

## fcs week #3: repeat no more



it was a bad week to be defending a title. 8 different conferences saw their champ or co-champ go down in flames against another fcs opponent. even discounting all the games against fbs teams, conference winners are a mere .500 to open the season, last week going 6 - 8. that may mean a lot of turnover in the standings and a different look on the playoff bubble. or it just may mean nothing.

of the fallen, montana from the big sky stands out the most. a week after nearly choking against one mo valley team, last year's runner up surrendered 20 consecutive points late to north dakota. the come-from-behind victory preserves the fighting hawks' win streak in home openers at an astounding 38. concerning for the girz has to be top, where they have been edged by just shy of 30 minutes after only 2 games. nevertheless, the griz were in a nearly identical positions last september and still caught a flight to frisco in january.

most heartbreaking may be ut martin's double ot loss to rival southeastern missouri. the skyhawks have tied for their conference championship each of the last two seasons but lost the playoff bid on a tie-break. the biggest hole though may have been dug by holy cross, who surrendered a lead to a caa team in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter—this time, new hampshire—for the 2<sup>nd</sup> consecutive week. most cursed might be united winner austin peay, who had 2 chances to come back against southern illinois in the final minute of their contest. both times saw saluki lb ben bogle break through the line and make the sack on 4<sup>th</sup> down.

## sidelines

- forget everything we just said. doomsayers who thought the fcs losing 63 consecutive fbs matchups was a portent of the college football landscape were treated to 3 big upsets late saturday afternoon. sacred heart, southern utah, and idaho helped to avoid this being the worst season for upsets all time and, maybe even more face-saving, pushed the number of fbs upsets (4) past the number of collapses to d2 teams (3).
- some final minute craziness: in addition to bogle's heroics for the salukis, there were a two other games that were decided in the final minute in bizarre fashion. mercyhurst scored a last minute td which had the potential to be the new program's first ever fcs game winner, but howard blocked and returned the pat for a critical 2 points. critical, because the bison were receiving a kick down by 2 instead of 4, and would only have time for a long game winning fg of their own. blink and you would have missed patriot winner lafayette downing monmouth in the final seconds thanks to an onside kick bracketed on either side by a deep td pass. that last hail mary td pass to wr elijah steward was his 15<sup>th</sup> catch of the game, which totaled to 240 yards receiving on the day.

## fcs game of week



last week: south dakota state jackrabbits (1 – 0, 50) outplay incarnate word cardinals (1 – 1), 45 – 24

the defending national champions found themselves in a dogfight most of this game but were unable to be stopped the entire 2<sup>nd</sup> half, scoring tds each of the 4 times they touched the ball. cardinal qb zach calzada had a phenomenal game, throwing for 350 yards at an 80% completion rate with 3 tds and no picks. he was dialed in with both top receivers jalen walthall and roy alexander, who accounted for half of those yards and all the tds. both would make highlight reel td catches on deep balls to keep the cardinals in this game. however, a pair of 4<sup>th</sup> down stops and a lot of lb adam bock in the backfield kept the cardinals from ever getting a lead. instead, jackrabbit qb mark gronowski would end up playing hero. he racked up nearly 300 yards passing at a measured pace. top receiver griffin wilde would make 10 catches. throw in the workmanlike play of rb amar johnson, who contributed 110 yards and 2 more tds, and the jacks basically controlled the pace of play. the cardinals punted just once all game. the jackrabbits did not punt at all. the only stop the cardinals managed was a pick by s mason chambers at their own goal line as time expired in the opening half. that kept the cardinals in the game through the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, but the jacks simply wore them out after that.



next week: north dakota state bison (1 – 0, 50) @ east tennessee state buccaneers

this matchup includes two brand new head coaches in two very different situations. tim polasek returns to the bison, this time as a head coach, after a decade as a coordinator on the fbs level. he inherited a plethora of rich talent, bringing a modest 8 transfers with him. tre lamb was pried away from gardner webb in the offseason, after leading that struggling program to two surprise conference championships. he did not inherit a plethora of rich talent, so he brought it with him. a total of 37 players transferred to the program including most of his starting line up from last year, so the buccaneers are a much deeper team than last year's lackluster showing would imply. still, it is hard to see their path here. the bison are just too strong in the trenches. the d-line features eli mostaert and dylan hendricks as every snap disruptors. the o-line is an immovable wall anchored by grey zabel. bison qb cam miller is a two way threat, and while he ordinarily takes a back seat to the deep corps of running backs, this may be his game to shine. the bucs have been surprisingly strong at stuffing the run but get burned frequently in pass counts.



## richmond spiders



last week: fall to wofford terriers (1 – 0), 26 – 19  
the spiders outplayed the terriers for most of this contest, but an apparent injury and subsequent turnovers doomed their bid.



spider qb kyle wickersham was a force on the ground, racking up 100 yards primarily in the opening half which helped the spiders get out to a lead. after wickersham injured his ankle, the game took a distinctive turn. though he would remain in the game, his mobility was noticeably diminished, and the terrier d pounced. unable to dodge the rush, move out into the flat, or push off on throws, his passing became uncharacteristically wild and led to 3 interceptions. the terriers turned each of these into scoring drives. the terrier offense had kept pace in the 1<sup>st</sup> half with a little bit of luck just before halftime. on a fake fg attempt, an ugly lob to the corner ended with a perfectly timed, diving reception, setting up their first td. they would go onto score 23 unanswered points fueled mostly by those turnovers. the death knell would come on a deflected ball that would end up in the hands of lb benny radicia. immediately following, wr kyle watkins would turn two short passed into consecutive big gains to give the terriers a two td lead with only a few minutes to go. the spiders responded by putting in their backup qb and airing it out, managing to score once and threaten a 2<sup>nd</sup> time. however, db amir anoor made his 2<sup>nd</sup> interception of the day on a 4<sup>th</sup> & long to ice the game.

next week: vs charleston southern buccaneers (1 – 1, -50)



the buccaneers did not win a single road game last season, but just last week, they managed to surprise socon champ furman in a nailbiter, making this matchup more intriguing than it might have looked a few weeks ago. the bucs have always had a tough, physical defense, though it has become increasingly reliant on big plays and timely stops. joshua hill anchors a d-line that tends to bring a lot of pressure, and s trayson fowler is the key in a secondary that will pounce on poorly thrown balls. the spider still have the better d overall, with dl jeremiah grant and lb wayne galloway continuing to excel at forcing teams into long 3<sup>rd</sup> downs. the bucs are not usually much of a scoring threat though. the spider o will still need to keep the turnovers in check and finish their drives more consistently than they have so far this early season.

## northern arizona lumberjacks



last week: succumb to arizona wildcats (fbs), 22 – 10  
the lumberjacks ultimately fell to the wildcats but not before resurrecting some ghosts of their upset from 3 years earlier. they actually held the lead for most of the game, but the wildcats managed to score the final



19 points of the game. rb quali conley scampered down the sideline for a 60 yard gain, fueling the wildcats' 1<sup>st</sup> score, but conley was mostly boxed in after that due to great

play from the lb pair of alex mclaughlin and tommy ellis. the l-jack offense, though, petered out in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half. in the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, the wildcats pinned the l-jacks back on their own 1 with a beautiful punt, setting up a safety by lb taye brown. the wildcats would score a td a few snaps later, cementing their hold on the game. dl tre brown and lb jacob manu combined for a strip sack on the next possession, and the wildcats never gave the ball back thereafter. still, the lumberjack d looked very impressive, holding the wildcats to a stunning 0 for 10 on 3<sup>rd</sup> down.

next game: @ utah tech trailblazers (0 – 1)



the lumberjacks hit bottom early last season when they surrendered 50 points to these trailblazers at home. the hapless blazers only won game after that point, dropping most of their contests in blowouts. the trailblazers now have a new coach and replaced nearly the entire offense that lit up the l-jacks last season, so it is hard to gauge what this game might look like. it would be a surprise if the new look trailblazers could really pull off a 2<sup>nd</sup> upset against a team that just put a scare into a big 12 program, but we would have said the same exact thing last year too.