

2002 PREVIEW

A primary question surrounding the 2002 Ferris State football team is can the momentum from a strong finish in 2001 carry over to the point where the Bulldogs are positioned to be legitimate contenders for the 2002 Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) Championship title and secure a potential NCAA Division II Playoff berth.

The Bulldogs are optimistic the answer will be an emphatic "Yes!" as Ferris State's theme for this campaign is "The Time Is Now!"

A total of 37 letterwinners, including 16 starters are back from a 2001 squad which registered a 7-4 overall record and posted a 7-3 third-place conference mark. FSU concluded the campaign with a four-game winning streak and in the process claimed its ninth winning season in the last 13 years.

With their success late last season, the Bulldogs will approach 2002 with an increased level of confidence and an energized winning attitude.

"We're excited about the upcoming season and are eager to build upon last year's performance," said eighth-year FSU head coach Jeff Pierce. "We have a good talent base and solid depth. We graduated some outstanding players and there are those who will probably say we've lost too much, but I believe we have the type of competitive individuals who will step up. Our success depends on how we progress in certain areas with our youth and how the veterans take their game to another level."

Offensively, the Bulldogs return eight starters and the key to the unit's success will hinge primarily on the ability to run the ball effectively. On the flip side, Ferris' defense should continue to improve with the considerable amount of experience and athleticism which exists.

"Our disappointment from last season was not winning the conference championship title," said Pierce. "and that is the major focus of this team this year. The guys learned a great deal last season and now have the character to handle adversity, which is critical to our success.

"With the GLIAC now starting to be recognized as a tough conference nationally as proven by Grand Valley State's national championship game appearance, we're well aware of the challenge which awaits us week after week. That certainly will demand that we be at our best on gamedays," added Pierce.

OFFENSE

Quarterback – The starting job belongs to sophomore **Tom Marsan** (6-3, 173), who completed 55 percent (122-222) of his pass attempts and threw for 15 TD's in nine games last season en route to receiving the team's Outstanding Offensive Rookie Award. His 1,537 passing yards last fall ranked 12th best among Ferris State's career leaders and represented the 15th highest single-season output in school history. Marsan, who recorded four 200-yard plus single-game passing performances a season ago including a personal career-best 334-yard effort at Wayne State, gained valuable experience running the offense and his numbers should improve. Junior **Adam Burgess** (6-0, 170) is a solid backup, but is the only other signal-caller with any game experience.

Running Backs – Improvement in this area is critical for Ferris' success in 2002 as Pierce emphasized throughout spring practice the importance of re-establishing a solid running attack. Junior **Derek Fudge** (5-9, 175), the 2000 GLIAC Freshman of the Year and second-team All-GLIAC performer, headlines a group of talented tailbacks. Fudge, who rushed for 549 yards and three TD's a season ago after compiling 1,227 yards and seven TD's in his freshman year, has battled injuries lately but still remains a capable runner. Sophomore **Andrew Terry** (5-8, 200) performed notably well in spring drills and is expected to contribute more this season. Sophomore **Cory Strader** (5-11, 192) lends speed too and will push for playing time. Another one vying for game action is redshirt freshman **Shawn Grigg** (5-10, 191), who has loads of potential and was one of the spring's pleasant surprises. Senior fullback **Brad Newell** (6-2, 253), a two-year starter, continues to solidify his reputation as an excellent dominating blocker. Newell teams up with junior backup **Jim Bockheim** (6-1, 251) to form a solid one-two punch.

Wide Receivers – The Bulldogs are faced with the daunting task of replacing the school's most prolific receiver in two-time consensus All-America flanker Clarence Coleman, the NCAA Division II's all-time leader in both receptions (323) and receiving yards (4,983). A 2001 finalist for the Harlon Hill Trophy as the nation's top NCAA-II player, Coleman closed out his four-year career ranking among all four NCAA Division all-time leaders in six statistical categories, including second in catches and third in receiving yardage. Along with Coleman, five of the top seven receivers from last season have departed.

Derek Fudge is the team's top returning receiver with 19 catches for 168 yards and two TD's last fall. Despite those losses, the young and relatively inexperienced FSU receiving corps still possesses the talent and depth to be dangerous. Battling for the flanker slot are sophomore **Delano McKinney** (5-11, 160) and redshirt frosh **Carlton Brewster** (5-11, 191). McKinney gained experience as a reserve last year while Brewster is regarded as a "big-play" receiver who should be exciting to watch. Sophomore **Andy Thwaites** (6-2, 184) made his case for increased action with an excellent spring effort. At split end, junior **Jesse**

Porter (6-4, 201) is listed as the starter going into fall drills and had five receptions for 51 yards last season. A pair of redshirt freshmen – **Larry Burton** (5-8, 174) and **Dennis Cartwright** (5-8, 148) also should play.

Offensive Line – Talent and experience should make this unit much improved as Ferris State welcomes back four starters to go with a cast of quality reserves. Senior **Justin Giordano** (6-3, 278), an All-GLIAC First-Teamer and Ferris' Most Valuable Offensive Lineman Award honoree, will start at left tackle for the third consecutive year while sophomore tackle **Kevin Park** (6-8, 285) is back as the regular on the right side. Sophomore guard **Jeff Williams** (6-2, 283), a converted defensive tackle, is slated to occupy the right slot with junior **Gino D'Agostino** (6-1, 311) at the other. Sophomore **Andy Szatkowski** (6-2, 291) returns as the starting center. Junior **Bryan King** (6-2, 260), sophomore **Matt Desmarais** (6-1, 275) along with redshirt frosh **Mark Miller** (6-3, 285) and **Jamie Bretl** (6-3, 258) will provide support.

Tight Ends – Improvement is expected in an area where the Bulldogs have talent, size and depth in junior **Matt McCoy** (6-7, 262), and sophomore **Austin Malloy** (6-5, 248). The starter last season, McCoy averaged 13.8 yards per catch on eight receptions for 110 yards and two TD's. A tremendous run blocker, McCoy also proved to be a legitimate receiving threat due to his size and athletic ability. Malloy has improved considerably in all phases and could challenge for the starting nod. Regarded as fine blockers and receivers, the pair will be deployed in two-set end formations in certain game situations.

DEFENSE

Defensive Line – This unit returns almost in its entirety with the exception of one starter. Senior right end **Bo Moore** (6-2, 235) proved to be the Bulldogs' best playmaker on defense last year with 68 total tackles, which included 15.5 tackles for minus 63 yards. Moore's single-season tackle output was third best on the squad while his 10 quarterback sacks (0.91 avg.) tied him for 19th place among the nation's leaders. As a result, Moore garnered All-GLIAC First Team, *Hansen's Football Gazette* All-America Honorable Mention, *Daktronics* Northeast Region Second Team and FSU Most Improved Defensive Player Award kudos. Moore has been tabbed a 2002 preseason second-team All-American by *Lindy's College Football Annual*. Senior **Michael King** (6-5, 269) will anchor the opposite end following a 45-tackle effort in a starting role last fall. Sophomores **John Hazle** (6-2, 222) and **Jesse Schnitker** (6-2, 235) are the backups. Manning the starting left tackle spot again is senior **Jason Feasel** (6-4, 268), who notched 43 tackles and had 10.5 tackles for a loss of 42 yards. Redshirt frosh **Josh Swartz** (6-2, 249) is Feasel's understudy. Junior **Pat Smith** (6-1, 267) and sophomore **Whitney Bell** (6-2, 269) will compete for the right tackle job.

Linebackers – This unit features a blend of experienced youth led by junior middle linebacker and '01 all-league honorable mention selection **Luke Piepkow** (6-3, 226). Piepkow amassed a team-leading 110 tackles last season and should be one of the league's best if injury free. Both of last year's starters on the outside are gone thus senior **Adam Riley** (6-0, 217) and sophomore **Rob Mida** (6-2, 228) are battling for the starting chuck backer slot while sophomore **Kevin Myers** (5-11, 199) has locked up the will backer job. Regarded as one of the team's top tacklers, Myers' 49 stops a year ago represented the ninth-best team total. Sophomores **Brad Morris** (6-3, 224) and **Brad Bigelow** (6-2, 207) along with junior **David Clifford** (6-3, 227), a former tight end, are in reserve.

Secondary – Returning all-conference starters in senior free safety **Alvin Grier** (6-0, 209) and senior cornerback **DeRen Ellis** (6-0, 167) provide FSU with an experienced nucleus. Grier, a fifth-year senior, received all-league honorable mention accolades in '01 for the second straight year after earning second-team laurels in 1999. His 63 stops last season ranked fifth highest on the team. An exceptional cover corner, Ellis attained All-GLIAC Second-Team honors last year and was a first-team honoree the previous campaign. He had a career-high 54 tackles in '01 and presently is tied with Grier for sixth among the school's all-time interception leaders with nine career pass thefts. Junior **Vito Ciaramellano** (6-1, 214) is the starting strong safety and will also play at linebacker in certain packages. Senior **Darius Alexander** (5-10, 182) and sophomore **Ryan Carruthers** (5-8, 168) will vie for the other corner assignment. Junior **Rich Dosh** (5-10, 191) racked up 43 tackles a season ago and will challenge at free safety.

Specialty Teams – Unlike a season ago, the placekicker and punting positions welcome back their respective starters. Junior **Tom Perez** (5-9, 140) connected on nine-of-14 field goals and 31-of-34 PATs to place second in team scoring. Perez, FSU's Special Teams Player of the Year in '01, ranked tied for 26th place nationally in field goals per game (0.82 avg.). Fellow soph **Tim Gill** (5-9, 163) will handle the punting chores after averaging 32.7 yards a boot last season. Sophomore walk-on **Casey Danford** (5-9, 189) will assume the kickoff duties. **Justin Giordano** and **Matt Desmarais** are both experienced long snappers while **Adam Burgess** will serve as the holder for kick placements. **Carlton Brewster** will double as both the primary kickoff and punt returner. **DeRen Ellis** and **Delano McKinney** also have game-breaking speed and are capable return men.

