

SATURDAY'S GAMES

ALL TIMES PACIFIC

MONTANA TECH

AT EASTERN OREGON, 1 P.M.

This is an important early matchup for both teams. By the end of the day, one will have incurred a second Frontier Conference loss. And while that isn't necessarily a death knell to a conference title or even a playoff berth (see Rocky Mountain winning it last year at 7-3), it without a doubt puts a damper on the losing team's hopes.

SOUTHERN OREGON

AT COLLEGE OF IDAHO, NOON

College of Idaho had beaten SOU only once since bringing back its football program before a 45-34 home win last October. That was the third in what has now become an eight-game winning streak for the Yotes, who are the Frontier Conference's hottest team.

ROCKY MOUNTAIN

AT CARROLL COLLEGE, NOON

On the field, Rocky has a three-game winning streak in the series (not counting its forfeited win in last year's season opener). The game is the home opener for Carroll College, which has dropped its last two home opening games, including when Rocky dismantled the Fighting Saints in Helena, Montana, two years ago, 40-14.

MONTANA WESTERN

AT MSU-NORTHERN, NOON

This is a matchup that will show if MSU-Northern, losers of 28 straight Frontier games, can contend in the conference again. Montana Western has won each of the last eight contests by a minimum of 20 points, including 52- and 29-point wins last fall.

PLAYER TO WATCH

A year ago, no Mountie fan would have pegged Saige Wilkerson as a future wide receiver, let alone the team's leading receiver in the early stages of 2019. But through two games, the converted quarterback has 10 catches for 125 yards and one all-important touchdown catch — the winning grab against SOU that he called "surreal."

TREND TO WATCH

Eastern has won its last four home openers, and has been strong in them under Tim Camp, going 8-3 in his tenure when they first take the field at Community Stadium. The games tend to be thrillers, too. All but three in that stretch have been one-possession games. The opponent in the three that haven't? Montana Tech.

NAIA POLL

Team	Record	Points
1. Morningside (Iowa) [16]	15-0	366
2. Benedictine (Kan.)	13-2	352
3. Saint Francis (Ind.)	10-3	338
4. Kansas Wesleyan	13-1	307
5. Saint Xavier (Ill.)	9-4	300
6. Concordia (Mich.)	10-3	280
7. Marian (Ind.)	10-1	278
8. Baker (Kan.)	9-3	268
9. Dickinson State (N.D.)	9-3	230
10. Reinhardt (Ga.)	9-2	224
11. Northwestern (Iowa)	9-2	214
12. Grand View (Iowa)	8-3	185
13. Lindsey Wilson (Ky.)	7-3	182
14. Langston (Okla.)	9-2	171
15. College of Idaho	6-5	164
16. Bethel (Tenn.)	10-2	161
17. Cumberlands (Ky.)	10-1	157
18. Evangel (Mo.)	9-2	136
19. Southeastern (Fla.)	7-3	88
20. Southern Oregon	6-4	82
21. Georgetown (Ky.)	7-3	78
22. Ottawa (Kan.)	8-2	70
23. Rocky Mountain (Mont.)	8-4	66
24. Dordt (Iowa)	7-3	32
25. Montana Western	6-4	27

Others Receiving Votes:

Siena Heights (Mich.) 25, Cumberland (Tenn.) 22, William Penn (Iowa) 20, Eastern Oregon 18, Montana Tech 9, Ottawa (Ariz.) 9, Arizona Christian 6, Olivet Nazarene (Ill.) 5, Ave Maria (Fla.) 5

EOU looks to ride momentum of thrilling win into home opener



Ronald Bond/The Observer

Eastern Oregon defensive backs, from left, Derrick Fontenot, Donald Cook and Brennen Hull work on drills during practice Tuesday.

By Ronald Bond

The Observer

It was almost a night-and-day difference from the opening game to the second game for the Eastern Oregon University Mountaineers.

A week after getting rolled in their season opener at Frontier Conference favorite College of Idaho, the Mountaineers turned it around on defense and found the needed moxie to earn a come-from-behind 24-21 win last weekend at Southern Oregon. The victory over the Raiders gave them some much-needed momentum and a confidence boost headed into their home opener against the Montana Tech Orediggers Saturday.

"I saw something special in these kids (in) that they pulled together and they played well together," EOU head coach Tim Camp said of Eastern's fifth win in its last seven road games against SOU. "That was probably the best game I've been a part of where the kids played to win the football game, and that's the way they practiced last week."

The biggest area of improvement for the Mountaineers was on defense. A week after C of I amassed 377 yards on the ground in its 48-12 win, EOU held SOU to just 96 yards rushing, and 273 yards total.

Defensive end Sage DeLong, who had three sacks and five tackles for loss in an effort that earned him NAIA defensive player of the week honors, said EOU focused on being physical in the lead-up to the Southern game after getting "exposed" by C of I.

"We changed what we were doing (after the C of I loss)," he said. "We decided we were going to get back to hitting people. The team responded."

That newfound — or, perhaps, refund — physicality is something the Mountaineers will need Saturday against the physical Orediggers.

And that will start on defense with containing Tech running back Jed Fike, who the last two seasons was the Frontier's leading rusher with 136.4 yards per game and a total of 2,592 rushing yards.

"He's a very good football player," Camp said of Fike. "The Orediggers have a good group of offensive linemen. Chuck (Morrell) does a very good job coaching those guys. They've got a really good defensive scheme. It doesn't matter what type of Tech (team) or what type of Eastern team you have. It's always a fair fight. It's going to be a very



Ronald Bond/The Observer

EOU wide receiver Saige Wilkerson, who caught the winning touchdown pass a week ago, makes a grab at practice Tuesday.

About the game

SERIES HISTORY

Eastern Oregon and Montana Tech have met a total of 31 times, with the Orediggers holding a 17-14 edge all time. EOU won the most recent matchup, a 35-17 home win last October that snapped Tech's four-game winning streak in the series.

OREDIGGER TO WATCH

Running back Jed Fike is a load, and is the two-time defending conference leader in rushing, posting 1,252 yards two years ago and 1,340 last fall. In three career games against EOU, the senior has 419 rushing yards and a touchdown.

physical and contested ball game Saturday."

Tech, like EOU was a week ago, is coming off a loss to College of Idaho, as the Yotes spoiled the Orediggers' season opener with a 28-14 win in Butte, Montana.

Fike ran for 101 yards and a touchdown in that game, but Tech also found success through the air as quarterback Jet Campbell threw for 218 yards and a touchdown. He connected with receiver Trevor Hoffman 11 times for 149 yards.

Keeping their eyes peeled on Hoffman's location will be key for the secondary, according to EOU safety Zack Jacobs.

"They have the capability of hitting us downfield, so the back end, we've gotta be ready," said Jacobs, who had two interceptions against SOU. "(Hoffman) is the main target."

The challenge for the secondary will be keeping track of the receivers and not letting Tech lull them to sleep with the run game before going deep.

"(We can't) let them fool us with a shot or something (and get) caught looking in the back field and letting our guy go," Jacobs said.

On offense, the Mountaineers will look to improve in their ability to maintain possession while also taking what the defense gives

them. Against the Yotes, EOU held possession for just two minutes in the first quarter, Camp said, but improved to 11 minutes in the first against SOU. For the game, EOU saw a jump from a 24:48 time of possession against C of I to 35:21 against Southern.

"I want to be able to control the ball," Camp said. "I want to be able to control the tempo and the flow of the game offensively, and take what they give us at that time. If you're able to do that, then you can help the defense out. We're going to play team football."

Wide receiver Saige Wilkerson, who caught the winning touchdown pass from Kai Quinn with 10 seconds remaining against SOU, said the team improved against Southern in taking opportunities presented to it in the run-pass option, and needs to keep growing in that regard.

"That opened up the run game," said Wilkerson, who is EOU's leading receiver with 125 yards through the first two games. "We were able to put the ball on the ground a little bit, and that opened up the pass game even more."

"(Tech is) very physical. I would say the RPOs will keep Tech's defensive backs on their toes. They're going to have to stop (the RPOs). That alone will lighten the box up, and I think our game plan is going to be to run the ball quite a bit."

POWER POLL

BY RONALD BOND
THE OBSERVER

1. College of Idaho: Two games in, and the Yotes look every part of a team ranked 15th in the nation and picked to win the Frontier Conference. They have a running game that, early on, leads the nation at 362 yards per contest.

2. Rocky Mountain: The defending Frontier champs are looking strong to start with a good road win at Dickinson St. It's too early to say, though, what just a 19-point win over formerly hapless MSU-Northern means.

3. Montana Western: The Bulldogs extended their streak of winning season openers to seven years in a row, by far the longest suck streak in the Frontier Conference.

4. Eastern Oregon: That was a much-needed win for the Mountaineers, and a very good bounce back after the tough opener. To get through the early back-to-back of Frontier favorites at 1-1 has to give EOU confidence.

5. Southern Oregon: To lose in the final seconds to the in-state rival has to sting for the Raiders. They'll need a big rebound at C of I to avoid an 0-2 start in conference play.

6. Montana Tech: The Orediggers were never really in the game against C of I after the Yotes broke out to a 21-point lead. They gave up 510 yards in that loss, their most since 2017.

7. Carroll College: The Fighting Saints lost their opener on the field for the third year in a row (though they did get the 2018 win back via forfeit). That's not a good trend.

8. MSU-Northern: While two games is a very small sample, the Lights appear to be improved with their win at Arizona Christian and a respectable effort against Rocky Mountain. They'll need to do more — like win a conference game — to get out of the cellar.

STANDINGS

	Conf.	Overall
College of Idaho	2-0	2-0
Rocky Mountain	1-0	2-0
Montana Western	1-0	1-0
Eastern Oregon	1-1	1-1
MSU-Northern	0-1	1-1
Montana Tech	0-1	0-1
Carroll College	0-1	0-1
Southern Oregon	0-1	0-2

Thursday, Aug. 29

Rocky Mountain 23, Dickinson St. 21

Saturday, Aug. 31

College of Idaho 48, Eastern Oregon 12

MSU-Northern 20, Arizona Christian 14

Sacramento St. 77, Southern Oregon 19

Saturday, Sept. 7

Eastern Oregon 24, Southern Oregon 21

Montana Western 31, Carroll College 24

Rocky Mountain 53, MSU-Northern 34

College of Idaho 28, Montana Tech 14

Saturday, Sept. 14

Montana Tech at Eastern Oregon, 1 p.m.

Montana Western at MSU-Northern, noon

Rocky Mountain at Carroll College, noon

Southern Oregon at College of Idaho, noon

Saturday, Sept. 21

Eastern Oregon at Portland St., 2 p.m.

Montana Western at Rocky Mountain, noon

MSU-Northern at Carroll College, 1 p.m.

Southern Oregon at Montana Tech, noon

Saturday, Sept. 28

Eastern Oregon at Montana Western, noon

Montana Tech at MSU-Northern, noon

College of Idaho at Rocky Mountain, noon

Carroll College at Southern Oregon, 1 p.m.

ON THE COVER

Defensive end Sage DeLong, the NAIA defensive player of the week. (Ronald Bond, The Observer)

CHECK OUT THE

Local Sports Report...

THE OBSERVER

Tune into the Johnny Ballgame Show for the Local Sports Report with Observer Sports Editor Ronald Bond at 5:30 p.m. each Wednesday.



ON THE

Johnny Ballgame Show

Listen to the Johnny Ballgame Show from 3-6 p.m. Monday through Friday on SuperTalk 1450 AM.

