South title and should be just as tough this year with RB Edwin Gowins heading up a potentially strong attack.

22. Liberty
The Flames have narrowly missed playoff berths in the last two years, but will be in the thick of the chase for an automatic bid in the Big South this season with a solid defense and multiskilled QB Mike Brown leading a potent offense.

23. Eastern Kentucky
QB T.J. Pryor was the OVC's freshman of the year last season, but he and the veteran EKU defense must be even better this season for a Colonels squad that stumbled to its first losing season in 32 years.

24. Maine
The Black Bears should be revitalized by the return of FB Jared Turcotte back from injury to balance QB Warren Smith's contributions to the passing game and an always aggressive defense.

25. Southeastern Louisiana
The Lions could prove to be a darkhorse with 18 starters (10 on defense) and 51 lettermen returning, including RB Zeke Jones and SS Tommy Connors, who returns from knee surgery.

Other Teams to Watch
Albany, Dayton, Eastern Illinois, Eastern Washington, Grambling, Harvard, McNeese State, Montana State, Northern Iowa, Lafayette.■