

## fcs week #4: the comeback kids came back

two of the most notable teams in recent fcs history had surprise downturns over the last two seasons and somewhat dropped off the radar. last weekend, both teams looked a lot like their old selves, riding scrappy play and clutch drives to pull off stunning comebacks. those wins basically threw their hats back into the ring. welcome back.



the southern illinois salukis were the story of the fcs 3 seasons ago, transitioning from the upstart that broke north dakota state's 38 game unbeaten record to the take-on-all-comers challenger who refused to let covid cancellations keep them out of the playoffs by throwing together their own last minute play-in games. the salukis seemed to have established themselves as the dark horse alternative to the dakotas state in the mo valley until almost exactly a year ago, when rival southeastern missouri pulled off an improbable comeback scoring on the final play of the game. the redhawks went onto an ovc championship and a playoff run. the salukis limped through the rest of season. in the 91<sup>st</sup> war of the wheel, the two teams clashed again, and in a near identical reversal of the previous year's battle, the salukis would pull off the stunner. superstar rb geno hess fumbled the ball at midfield with less than 2 min to go, and saluki qb nic baker made him pay by finding an open receiver at the corner of the end zone in the closing seconds to steal a 26 - 25 victory. the salukis are hoping that wild finish is enough to re-ignite their playoff dreams the way it did for their cross mississippi rivals last year.



2022 was the worst season eastern washington experienced since the sopranos went to black. that was before the red-on-red jab to the eye that is the inferno, before the wild 2010 frisco championship, before multiple record setting offenses, before 15 consecutive winning seasons. their opponent this weekend, southeastern louisiana, seems a geographic mismatch, but was no stranger to cheney faithful who watched from a distance for several years as the eagles' eric barriere and lions' cole kelley had a weekly transnational duel for passing records. both would eventually be crowned with paytons. the lions, coincidentally the team that the salukis toppled in that mad scramble playoff run 3 seasons ago, have been dominant of late with a pair of southland championships and an offense that has not skipped a beat since its star moved on. the eagles have not fared nearly as well. nevertheless, eastern washington would claim their own comeback victory in this see-saw battle, scoring twice in the final two minutes. the first was to retake a lead that had swung back and forth so many times, and the second was a pick 6 by marlon jones to erase any chance of the lions re-retaking it back. this surprise puts the eagles back in the expanding field of potential big sky contenders, while the lions—whose other out-of-conference games were fbs losses—will essentially need to win the southland a 3<sup>rd</sup> straight time to keep their playoff hopes alive.

## fcs game of week



### last week: holy cross crusaders (2 – 0) blow past yale bulldogs (0 – 1), 49 – 24

qb matthew sluka lit up the bulldog d in this crusader rout. sluka accounted for 6 tds, 4 through the air and 2 more on the ground. he passed for 280 and rushed for another 100. top target wr jalen coker hauled in 9 passes and 3 of those 4 tds and accounted for 120 yards' worth of receptions. the game had been relatively close through the first half, but the crusaders went on a tear to open the 2<sup>nd</sup>. they would score tds on 3 consecutive, long drives, holding the ball by a 2 to 1 margin over that period. the desperate dogs tried to respond, but lb jacob dobbs—already having a tremendous game—stripped the ball in the shadow of their end zone. the crusaders would need only one more play to add a 4<sup>th</sup> straight td and cement the win. rb tre peterson led a strong rushing performance by the bulldogs to keep the game competitive most of the way through, but his team lacked the explosiveness that would turn this into a crusader cakewalk by game's end.

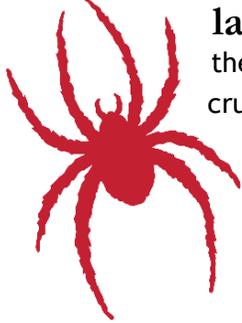


### next week: montana state bobcats (2 – 1) @ weber wildcats (1 – 0, 50)

for many years, the wildcats have played a type of locked in style that won a lot of games, even a lot of big sky championships, but probably not the attention of your average football fan. entering 2023, the team has had to replace longtime coach jay hill with longtime assistant mickey mental, but the commitment to this approach remains much in tact. last season, the wildcats' discipline came up short just 3 times—all bizarrely due to errant special teams snaps. two of those times were against these same bobcats. cb maxwell anderson and company should effectively shutdown the bobcat passing attack as they have done in the past. lb winston reid, arguably the best player in the big sky, should give the bobcats fits as well. however, the bobcats move the ball on the ground with an extraordinary efficiency employing a 2 qb “big cat, little cat” strategy. qb tommy mellott (the big cat) runs almost a straight wildcat—no pun intended—offense, while qb sean chambers (the little cat) is more of an option guy and may be even more dangerous. he is also technically the bigger of the two. in this cat battle, it will be a question of who controls that line. should the wilds smother, they win the day. should the bobs 2 headed offense push the pile, victory is theirs. the bobs are strong enough to keep the wilds to a low scoring game, even if the wilds did not do that themselves, but mistakes could loom large. db rylan ortt leads a secondary that forces a lot of turnovers. if the bobs nab any short fields this game, it won't matter which cat lines up under center. do not ignore special teams either. though the wilds are much maligned for their critical errors, kr abraham williams is the best in the game, scoring on a return nearly every 3<sup>rd</sup> game in his career.



## richmond spiders (1 – 1, -50)



**last week: swat delaware state hornets (0 – 1), 38 – 6**  
the spiders scored 3 tds in the final 8 minutes of the opening half to effectively crush any overmatched hornet hopes for an upset. the offense was solid through most of the first half, and after scoring with less than 2 minutes to go, managed to get the ball back and stun the hornet d with a 60 yard catch and run to end the opening half. the defense was dominant all game long. the dl zander barnett led the way, tying as the game's top tackler and getting in on 3 sacks. the hornets played scrappy—and late in the game, just plain chippy—but they did not really threaten after the opening quarter. a thankfully easy win.



*spider of week—wayne galloway*

some love for the other spider lb. galloway tied his better known partner in tackles this week and complemented that showing with an 80 yard pick 6 in the 4<sup>th</sup>. that final score reversed what had been the deepest stab the hornets had made into spider territory all game.

## next week: @ stony brook seawolves (0 – 2)



coach chuck priore has been closing in on the 100 win mark and, in any typical season, it would feel like a given. unfortunately for him, the seawolves are coming off the worst performance in his 17 year tenure. the normally stout d has been pretty porous, particularly against the pass, which should allow the spider o to build on last week's performance. offensively, the seawolves have been struggling in the trenches with little push from the run game and challenges blocking. the spider front 7 is well positioned to feast on this team. a big game from lb tristan wheeler (and maybe galloway too) seems almost a given these days, but do not be surprised to see the d-line behind marlem louis (and maybe barnett too) take control. the issue for the spiders may be less the match up than the history. the spiders, even when big favorites, do not fare well on long island, and the seawolves, a program that has never been this bad for this long, have all the motivation to make a statement.

## northern arizona lumberjacks (0 – 2)



**last week: torn asunder by utah tech trailblazers  
(1 – 2, -22), 50 – 36**

the lumberjacks struggled mightily in a sloppy game, and the trailblazers wasted no time in exploiting each mistake. the l-jacks turned the ball over 5 times.



in the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter, they would turn the ball over on 3 consecutive drives, and on 2 of those, the t-blazer d carried the ball into the end zone themselves. the trailblazer offense played solid, mistake free football throughout, taking advantage of the short fields to run off 34 consecutive points and seemingly put the game out of hand by half time. qb kobe tracy worked in a few big plays, including a 70 yard deep ball to wr rickie johnson setting up 1 td and a quick out to wr michael moton that resulted in a 60 yard td scamper. the l-jacks were not quite ready to walk off the field though. they turned things around dramatically in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half, scoring 3 late tds to tighten the game a bit. unfortunately, even in the midst of this turnaround, the trailblazer wreaked some havoc. dl syrus webster, who had been a terror generating pressure throughout, tore the ball free to set up a fg, and shortly after that, lb will leota made a pick deep in l-jack territory, setting up another score, and effectively making the late fireworks more for show. of note, trailblazer k connor brooksby hit all 10 kick attempts—5 fgs and 5 pats—for a total of 20 points, only the 2<sup>nd</sup> time that has happened in the last decade. two of his fgs were 50 yarders.

**next week: vs montana griz (2 – 0)**



griz coach bobby hauck is on the precipice of becoming the big sky's winningest coach, surpassing lumberjack legend jerome sauers. if the lumberjacks want to rally around their old leader, knock off their longtime nemesis, and salvage the rest of this season, they are going to have to play much cleaner. last year, they were able to hang in games against better opponents by avoiding penalties and turnovers. through 3 weeks, those have become commonplace. the griz are likely to run the ball down their throat behind the twin rb threats of isaiah childs and nick otsmo. they also boast a strong d, built around lb levin janacaro. the griz will be a heavy favorite. an upset here would have to involve more ball control, maybe a short passing attack to wr coleman owen. the l-jacks have shown some potential but more pitfalls in their hurry ups, so they cannot continue to fall behind.