

2008 SEASON PREVIEW



It is often said in life that "change" can sometimes be good. On the other hand, in most cases nothing tops "experience".

If those are both correct, the Ferris State University football squad should be well-prepared to tackle the 2008 campaign as the storied program embarks on its 100th season of varsity competition.

The Bulldogs enter the year with plenty of changes, but also return significant experience in several key areas to once again be a factor in a competitive Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference (GLIAC) race.

The changes start in personnel where the Bulldogs must replace team leaders in rushing, passing and receiving. Ferris will attempt to do that with a revamped coaching staff featuring three new faces to go along with several veteran holdovers.

Further changes come in the schedule, which this season includes three teams the Bulldogs did not face a year ago in Tiffin, Findlay and Indianapolis. While the game at Tiffin will be a non-conference encounter, it will give Ferris its first opportunity to face the Dragons, who have joined the GLIAC following the departure of both Gannon and Mercyhurst.

Change is also evident at FSU's Top Taggart Field, which will feature a new state-of-the-art Mondo Ecofill artificial playing surface this fall.

"It's an exciting time of year and we're ready to go," said FSU head coach **Jeff Pierce**, who enters his 14th season at the helm. "Our student-athletes have really committed themselves during the offseason and that should help prepare us for the challenges ahead."

Offensively, the Bulldogs' first task will be to replace veteran quarterback C.J. Van Wieren, who threw for 1,835 yards and ran for a team-high 1,015 yards as a dual-threat option in the spread offense a season ago.

However, while the Bulldogs do return plenty of experience and talent along the offensive line in addition to several key contributors at the running back spot, the squad also faces the task of finding replacements for the team's top three receivers from 2007.

Seven starters return on offense following Ferris' 7-4 finish (including a forfeit win) a season ago.

"Overall, I was impressed with how our offensive unit developed in the spring and I think we'll be pretty multi-dimensional this fall," said FSU Offensive Coordinator **Matt McCarthy**. "We've got some young players on this side of the ball, but they're eager to learn and produce this season."

On the defensive side of the ball, Ferris should have enough depth and returning experience to rank among the league's top units. The Bulldogs return eight starters on the defensive side, including all three at the linebacker position and three more in the secondary. Significant depth also abounds at both positions.

Up front, the Bulldogs will have to fill a pair of holes on the defensive line with the loss of two all-league players in Kurt Hout and Erik Schumacher. However, few, if any, across the country are better than senior tackle **Jake Visser**, giving the squad a great foundation to build around.

"We're experienced on defense and we expect big things out of this group on the field," FSU Defensive Coordinator **Duane Wilson** said. "We've got a number of guys who've played quite a bit and it's an older unit that returns this year."

While Ferris will have to find new return men in the special teams area, the Bulldogs are afforded the luxury of having All-GLIAC kicker/punter **Jim Yates** around for one more campaign.

Overall, the Bulldogs welcome back nearly 50 letterwinners and 17 starters from last year's fourth-place tying effort (6-4) in the league standings.

Ferris' 100th season features five home games and a number of events will take place to commemorate the special anniversary. While the Bulldogs' always-tough GLIAC slate features tough road games at Ashland, Hillsdale and defending conference champion Grand Valley State among others, FSU will play three of its last four tilts at home versus Wayne State, Northwood and Saginaw Valley State.

While change is sometimes inevitable, the Bulldogs' hope the new energy combined with some key veteran

experience enables the program to once again be a top challenger in the GLIAC standings.

OFFENSE

Quarterback – Junior **Eric Grozenski** (6-2, 222) enters fall camp as the starting quarterback, but will likely be challenged by a pair of youngsters in sophomore **Kyle Foster** (6-3, 200) and redshirt freshman **Tom Schneider** (6-3, 195). Grozenski saw action in seven contests as the team's backup last year and completed 50% (8-16) of his passes for 138 yards. He should have the most knowledge of the team's offensive system although both Foster and Schneider showed significant improvement during the spring. Foster played in only one game and did not attempt a pass last year. Meanwhile, Schneider was chosen as Tomorrow's Team Offensive Player of the Year and tossed three TD passes in April's Crimson & Gold Spring Game.

Running Backs – A number of players should battle for playing time in the backfield. Senior **Paris Holloman** (5-8, 194) ran for 328 yards and four scores as the team's primary starter at tailback. The speedy back is a three-year letterwinner, but has been hampered by injuries in his career. Fellow senior **Leonard Curry** (5-10, 235) is a power back who tallied two TD's last fall. Sophomore **Charles Wasson** (5-10, 209) played in 10 games as a reserve in 2007 and is a good pass blocker behind the line of scrimmage. Additionally, redshirt freshman **Marvel Pridgeon** (5-11, 215) is coming off a solid spring and has the potential to challenge for a starting role. The Bulldogs will likely use sophomore slot receivers **Tim Hogue** (5-7, 165) and **David Johnson** (5-10, 204) out of the backfield at times much like they did with former All-GLIAC honoree Robert Miller the last two years. Several other players could play in a reserve role, including junior **Ryan Pieske** (5-9, 198).

Wide Receivers – The Bulldogs lost not only Robert Miller to graduation, but also will miss the services of veteran go-to guys Mike Guevara and Nate Fricke. Together, the trio hauled in 91 receptions and averaged more than 15 yards per catch a year ago. While Hogue and Johnson will contend for time at the slot receiver spot, the Bulldogs do return two guys with starting experience on the outside in senior **Cole Meredith** (6-0, 199) and junior **Chris Wilson** (6-6, 230). Meredith averaged 20.8 yards per reception last fall while Wilson's height and frame enabled him to make 11 grabs and a pair of scores. Senior **Rahseem Jones-Salaam** (6-0, 188) is a three-year letterwinner who can provide veteran experience as an added threat. The Bulldogs will also utilize sophomore **Matt Schuelke** (5-10, 170) along with redshirt freshmen **Damien Miller** (6-0, 170) and **Seth Hubbard** (6-3, 180) as part of the usual rotation at the receiver positions. Former quarterback **Kevin Ward** (6-4, 215) has moved to the receiving corps and should provide added depth on the outside based on his spring performance. Sophomore **Keenan Bowman** (6-2, 180) will be a quality reserve.

Offensive Line – The situation up front is completely different this time around than it was a year ago. Last fall, the Bulldogs entered camp with only one returning starter in All-GLIAC pick Bill Bourdlais and were faced with the task of finding four new starters. This year, Ferris welcomes back five players who started at one time or another in 2007, but must find a way to offset the loss of the unit's top player and leader in Bourdlais. Junior **Brad Bammert** (6-2, 280) and sophomore **Matt Wellman** (6-4, 280) were both 11-game starters at the two tackle spots last fall. Bammert manned the right side with Wellman holding down fort on the left-side of the line of scrimmage. Junior **Joe Doman** (6-0, 291) also made all 11 starts as the squad's center a year ago and has the ability to play at guard as well. Sophomore **Scott Shattuck** (6-1, 290) should challenge for a starting role at either center or guard with senior **Alex DeKok** (6-2, 285) also back at guard after making five starts last fall. The Bulldogs will likely count on the services of several other letterwinners including seniors **Tom Thornton** (6-4, 295) and **Josh Brenning** (6-6, 285) along with sophomore **Joe Voiles** (6-2, 270) as part of the cast.

DEFENSE

Defensive Line – While there may be no one around better than senior tackle **Jake Visser** (6-2, 275), the Bulldogs will be challenged to replace both Hout and

Schumacher who helped form one of the nation's top units. A consensus first-team All-America selection last fall, Visser also claimed the GLIAC's Defensive Lineman of the Year Award and was voted team MVP.

The preseason All-America choice is a candidate this fall for national defensive player of the year laurels. Senior end **Kyle Walker** (6-1, 250) should be solid again in his third year as a starter on the outside. Junior **Joe Morrow** (6-2, 265), sophomore **Jacob Moreno** (6-2, 253) and juniors **Leonard Woods** (6-0, 269) and **Kory Deering** (6-3, 282) will be among the top candidates to fill the two open slots although a number of young prospects could contend for time, including redshirt freshmen **Muneer Bawayeh** (6-4, 225), **Wayne Pritchett** (6-1, 200) and **Mark Lomasney** (6-2, 225). Senior **Travis "Snoop" Eising** (6-2, 229) is a valuable special teams contributor who moved from the H-Back position to the defensive line last fall. FSU also recruited heavily this spring along the front line.

Linebacker – Ferris' linebacking unit should be one of the league's top groups with the return of three senior starters in **Kevin Noe** (6-3, 243), **Jeff Hollandsworth** (6-0, 235) and **Jordan Moore** (6-0, 226). Noe, who led the Bulldogs in tackles in 2007, earned All-GLIAC Second Team kudos last year and has received preseason All-America consideration. Moore is a sixth-year player in the program while Hollandsworth has been a regular starter much of his career. Seniors **Rob Evenboer** (6-1, 232) and **Matt Mausolf** (6-0, 220) add quality depth and are three-year letterwinners. Meanwhile, juniors **Nick Butler** (5-10, 235), **Matt Ryan** (6-1, 190) and **Chad Schoen** (6-0, 206) along with sophomore **Kyle Fitzpatrick** (6-2, 211) have the potential to play key roles and give FSU plenty of talent, depth and optimism at the position. Redshirt freshmen **Steve Battaglia** (6-1, 215) and **Chris Kurbel** (6-1, 220) have shown the ability to contribute.

Secondary – A number of faces return defensively in the secondary as the Bulldogs should have plenty of veterans in the back-half of the unit. Senior **Terrell Heggins** (5-11, 215) was impressive in his first season with the team at one corner a year ago and has also drawn preseason praise following an all-league showing in 2007. Senior **Kyle Williams** (5-10, 175) was injured early last year and missed most of the season, giving junior **Angelo Williams** (5-11, 185) an opportunity to play full-time at the other corner. Both return this year with redshirt freshman **Russell Weatherspoon** (5-10, 165) expected to challenge for time on the outside. While FSU must replace talented performer Patrick Wells at one of the safety spots, plenty of depth and experience is available in juniors **Chad Wilson** (6-0, 197) and **Santino Favot** (5-11, 185) to go with seniors **Oseloka Keys** (6-3, 200) and **C.J. Lee** (6-3, 200). Together, the foursome give FSU both size and speed down the field. Sophomore **Landon Jones** (5-9, 185) and junior **Dominique Smith** (5-11, 185) may provide depth.

Special Teams – Ferris welcomes back senior **Jim Yates** (6-1, 213), who was an All-GLIAC Second Team performer and FSU's Special Teams Player of the Year in 2007 after handling both the punting and kicking chores. Redshirt freshman **Dusty Greenbury** (6-2, 205) should be a quality backup and sophomore **Brian Bush** (5-11, 201) is also back to handle the long-snapping job. Replacements must be found for the return chores after Guevara, Miller, Fricke and Wells combined to perform most of the duties last fall.

