

2006 SEASON PREVIEW

As the Ferris State University football program enters its 12th year under the direction of head coach **Jeff Pierce**, a new sense of purpose and excitement abound within in the program.

One can witness the sense of urgency and commitment as more than 50 players decided to stay on campus this summer and voluntarily attend the daily rigorous workouts both in the weight room and on the field.

There's no question in Pierce's mind the 2006 Bulldogs will be improved. How that translates into wins and losses remains to be seen.

"I believe we will be a much-improved football team come this fall," said Pierce, the school's all-time winningest coach. "We went through some tough stretches last season and it's frustrating to fall short of those high expectations. I'm excited about this upcoming season and anxious to see how our team responds to the challenges which await us."

A season ago, the Bulldogs struggled out of the gate by dropping their first four contests before winning the next two. Ferris State achieved victory only once in its last five outings en route to a 3-8 overall record and an eighth-place tying 3-7 mark in the highly-competitive Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC).

Despite the record, Pierce was able to take a number of positives from the challenging gridiron campaign.

"These guys stayed together last year and fought through some tough times which will only strengthen our resolve," said Pierce. "We also had to endure a number of injuries and depth problems last season. However, a number of our younger players were forced to step up which allowed them to improve and mature."

A significant improvement by Pierce within the last season is upgrading the Bulldogs' depth through an increase in scholarship funding.

"I sincerely appreciate the generosity of our football alumni and thankful for their contributions," said Pierce. "Competing in the nation's top Division II football conference, you need to have quality depth in order to be successful."

The go out and make a difference approach is one Pierce and the coaching staff is instilling in its players.

"Our commitment has been exceptional, the best I can remember in a long time," Pierce said. "Their mindset is all business like. These men are locked in to achieving a highly-successful season."

OFFENSE

Quarterback – Returning for his fifth season at Ferris, senior **Ryan Kaul** (6-0, 205) is the incumbent as the Bulldogs' starter. Kaul, who ranks sixth among the school's all-time passing leaders with 3,484 career yards, threw for a career-high 1,924 yards and 14 TD's in nine outings a season ago. The 2005 All-GLIAC Honorable Mention pick also chalked up 280 yards with four TD's on the ground. Challenging him for the starting job will be junior **C.J. Van Wieren** (6-4, 235), who rushed for a team-high 363 yards with four TD's in 10 games. The athletic Van Wieren, who plays on the FSU men's basketball team, passed for 597 yards with three TD's last fall. His presence gives the Bulldogs two outstanding signal-callers capable of leading the attack. Regardless, the coaching staff is intent on having Van Wieren play somewhere to utilize his abilities. Senior **Steve Fusee** (6-2, 209) is a capable backup.

Running Backs – The Bulldogs are in better shape than a year ago as all but one of their primary ball carriers return. Furthermore, Pierce believes

this area has a lot of options because of the personnel's versatility. At tailback, senior **Shawn Grigg** (5-9, 200) and sophomore **Paris Holloman** (5-8, 194) will vie for the starter's spot. A 10-game starter last season, Grigg wound up third in team rushing with 271 yards and a TD. The speedy Holloman, who had a great spring camp, saw action in the final five games and rushed for 60 yards in that span. Senior **John Vandenberg** (5-11, 236) returns as the starting fullback and ran for a team fifth-place 69 yards and three TD's in 2005.

Wide Receivers – The Bulldogs are faced with the task of replacing one of the school's most prolific receivers in All-America flanker Carlton Brewster. The two-time All-GLIAC First-Team wideout closed out his four-year career ranking second among FSU's all-time leaders in receptions (234) and receiving yards (3,184) while finishing eighth in scoring with 164 career points. Along with Brewster, seven of the top nine receivers from a season ago have departed.

Junior flanker **Nate Fricke** (5-8, 175) was the Bulldogs' second-leading receiver last year with 35 catches for 401 yards and four TD's. As a result, he was chosen as the Ferris' Outstanding Offensive Rookie. Senior split end **Lawrence Conner** (5-9, 170), who caught a squad fourth-place 25 aerials for 253 yards last fall, is an elusive slot receiver with big-play ability. Fricke will be challenged for playing time by sophomore **Cole Meredith** (6-0, 199) while Conner can expect the same from talented junior college transfer **Robert Miller** (5-8, 185). A multi-skilled receiver, Meredith excelled in spring ball and is one of the team's best special team performers. The quick-footed Miller has the potential to be an impact player and earned National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) All-America Honorable Mention honors at Harbor (Calif.) Community College last season. Redshirt freshman flanker **Chris Wilson** (6-6, 215) also poses a threat due to his athleticism and leaping ability. Expect Ferris to use a lot of different combinations based upon offensive sets and each player's skills.

Offensive Line – Experience and quality depth will be the unit's strengths. Senior **Allen Feigel** (6-5, 328) has remained a fixture at left guard the last two seasons and is regarded as one of the team's best. Lining up next to Feigel at left tackle is senior **Kevin Teeple** (6-7, 307), who's also an imposing figure. One of the Bulldogs' most athletic linemen, senior **Chris Putra** (6-2, 264) is back at the starting right tackle post. At center, seniors **Tim Pickens** (6-3, 283) and **Rob Lukofsky** (6-2, 290) are battling for the starting assignment. Pickens started in six of eight games played in the middle last season while Lukofsky competed in the initial five before suffering a season-ending injury. Occupying 2005 second-team All-GLIAC right guard Jeff Williams' starting slot will probably be junior **Bill Bourdlais** (6-4, 290), a converted defensive tackle and perhaps the squad's most athletic lineman. Senior guard **Mitch DeVries** (6-3, 310) could also figure into the mix.

H-Backs – With its various formations, **John Vandenberg** is slated to be the regular as a result of his blocking and pass-catching skills. He's a valuable asset who can dominate at a number of positions.

DEFENSE

Defensive Line – As a unit, this may be the most

talented and deepest group on this side of the ball. With all four starters and quality depth, Ferris has the luxury of considerable flexibility and options. Everything up front begins with left tackle **Jake Visser** (6-2, 265), who earned all-league honorable mention and team Most Valuable Defensive Player kudos in 2005 after posting a team second-place leading 98 tackles, including four sacks. The junior has been named a 2006 preseason All-American by *Hansen's Football Gazette*. Senior **Jereld Sawyer** (6-1, 278) returns at right tackle after recording a career-high 43 stops last season. Junior **Erik Schumacher** (6-4, 248), senior **Dan Boulter** (6-1, 238) and sophomore **Kyle Walker** (6-1, 250), FSU's Most Outstanding Defensive Rookie last year, each appeared in all 11 outings a season ago. Schumacher compiled 48 tackles while Boulter and Walker tallied 25 and 52 stops apiece. A newcomer to watch is junior end **Kurt Hout** (6-2, 250), a transfer from Division I-AA Northern Colorado who was a honorable mention all-conference pick in 2005.

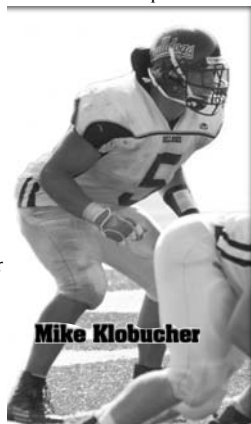
Linebackers – This area has been a staple of the Bulldog defense throughout the years and the most recent noteworthy performer is senior middle linebacker **Mike Klobucher** (6-2, 248), a 2006 *Football Gazette* preseason All-American. The 2005 FSU MVP and Most Valuable Defensive Skill Player lead the team in tackles for the second year in a row with 109 stops en route to becoming a repeat All-GLIAC Honorable Mention selection. Sophomore **Jeff Hollandsworth** (6-0, 225), junior **Nick Maeder** (5-10, 210), and junior **Jordan Moore** (6-0, 226) will vie for the two starting outside linebacker jobs. Hollandsworth was Ferris' Most Improved Defensive Player last fall after totaling 91 tackles to rank third on the team. Maeder rebounded from a 2004 season-ending injury to place fourth with 77 team tackles. Moore is fully recovered from a 2005 season-opening game injury which sidelined him for the remainder of the campaign. Sophomore **Kevin Noe** (6-3, 227) and redshirt frosh **Sidney Hoyle** (6-2, 194) are two up-and-coming outside linebackers who should see the field. Noe had 28 tackles last year.

Secondary – Ferris returns three of its four starters and has significantly upgraded its depth. Fifth-year senior **Jim Skodak** (6-0, 202) will continue covering the opposition's top receiver. The three-time (2003-05) honorable mention all-GLIAC cornerback had 28 stops with a team-high tying three interceptions last fall. Senior strong safety **Chris Machalak** (6-1, 208) turned in a notable 2005 season with a career-best and team fifth-place 68 tackles as a full-time starter. Senior free safety **Nick Beaudry** (5-10, 197) had a career-high 34 tackles and a squad-best tying three pass thefts for 39 yards in eight

games before going down with a season-ending injury. Redshirt frosh **Angelo Williams** (5-11, 185) along with junior college transfers **Patrick Wells** (6-1, 200) and **Kyle Williams** (5-10, 175) are all athletically gifted and will be immediate contributors at both cornerback and the safety positions.

Specialty Teams – An area of concern is no longer as the Bulldogs return virtually all of its 2005 regulars. Senior kicker **Josh Eichler** (5-10, 180) connected on eight-of-12 field goals last season and was the team's leading scorer. Sophomore **Jim Yates** (6-1, 213) averaged a team-high 39.5 yards per punt in 2005 and was named

FSU's Special Teams Player of the Year. Junior punter **Levi Slager** (6-0, 181) will push for the No. 1 role after averaging 36.6 yards last year. **Jereld Sawyer** is back after handling all of the long snapping duties last season while **Slager** was the Bulldogs' primary holder.



Mike Klobucher



Jim Skodak

