

CARROLL COLLEGE (6-3, 6-3) AT EASTERN OREGON (3-7, 3-6)

GIMME FIVE — KEYS TO SATURDAY’S GAME

1. ESTABLISH THE RUNNING GAME EARLY

Carroll’s rush defense is among the best in the conference, but teams have been able to run the ball on the Saints more of late. EOU has rushed for more than 100 yards in all three wins, and needs to Saturday.

2. GET STOPS ON THIRD, FOURTH DOWN

Third down has been an issue for the Mountaineers at times this season, as they’re allowing a 41.2% conversion rate. Fourth down is worse at 62.5%. EOU needs to finish the job on defense.

3. GET TO THE QUARTERBACK

Carroll has done an exceptional job of keeping Devan Bridgewater clean, allowing just seven sacks. It’ll be important for the EOU front seven to pressure him and not give him time to scan the field.

4. HOLD DOWN SHANE SIPES

The Carroll receiver has been nothing short of impressive this season, and he seems to be the main go-to. If the EOU secondary can keep him from getting loose, it could be a good afternoon.

5. FINISH THE GAME, SEASON STRONG

The Mountaineers have been close to two or three more wins in the second half of the season. They need to finish in the fourth quarter, which will send the seniors out right and set a tone for 2020.

SATURDAY’S KEY MATCHUP

CC DB Brian FauntLeRoy

KEY STATISTIC: Leads the Carroll College secondary with four interceptions.

When Carroll’s passing defense has been on point, Brian FauntLeRoy has been a main part of the success. Carroll had a three-week stretch midseason where it allowed 161, 162 and 168 yards passing — its three best pass defense games of the season. FauntLeRoy had three of his team-best four interceptions in those contests. Carroll is also holding teams to less than 50% passing. The Saints have at times been suspect in their passing defense, and at other times splendid. Which group shows up Saturday may determine the outcome.

EOU WR Saige Wilkerson

KEY STATISTIC: Leading receiver for Eastern Oregon with 399 yards.

While EOU should look to get the running game going against Carroll, it needs to looks to attack the Fighting Saints through the air. Carroll’s pass defense has, at times, been vulnerable this season. Saige Wilkerson and the receivers could be in position for a good afternoon, especially if the ground game gets going and forces Carroll to bring an additional defender into the box. There is potential throughout the EOU receiving corps, and if Wilkerson, Isaiah Thomas, or another receiver gets loose, the Saints could be in for a long afternoon.

EDGE: FAUNTLEROY

BY THE NUMBERS

CC INDIVIDUAL STAT LEADERS

Passing	C-A-I	Pct.	Yards	TD	Yds/G
Devan Bridgewater	114-234-5	48.7	1,854	16	206.0
Rushing	Carries	Yards	Avg.	TD	Avg/G
Matthew Burgess	143	919	6.4	15	102.1
Major Ali	109	570	5.2	4	63.3
Devan Bridgewater	60	270	4.5	3	30.0
Griphen Le	20	138	6.9	1	19.7
Kaleb Adams	18	87	4.8	0	17.4
Receiving	Rec.	Yards	Avg.	TD	Avg/G
Shane Sipes	49	906	18.5	5	100.7
Joe Farris	24	279	11.6	1	34.9
Tony Collins	15	317	21.1	5	45.3
Jaden Harrison	7	96	13.7	1	12.0
Major Ali	6	78	13.0	0	8.7
Punt Returns	No.	Yards	Avg.	TD	
Jaden Harrison	9	66	7.3	0	
Kick Returns	No.	Yards	Avg.	TD	
Shane Sipes	10	238	23.8	0	
Matthew Burgess	5	100	20.0	0	
Field Goals	M-A	Pct.	40+	Long	
Josh Kraft	4-6	66.7	1-3	41	
Tackles	Solo	Ast.	Total	TFL	
Dylan Kresge	23	42	65	1.0	
Chase Bowen	23	26	49	1.5	
Zach Spiroff	33	12	45	0.0	
Cole Greff	17	26	43	5.0	
Brian FauntLeRoy	25	18	43	0.5	
Nate McGree	20	22	42	6.5	
Isazah King	26	14	40	3.0	
Interceptions	No.	Yards	Avg/Ret	TD	
Brian FauntLeRoy	4	47	11.8	0	

EOU INDIVIDUAL STAT LEADERS

Passing	C-A-I	Pct.	Yards	TD	Yds/G
Kai Quinn	145-309-12	46.9	1,795	6	179.5
Rushing	Carries	Yards	Avg.	TD	Avg/G
Victor Dias	130	512	3.9	6	51.2
Kai Quinn	84	295	3.5	4	29.5
Kaler Moore	38	134	3.5	3	16.8
Victor Rosas	7	44	6.3	0	14.7
Receiving	Rec.	Yards	Avg.	TD	Avg/G
Saige Wilkerson	23	389	16.9	1	38.9
Isaiah Thomas	27	336	12.4	0	33.6
Conner Falk	22	232	10.5	1	23.2
Tanner Zenke	15	177	11.8	0	17.7
Phoenix Millhollen	11	177	16.1	2	19.7
Victor Dias	21	171	8.1	1	17.1
Punt Returns	No.	Yards	Avg.	TD	
Isaiah Thomas	7	54	7.7	0	
Kick Returns	No.	Yards	Avg.	TD	
Tanner Zenke	19	462	24.3	0	
Isaiah Thomas	7	85	12.1	0	
Field Goals	M-A	Pct.	40+	Long	
Jaiden Machuca	10-11	90.9	0-0	36	
Tackles	Solo	Ast.	Total	TFL	
Haziel Ledezma	29	36	65	0.5	
Isaiah Cranford	25	33	58	6.0	
Solo Taylor	15	38	53	2.0	
Gunnar Blix	20	31	51	3.0	
Chase VanWyck	22	27	49	4.5	
Sage DeLong	24	22	46	12.0	
Zack Jacobs	17	26	43	1.0	
Interceptions	No.	Yards	Avg/Ret	TD	
Zack Jacobs	4	0	0.0	0	

POSITION MATCHUPS

BACKFIELD

Carroll has impressive balance in its offense, rushing and passing for over 200 yards a game. Matthew Burgess leads the ground game, and Devan Bridgewater does a good job protecting the football.



RECEIVERS

Shane Sipes is No. 2 in the conference in receiving yards, but has more than double the catches of the next Saints’ receiver. EOU actually has more balance in its receiving game, which will give it the edge here, though just barely.



OFFENSIVE LINE

Carroll has the No. 2 rushing attack in the conference and No. 13 in the nation, but perhaps more impressively has allowed just seven sacks in nine games. The line does a good job keeping Bridgewater upright.



DEFENSIVE LINE

On numbers alone, the EOU defensive line, man for man is better than Carroll’s. Sage DeLong alone has more tackles for loss than the top two on the Saints’ D-line. EOU is good at getting into the backfield.



LINEBACKERS

Since the bye week, the Mountaineers have allowed 109 yards per game rushing and 2.77 yards per carry, while Carroll has given up 165.2 and 4.28. The D-line plays a huge role in that, but so do the linebackers.



SECONDARY

The pass coverage for the Saints has collected 13 interceptions and held the opposition to less than a 49% completion rate this fall. Eastern’s defense has nine picks, but is still allowing a 62.5% passing rate.



PREDICTION: EASTERN OREGON 17, CARROLL COLLEGE 16

EASTERN OREGON SCHEDULE/RESULTS

 AT COLLEGE OF IDAHO LOSS 48-12	 AT SOUTHERN OREGON WIN 24-21	 VS. MONTANA TECH LOSS 35-10	 AT PORTLAND STATE LOSS 59-9	 AT MONTANA WESTERN LOSS 49-13	 VS. MONTANA STATE NORTHERN WIN 45-7	 VS. SOUTHERN OREGON LOSS 31-25	 AT MONTANA TECH LOSS 23-10	 VS. COLLEGE OF IDAHO LOSS 24-17	 AT ROCKY MOUNTAIN WIN 27-17	 VS. CARROLL COLLEGE Nov. 16 1 p.m.
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Improvement from the bye week is evident

How would you rate Eastern Oregon’s improvement during the 2019 season?

This season hasn’t been what most hoped, but many fans likely began readjusting their hopes by week three, and if not certainly by the bye week, when EOU slid to 1-4. At that point, the goal was to see if the team could be better in the second half.

That’s also, as has been written in these pages several times, when Eastern readjusted its game plan. I’m not going to again go into the details of what they fixed, but will sum it up briefly: physical play, huddles on offense, emphasis on toughness, the six-week plan. Those who have tracked the team all season know what I’m talking about.

The sample size is now much bigger than what we had following the first contest out of the bye week. We’ve got five games to look at — and, in fact, a five-week first-half sample to compare it to.

So what can we take away from the second half of the season? Is EOU better than it was at



FROM THE SIDELINE

RONALD BOND

the bye week?

1) The EOU defense, which was getting gashed the first half of the season, is better. Much, much better. In the second half of the season, EOU is holding teams to 20.4 points per game — HALF of what it was giving up at the bye week (actually, less than half. That number was 42.4 after week five). The rushing defense? How about 109 yards per game (and only 2.77 yards per rush) after allowing about 225 a game in the first half. The overall defense? It’s at 317 after giving up nearly 470.

2) Eastern has been in games. Each loss during the first half of the season was a blowout by at least 25 points, and a game the Mountaineers trailed by at least 32. If you recall, I wrote a few weeks back that Eastern wasn’t even giving itself a chance to win the first half of the season. It is now. True, EOU is only 2-3 since

the bye, but it’s been right there in each contest. The Mounties lost to Southern Oregon by six, Montana Tech by 13 and College of Idaho by seven. Each of those contests was a one-possession game in the fourth quarter. Eastern had the ball down by one possession in the fourth quarter against both SOU and C of I. A couple plays here or there, and this team is 4-1 in the second half. The improvement from the first College of Idaho matchup to the second is where the move forward by the team is most evident.

3) The offense has been better, though it hasn’t seen the leaps and bounds of the defense. It has been able to mount longer drives, has found its running game and is scoring more (24.8 points in the last five games vs. 13.6 in the first five games). The Mountaineers have gotten some pieces back from injury, which has helped, as well. There are flashes of brilliance and potency, but there hasn’t been consistency. There have been missed reads and missed assignments. This, I

think, has to be a focal point going into 2020. The identity of the offense has been discovered — a run-first, smash-mouth football team. Most of the key pieces (with the exception of a few due to graduation) should be back. I’ll be curious to see how the offense continues to develop.

The team that EOU has put on the field in the second half, I think, could have found a way to scratch out an additional win during the first half of the season, and maybe two.

The game against Carroll College on Saturday will be a final exam to gauge the development. Had these teams played in week two or three, Carroll likely runs away with it.

I expect a battle on Saturday, just like the previous four games. EOU won each of them, but they have been close: 28-21 in 2015, then 27-17, 41-34 and, last year, 8-7.

So has the team improved? Let me answer it this way: the team I’ve seen in the second half of the season is a good football team. I couldn’t say that at the bye week.

Senior hopes to finish EOU career in style

By Ronald Bond
The Observer

Haziel Ledezma turned in one of his best games of the season — and maybe his career — last weekend.

The senior defensive back played a major role on defense with two interceptions in Eastern Oregon University’s 27-17 road win against Rocky Mountain College. By comparison, he had one in the previous nine games this season.

“That was a fun game,” he said. “I switched positions from corner to safety for that game, and the QB is pretty young. Our D-line was doing a good job of getting to him. Those two picks I got (were) more about baiting him and being patient for him to go where I knew he was going to go. I was able to see the field from a different perspective and from a different position.”

It was the latest in what has been a solid final season for the senior, who now has career highs in interceptions and tackles. Two weeks earlier, he had a career-best 13 tackles against Montana Tech.

Ledezma is among the 15 seniors who will finish off their college football career for EOU Saturday against Carroll College.

He called the time at EOU a roller coaster, and that is, perhaps the best way to put it. He was on the squad for the team’s ride to the NAIA playoffs and, eventually, national semifinals.

“My freshmen year was that playoff season which was awesome,” he said. “I got to be a part of that and travel with the team.”

The team has also gone through a couple challenging campaigns, including this season that sees it enter its final game with a 3-7 record. How close EOU has been in some of those games, though, is what makes it tough for the senior.

“Seasons like these where you’re so close (are the lows),” he said, pointing out Eastern has lost three games in the second half of the season where it was within a touchdown in the final quarter. “Those are tough, but at the end of the day it is what it is.”

He’s become a key piece of the defense in his time at EOU. Ledezma is the team’s leading tackler this season, entering the final game with 65 takedowns. He’s second on the team with three interceptions, and has six in his career.

He said it took about a year to really grasp the position and see everything fall in place.

“Around my sophomore year when I started filling in and having a full time job as starter — that season really made it take off for me,” he said. “It’s definitely more challenging (to play defense), but that’s kind of the fun part about it, either always being isolated or on your toes (and) having to do things right,” he said.

Off the field, Ledezma has an agriculture background, noting that is parents are ranchers. Ledezma said he’ll get a degree in Agricultural Business Management from Oregon State University through classes he’s taken at EOU. His hope is to return home and start an artificial insemination business for cattle.

“Jerome is a big ag-based town, so for me specifically for what I want to do, there a lot of opportunities out there in the cattle field,” he said of the decision to return to Southern Idaho.

While his senior season won’t end in a playoff run the way his freshman year did, he said he has seen ample growth both individually and in the team since the bye week, when head coach Tim Camp asked each player for a six-week plan for the second half of the season.

Ledezma said, in short, his plan was to give the team his all.

“This is my senior season. If I don’t give my everything, that is going to be with me for the rest of my life,” he said. “I’m always going to go back and think I should have tried harder, should have done this a little bit better. My six-week plan was to give this program everything that I had — my blood, my sweat, my tears. I feel like I’ve done that.”

Camp spoke highly of Ledezma, a player who the coach said cares about his teammates, coaches and school.

“He is one of the finest young men that you will ever find,” Camp said, calling him one of the best he’s coached. “I have coached for 23 years in college, and he is genuine and sincere.”

Ledezma added that a win in his final game would “mean everything.”

“You obviously don’t want to lose, and (it’s) the last game of our lives,” he said. “That’s a big time win (if we get it).”