2016 Football Preview

Utah State University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.usu.edu/newspapers

Recommended Citation
FOOTBALL PREVIEW 2016

@utahstatesman
WWW.USUSTATESMAN.COM
NOW OPEN

Lee’s Ace Hardware
894 South Main Smithfield, UT 84335
(435) 754-7575 • www.acehardware.com

Ace is your neighborhood place for Craftsman.

Turn your to-do list into a to-done list.
CONTENTS

4 MAVERIK STADIUM
6 POSITION PREVIEWS
12 FEATURED ARTICLES
32 SCOUTING REPORTS

Graphic Designers
Kelsey Schwanke
Theodore Butts

Managing Editor
Thomas Sorenson

Sports Content Manager
Logan Jones

Sports Editor
Megan McNulty

Senior Writer
Paige Cavaness

Contributing writers
Taylor Emerson
Emily Duke
Jason Walker

Images courtesy of
Matt Halton
John Byrne
Troy Babbitt
Ernie Anderson
Dan Byers
Percy Anderson
Utah Statesman staff
Air Force Academy Athletics
Boise State Athletics
Colorado State Athletics
New Mexico Athletics
Utah State Athletics
Wyoming Athletics
Fresno State Athletics
Nevada Athletics
San Diego State Athletics
Weber State Athletics
USC Athletics
Arkansas State Athletics
“There's a couple nights I go in there late at night and look around and just imagine how blessed we are. We are blessed. We got a nice facility, a new press box, new jumbo screen and we’re hyped up for that first game September first.”

-Kent Myers
Chuckie Keeton is gone for good, and Junior Kent Myers is officially taking the reigns. Myers is one of the best dual-threat quarterbacks in the Mountain West, and set both the school and conference single-game record in his first career start at Hawaii with a completion percentage of 93.3 percent and three touchdowns. As a freshman, he was turned from a redshirt to a starter to fill in for injured quarterbacks Keeton, Darrell Garretson and Craig Harrison. He found himself behind Keeton on the depth chart once again last season, but after a brief experiment taking snaps at wide receiver Myers started eight games at quarterback due to Keeton’s frequent injuries.

Utah State enters 2016 boasting six running backs on its roster, including three with starting experience. The Aggies will return Devonte Mays, their leading rusher from last season, who rushed for 966 yards and seven touchdowns in just six starts his first year with the Aggies.

In his first season with the Aggies, Mays ranked third overall in the Mountain West and 39th nationally with 5.9 yards per carry. He notched three 100-yard rushing games during the season, including a 22-carry and 176-yard stomping against Wyoming.

The Aggies also return junior running back LaJuan Hunt, who started in 11 games last year and has played in all 27 games in his two seasons with the Aggies. LaJuan led the Aggies in rushing two years ago with 540 yards, which was the third-most by a freshman in school history.

Though Mays seems the strong workhorse type, Hunt is the kind of backup coaches dream of and will likely split touches throughout the season.

Somewhat under the radar sits junior Tonny Lindsey, who played in nine games last season and started his first career game against Nevada. Lindsey ended the season with 93 yards on 12 carries. In his time at Cerritos Junior College, Lindsey played in only nine games due to injury. Even with the time he spent sitting out, he carried the ball 55 times for 530 yards and four rushing touchdowns. He added a receiving touchdown to his total.

The Aggies will also bring back sophomore Justin Hervey for his second full season as an Aggie. Hervey redshirted his first season at Utah State and then came in last season to play in eight games, carrying the ball 14 times. He ended the season with 47 rushing yards and one touchdown.

Others ball-carriers returning for the Aggies include include freshman Dionte Simon and junior Morian Walker.

Behind Myers waits University of Oregon transfer Damion Hobbs. Last season, Hobbs played in seven games completing 4-of-5 passes (.800) for 73 yards and one touchdown. If Myers does go down, the three-star recruit’s athleticism and experience makes him a worthy replacement.

Behind Hobbs is returning sophomore DJ Nelson, who played in all 13 games last season as the team’s holder after redshirting his freshman year. Nelson played quarterback at Logan High School where he led the Grizzlies to back-to-back region titles.

Others on the roster sophomore Cade Smith who has experience in the program as a redshirt freshman last season. Smith, who attended West Salem high school in Salem, Oregon, was the Greater Valley Conference Offensive Player of the Year and completed 131-of-213 passes (.615) for a school record along with 32 touchdowns.

Last we have true-freshman Jordan Love from Bakersfield, California. Coming out of Liberty high school, Love is a three-star quarterback who totalled 4,078 passing yards his senior year.
WR/TEs

Head Coach Matt Wells has a challenge ahead of him with his receiving corps.

Last year, 43.7% of Utah State’s passing yards ended up in the hands of either Hunter Sharp or Devonte Robinson. Neither of them are returning to the Aggies this year. Both graduated and are trying to make their way into the NFL. Sharp is currently with the Philadelphia Eagles, and Robinson was recently cut from the Green Bay Packers.

The top returning pass catcher is tight end Wyatt Houston who has caught 51 passes for 603 yards and seven touchdowns in his three-year career.

Returning three starters on offensive line is a good sign for the Aggies’ this year. Utah State will return senior tackles Austin Albrecht and Jake Simonich and senior center Austin Stephens. All three have starting experience and received honorable mention All-Mountain West honors after last season.

Along with Houston, Utah State will enjoy returning crowd favorite Andrew Rodriguez who began last season returning punts for the Aggies. He averaged 9.9 yards per return, the sixth best in school history.

The rest of the receiving corps consists of unproven veterans and newcomers, including junior college transfers, former redshirts and incoming freshmen. Fortunately, coach Wells is familiar with this situation — this year will be the third time in four years as Utah State’s head coach that he will have had to replace his top two receivers.

Braelon Roberts is a prime candidate to answer the call as he is one of the biggest receivers on the roster standing 6’3” and weighing in at 200 pounds. He can get down the field and his size will cause matchup problems for smaller corners. Last year, Roberts started in six of the 11 games he played in, finishing with 17 catches for 150 yards.

As the team’s top returning pass-catcher, Houston boasts great athleticism and size to go along with good hands and blocking skills to boot. Houston has potential to wreak havoc on opposing safeties with his combination of size and athleticism. Underutilized in the past, Houston will look to be a major factor in the offense and an excellent security blanket for Kent Myers.

The battle for the second outside wide receiver spot will be hotly contested. Zach Van Leeuwen, Tyler Fox, Jaren Colston-Green, Ethan Cortazzo and Alex Byers will all duke it out for playing time this fall. Van Leeuwen, Fox and Colston-Green all saw playing time for the Aggies last season while Cortazzo and Byers are junior college transfers. Byers posted electrifying numbers in his time at Antelope Valley Junior College with 56 receptions for 1,072 yards and 12 touchdowns in his sophomore season.

On the inside at slot receiver, the Aggies may see more of Rodriguez. In addition to his punt return duties last year, Rodriguez reeled in 27 passes — the most of any returning player — for 281 yards. Behind Rodriguez is redshirt freshmen Gerold Bright, senior kick returner Kennedy Williams and intriguing true freshmen Rayshad Lewis, son of former NFL linebacker Ray Lewis. Lewis will likely see the field this season after flashing big-play potential in fall camp.

O–LINE

Sophomore guard KJ Uluave all with game day experience. All together the offensive line will return eight players with game day experience.

Additions to the line include junior-college transfer Sean Taylor, redshirt freshman transfer Colby Kerns and true freshmen Demytrick Ali’ifua, Viliamu McMoore and Ty Shaw.

Front 7

Honorees on the roster, along with fellow senior end Siua Taufa and junior end Ian Togiai gives the Aggies a couple of game-proven players on the line.

Behind those starters, the depth chart still has a bit more experience in senior end Edmund Faimalo and sophomore nose guard Gaseoto Schuster. Look for them to make plays in some meaningful rotational package minutes.

The real concern for the Aggies is behind the line. During the entirety of Matt Wells’ tenure at Utah State, the Aggies’ have had some strong linebacker groups — and last year’s group was particularly skilled.

This season, Wells will have to replace 264 tackles — 43 of which came from behind the line of scrimmage — 11 sacks and five takeaways. He will have to do so with just three of the 10 linebackers who registered a stat last year. Sophomore Chasen Andersen, son of former Aggie head coach Gary Andersen, is the only one who hit double-digit tackles.

Lining up at the two inside linebacker positions will be returning senior Anthony Williams and junior Alex Huerta. Both of whom have had very strong camps and look ready to replace some of that lost production.

Out on the edge will be senior Brock Carmen and sophomore Derek Larsen. The pass-rushing duo has limited experience with the Aggies, but has earned the praise of Wells in both spring ball and fall camp.

A young nucleus waits behind this year’s starting ‘backers. Leki Uasike, Europa Mataia, Joe Riggins, Kevin Meitzenheimer, Dalton Baker, Chase Christiansen, Logan Lee and Justus Te’i will all fight to see some time of the field in order to ready themselves for next season.
Where Utah Gets Engaged!

S.E. Needham quality at internet pricing

S.E. Needham jewelers since 1896

141 North Main ● www.seneedham.com ● 435-752-7149
Store Hours: Monday - Saturday 10:00 - 7:00
FOOTBALL PREVIEW

SECONDARY

Utah State's secondary is easily the defense's most experienced position group.

The Aggie's return two of their starters in the secondary, safety Devin Centers and junior corner back Jalen Davis. The duo ranks first and second in total starts among returning defensive players with the only other remaining defensive starter being end Ricky Alfita.

In Davis' two seasons in Logan, he has started all 26 games that he has appeared in. He has recorded 111 tackles, five interceptions and two sacks.

In his first three years at Utah, Davis has appeared in 37 games, including three missed field goals against BYU. Davis earned all-Bay League honors as a junior and senior and Special Teams Player of the Year.

Utah State is also returning several role players from last year with senior cornerback Daniel Gray and junior safety Dallin Leavitt eager to step in as starters.

Gray, a transfer from Tennessee, has started nine games in his career — two in 2015 — during his tenure at Utah State. Gray is an explosive, corner with excellent speed and good size at 5'11" and 185 pounds.

Leavitt, a transfer student but from BYU, will look to replace hard-hitting safety Marwein Evans. Evans had the third most tackles for the Aggies last season (73), including ten tackles for loss and two sacks.

Leavitt started four of the 11 games he played in as a sophomore at BYU. Against Texas, he had seven tackles with two of those being for a loss.

Filling out the corner rotation, the Aggies will have junior Wesley Bailey and senior Jentz Painter. Bailey is a big, physical corner while Painter has the quickness to cover smaller slot receivers.

All projected starters for the secondary have posted at least five starts in their careers, the most of any position group on the defense.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Aggies will see both new and old talent on special teams this year and most will be vying for starting positions.

Utah State returns three special teams members from last season including senior placekickers Jake Thompson and Brock Warren, as well as sophomore punter Aaron Dalton.

Dalton, a sophomore out of Davis, Utah, ranked ninth in the Mountain West and 63rd nationally with a 41.5-yard punting average last season. His shining moment came in the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl against the Akron Zips last season when he booted a 69-yarder, setting a bowl game record.

Warren, a senior out of Hyde Park, Utah, ranked 15th in the Mountain West and 47th nationally with 106 total touchbacks in his first three years at Utah State.

Warren’s one out of Hyde Park, Utah, ranked 15th in the Mountain West and 47th nationally with 106 total touchbacks in his first three years at Utah State.

Thompson, Warren and redshirt freshman Dominik Eberle will all fight for the spot as the Aggies' top kicker.

Thompson has kicked off a total of 219 juni for the Aggies, averaging 62.7 yards with 106 total touchbacks in his first three years at Utah State.

Sloane, a senior out of Hyde Park, Utah, ranked 15th in the Mountain West and 47th nationally with 106 total touchbacks in his first three years at Utah State.

Sloane is a senior out of Hyde Park, Utah, ranked 15th in the Mountain West and 47th nationally with 106 total touchbacks in his first three years at Utah State.

Utah State’s secondary is easily the defense's most experienced position group.

The Aggie's return two of their starters in the secondary, safety Devin Centers and junior corner back Jalen Davis. The duo ranks first and second in total starts among returning defensive players with the only other remaining defensive starter being end Ricky Alfita.

In Davis' two seasons in Logan, he has started all 26 games that he has appeared in. He has recorded 111 tackles, five interceptions and two sacks.

In his first three years at Utah, Davis has appeared in 37 games, including three missed field goals against BYU. Davis earned all-Bay League honors as a junior and senior and Special Teams Player of the Year.

Utah State is also returning several role players from last year with senior cornerback Daniel Gray and junior safety Dallin Leavitt eager to step in as starters.

Gray, a transfer from Tennessee, has started nine games in his career — two in 2015 — during his tenure at Utah State. Gray is an explosive, corner with excellent speed and good size at 5'11" and 185 pounds.

Leavitt, a transfer student but from BYU, will look to replace hard-hitting safety Marwein Evans. Evans had the third most tackles for the Aggies last season (73), including ten tackles for loss and two sacks.

Leavitt started four of the 11 games he played in as a sophomore at BYU. Against Texas, he had seven tackles with two of those being for a loss.

Filling out the corner rotation, the Aggies will have junior Wesley Bailey and senior Jentz Painter. Bailey is a big, physical corner while Painter has the quickness to cover smaller slot receivers.

All projected starters for the secondary have posted at least five starts in their careers, the most of any position group on the defense.

Along with these newcomers, Stacey Collins has been named Utah State's new special teams coordinator. Collins has spent the past four seasons as head coach and special team coordinator at South Dakota school of Mines. He led them to winning records in 2011 (6-4) and 2013 (6-5) and recorded 16 wins to become the sixth-winningest coach in program history. Collins will replace Dave Ungerer, who is set to join Fresno State's coaching team as the special teams coordinator. Ungerer had 28 years of experience, including three seasons with the Aggies.

POSITION PREVIEWS

Utah State's secondary is easily the defense's most experienced position group.

The Aggie's return two of their starters in the secondary, safety Devin Centers and junior corner back Jalen Davis. The duo ranks first and second in total starts among returning defensive players with the only other remaining defensive starter being end Ricky Alfita.

In Davis' two seasons in Logan, he has started all 26 games that he has appeared in. He has recorded 111 tackles, five interceptions and two sacks.

In his first three years at Utah, Davis has appeared in 37 games, including three missed field goals against BYU. Davis earned all-Bay League honors as a junior and senior and Special Teams Player of the Year.

Utah State is also returning several role players from last year with senior cornerback Daniel Gray and junior safety Dallin Leavitt eager to step in as starters.

Gray, a transfer from Tennessee, has started nine games in his career — two in 2015 — during his tenure at Utah State. Gray is an explosive, corner with excellent speed and good size at 5'11" and 185 pounds.

Leavitt, a transfer student but from BYU, will look to replace hard-hitting safety Marwein Evans. Evans had the third most tackles for the Aggies last season (73), including ten tackles for loss and two sacks.

Leavitt started four of the 11 games he played in as a sophomore at BYU. Against Texas, he had seven tackles with two of those being for a loss.

Filling out the corner rotation, the Aggies will have junior Wesley Bailey and senior Jentz Painter. Bailey is a big, physical corner while Painter has the quickness to cover smaller slot receivers.

All projected starters for the secondary have posted at least five starts in their careers, the most of any position group on the defense.

 Along with these newcomers, Stacey Collins has been named Utah State's new special teams coordinator. Collins has spent the past four seasons as head coach and special team coordinator at South Dakota school of Mines. He led them to winning records in 2011 (6-4) and 2013 (6-5) and recorded 16 wins to become the sixth-winningest coach in program history. Collins will replace Dave Ungerer, who is set to join Fresno State's coaching team as the special teams coordinator. Ungerer had 28 years of experience, including three seasons with the Aggies.

Along with these newcomers, Stacey Collins has been named Utah State's new special teams coordinator. Collins has spent the past four seasons as head coach and special team coordinator at South Dakota school of Mines. He led them to winning records in 2011 (6-4) and 2013 (6-5) and recorded 16 wins to become the sixth-winningest coach in program history. Collins will replace Dave Ungerer, who is set to join Fresno State's coaching team as the special teams coordinator. Ungerer had 28 years of experience, including three seasons with the Aggies.

Along with these newcomers, Stacey Collins has been named Utah State's new special teams coordinator. Collins has spent the past four seasons as head coach and special team coordinator at South Dakota school of Mines. He led them to winning records in 2011 (6-4) and 2013 (6-5) and recorded 16 wins to become the sixth-winningest coach in program history. Collins will replace Dave Ungerer, who is set to join Fresno State's coaching team as the special teams coordinator. Ungerer had 28 years of experience, including three seasons with the Aggies.
Everything about his story destined him for BYU. His father, a former Cougar linebacker. His mother, a graduate of the university. Even generations before them called Provo home— at least for four years. He first knew he wanted to play football in the first grade and, even at that young age, he wanted to play it in royal blue and white. His first scholarship offer came when he was just a freshman; his acceptance followed a year later. His first steps on the turf field at LaVell Edwards Stadium marked the fulfillment of a childhood dream, a father’s ambition and a new legacy’s beginning.

Dallin Leavitt was born and bred to become a Cougar. The first 20 years of his life certainly alluded to that. It was that certainty about becoming a Cougar that helped to solidify his judgment as he continued to turn down offer upon offer from powerhouse programs like Oregon, Utah, Arizona State, California, Stanford, UCLA, and the list goes on.
OPEN A SMARTStart CHECKING ACCOUNT WITH AN AGGIE VISA DEBIT CARD AND RECEIVE UP TO $50 & A FREE UTAH STATE HOODIE

Apply at any USU Credit Union Branch through September 30th

Membership and eligibility required. Available on new checking accounts only. Upon opening the account, USUCU will deposit $25 into the checking account. May not be combined with other offers. Upon receipt of the member’s first direct deposit, another $25 will be deposited into the checking account. Visit a branch for details. Offer valid through 09/30/2016 while supplies last. Member NCUA. Promo code AG2E316.
son as a Cougar. It came because, for Leavitt, something never quite felt right, BYU never felt like the home it was always meant to be. Late in November of 2014, he signaled to the university that he intended to transfer and turned He turned to Aggies’ tight end Wyatt Houston.

In a phone call just a couple days removed from his transfer waiver, Leavitt called his high school teammate to ask where he thought he should play.

Houston’s response was simple — come play for Utah State.

In the end that was all that needed to be said. In the days following, Leavitt, and his father, Jared, set up a meeting with coach Matt Wells in Logan to see if Utah State would be the right fit for the budding young safety. Together they toured the facilities, the campus and the community; and after seeing the program, understanding what his role would be and meeting with players and coaches alike, Leavitt had his mind made up—he would become an Aggie.

“It was the best decision of my life to transfer,” Leavitt said. “I felt at home right away. I knew this is where I wanted to be and where I needed to play.”

However, his transfer meant that he had broken more than just rivalry lines —, Leavitt had decided to walk away from the university that his family held so dear.

“It definitely is a betrayal against BYU,” said Jared Leavitt. “I know some of the coaches see it that way. The players, the fans, they all feel it too. Even some of the family was a little shocked when it happened.”

For Leavitt, it wasn’t an easy decision, but certainly, in the long run, he feels like it will be the right choice. Now his focus has turned toward this season where, after sitting out the 2015 season per NCAA transfer rules, he is ready to contribute in his fresh start.

“I’ll be playing mostly safety, nickel, and I might line up at corner if needed,” Leavitt said. “I will do whatever I have to do to help this team be successful, no questions asked.”

Yet even before playing a down in an Aggie uniform, he has already assumed the starting job and the leadership role that comes with it. That’s a lot to be said when joining the experienced and deep group the Aggies’ have in the backfield this year.

Lining up next to Leavitt is Devin Centers, Utah State’s true “center fielder.” The 2014 All-Mountain West honored free safety is built more like a strong safety and can hit like one as well. He is an athletic playmaker and can cover sideline-to-sideline in a hurry. Although his numbers did drop off last year, he is ready to shine in his senior season.

In front of them is Jalen Davis, the star junior cornerback who continues to impress. Fresh off his All-Mountain West season, Davis is fully expected to be among the top lockdown corners in the division ever when that position is so deep. He and senior corner Daniel Gray
will redirect receivers at the line of scrimmage and run step-for-step with them down field.

Add in rotational safeties Jontrell Rocquemore and Gaje Ferguson, along with reserve corners Wesley Bailey and Jentz Painter and you have arguably the two deepest positions on the roster.

“You’ve got a lot of versatility on that back end,” Wells said. “We will most certainly rely on them this season and they know that. They’re ready for it.”

Listed at 5-10 and weighing in at 205 pounds, Leavitt will serve as the Aggies’ strong safety. His job is two-fold. First and foremost he is tasked with guiding his teammates and making sure they are set in the right positions. Secondly he has to produce, and Wells’ expectations are high. In one play he might be called upon to stuff the run in the box and seal the edge against opposing runners. In the next, he needs to be able to cover receivers down field and force turnovers.

“Being a safety is like being on an island,” Leavitt said. “It’s just you and your brothers against the world. If you make a play, everyone will see it; but if you don’t, and they run by you, everyone will know.”

Throughout the season Leavitt will certainly have his work cut out for him, but on his calendar, one game in particular takes precedence - BYU. It will be his homecoming in an unapologetic return and, he will have the chance to shine in the spotlight.
Show me a Scotsman,
Who doesn’t love the thistle.

Show me an Englishman,
Who doesn’t love the rose.

Show me a true-blooded
Aggie from Utah,

Who doesn’t love the spot . . .
Where the sagebrush grows!
Twenty years after Utah State’s last conference title, Matt Wells’ sights are set on the Mountain West crown.

Logan Jones

Matt Wells knows his history.

The man holding the reins to all things Utah State football is no stranger to the mess that existed before the program’s 2012 resurrection. Wells played quarterback on John L. Smith’s 6-5 Big West co-championship team in 1996, in what would be the Aggies’ last winning season. Coach Gary Andersen and quarterback Chuckie Keeton paired up to nurse the Aggie program back to health — fifteen straight losing seasons later.
The man holding the reins to all things Utah State football is no stranger to the mess that existed before the program’s 2012 resurrection. Wells played quarterback on John L. Smith’s 6-5 Big West co-championship team in 1996, in what would be the Aggies’ last winning season. Coach Gary Andersen and quarterback Chuckie Keeton paired up to nurse the Aggie program back to health — fifteen straight losing seasons later.

Quizzing Wells on decades of Utah State’s highs and lows is wholly unnecessary. Wells knows it all. He’s even lived some of it. Since one of the most successful stretches in school history collided with a 6-7 season and is widely considered to be disappointing, it falls on Wells’s shoulders to ensure the next chapter of Aggie lore doesn’t include another horrific losing streak.

“Don’t get me wrong, six wins around Utah State? That would’ve been a really really good year in a lot of decades,” Wells said. “All of a sudden now it’s getting compared to 11, 10 and nine, and two of those three being two of the best years in Utah State history.”

Andersen and Keeton are often credited for the team’s turnaround, but it’s Wells who aims to sustain that winning culture. In his four-year tenure as head coach he’s proven capable of producing wins despite losing both his offensive and defensive coordinators two years in a row. The Aggie defense has not just survived, but thrived. The offense returns the majority of its starting linemen, inviting both quarterback Kent Myers and running back Devante Mays into the all-conference discussion by year’s end.

But despite Wells’ success, 2016 poses a unique challenge. It is in many ways a put up or shut up year for the former quarterback, or as Wells words it, “The difference between having a good season, and having something that people write about and have reunions about and those kind of things.”

If ever there were a year to prove he is the source of pro-grade recruits, over-achieving win totals and a defense on par with the best teams in the nation, this is it.

Gone to the NFL are line-backing studs Kyler Fackrell
and Nick Vigil who anchored the team's strongest position group for most of Utah State's hot streak. Gone are the genius defensive minds of Dave Aranda (LSU) and Todd Orlando (Houston). Gone is longtime starting quarterback Chuckie Keeton, who despite suffering from an injury-riddled career still managed two separate five-touchdown games and the second most all-time touchdown passes by any Aggie ever (58).

This is Wells' prove-it year.

"Expectations are a lot higher, just the way we want 'em," Wells said at Utah State's annual media day press conference.

Wells expects his team to teach by example. Upon reviewing the massive reconstruction project that is the Aggie front seven, Wells expects his defense to reflect the standards he holds himself accountable to.

"The first thing they better be doing to teach is to produce," Wells said. "You can't lead if you don't produce — end of story. If you want to lead and open your mouth, you better produce."

For Wells, there's no offseason. In fact, he's made it clear that hosting Weber State on Sept. 1 is the beginning of what he terms the year's 'fourth quarter'. Hiring six new coaches, keeping a recruiting class together through spring and dealing with the aftermath of a depth chart missing all but three of its defensive starters is just a taste of his regular balancing act.

"I try to focus on staying in my lane and understanding what my role is," Wells said, "and that's to win games, to graduate these seniors at the same rate we've been doing it for a long time and to take these young men from young men to grown men."

Where the program finishes in order to maintain a measure of success depends on who you talk to. For Wells and the 2016 Aggies the goal is the same as it's been since joining the Mountain West in 2013 — bring home the conference title.

"It's a tough league," Wells said. "The guys that can play well week in and week out, overcome adversity, overcome an injury or two, overcome one side of the ball not playing real well but still find a way to win and get some mojo and some confidence, that'll be the team that wins it down the stretch."

Wells has tasted a conference championship. He's hoisted the big trophy at the end of the year. Now, exactly 20 years after that '96 Big West title share, he'll look to navigate a team that should be in a rebuilding year back into title contention.

"I think they've got something to prove," Wells said. "We're good, I just don't know if we're great yet."

"IT'S A TOUGH LEAGUE"
Intermountain Logan Regional Orthopedics and Sports Medicine is pleased to welcome Dr. Tye Harrison. Dr. Harrison will focus on sports medicine and will be the Head Team Physician for the Utah State University Aggies. Dr. Harrison attended Weber State University and received his BS in microbiology. He received his medical degree from the A.T. Still University, Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine in Kirksville, Missouri. He completed an internship at the Charleston Area Medical Center in Charleston, West Virginia, and went on to complete his family medicine residency at the Lone Star Family Health Center in Conroe, Texas. He then completed a sports medicine fellowship at VCOM/Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. He joins Intermountain Healthcare after being a team physician for Auburn University, assistant professor, and fellowship director for Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine. He is also a team physician for the U.S. Ski and Snowboard teams.
Slouched comfortably in one of the dozen chairs found inside the offensive line’s video room, Devante Mays folds his hands across his chest, offering an occasional glance at the exit sign.

Mays isn’t much of a talker. The raw power and explosiveness that’s earned him a premiere position in Utah State’s crowded backfield lays in wait beneath a stoic, silent surface. Off the field, the only indication of Mays’ violent rushing ability is his sheer mass. Mays is a mountain of an athlete — particularly for a running back — but his calm demeanor suggests he’d prefer to speak with a quick head nod and a smile than with lengthy exposition.

Describing the keys to his success last season, the Texas native sums up his in-game mindset in the most Devante Mays way possible:

“Aggressive.”

Confident. Precise. Accurate. Mays speaks the way he plays, and certainly practices what he preaches.

There’s nothing complicated about the way Mays runs. A straight line from the backfield to the end zone seems only fitting for the no-nonsense senior, personified by the Aggies’ opening score against Fresno last season. The memorable run resulted in the supercharged rusher accelerating through two defenders, past the corner of the...
That was the spark. Mays handled the threat of head-hunting defenders like a living, breathing football, not the type to put in the work in the weightroom without complaint. Mays, still with his hands interlocked across his chest as if the ability to lift a medium-sized piano was nothing out of the ordinary, recalls his days at Blinn College being significantly less demanding.

“IT'S A BIG CHANGE COMING FROM JoCo TO HERE, ADAPTING TO EVERYTHING,” Mays said. “The speed of the game is fast; the tempo is so much faster. I don't even think we had a tempo at my JoCo you know? We would just run a play, after that you kind of look and wave and kind of take your time but here it's 'hurry up, hurry up hurry up! You've got to be in top condition to do that every play.’

Between practice, the gym, reviewing game tape and a full course load, Mays' free time is at a premium, but his favorite pastime is unsurprising.

“I play Madden a lot, that’s my style,” Mays said. “I just like to chill, pump up or emotional.” But when it comes to live music, thinking about great things like scoring and running over guys...

Devante Mays never was much of a talker.

end zone and over a mobile gate typically used to keep photographers off the field — and to keep the players on it.

“I think that’s my style, I’m more of a bruiser type of guy,” Mays said matter-of-factly. “I’d rather run inside than outside.”

In a conference loaded with several backs considered to be special players, Mays separates himself not just with earth-shaking big-play potential, but also by the rare ability to almost single-handedly turn each game around. His monumental effort in last season’s conference showdown versus Nevada was the difference between a school-record fourth straight bowl game and what would’ve been a miserably underwhelming 5-7 season.

Trailing the Wolf Pack 27-7 in the third quarter of Utah State’s final conference matchup, Mays took a handoff and burst through Nevada’s defensive line, spinning away from what should’ve been a sure tackle en route to a 32-yard gain.

That was the spark. The tide turned, energy found its way back into the previously-dormant Maverik Stadium crowd, Mays reached paydirt once and then again less than three minutes later and after a miraculous fumble recovery in UNR’s end zone, the clock hit straight zeroes with the Aggies on top 31-27.

All told, Mays amassed 153 yards and two touchdowns on 22 carries (not to mention leaving the imprint of his facemask in the abdomen of several would-be tacklers). His punishing style changed the outlook of the Aggies’ season, all while raising his expectations for his final year.

“I feel like it’s something I have to do, not for myself but to keep the tradition going, having a breakout year,” Mays said. “I always personally have a goal of 1,000 yards and ten yards per carry, but I stepped it up after this last season after realizing that I can do way better.”

Mays’ new goal is 1,500 yards, nominated JuCo transfer wideout Alex Byers as the biggest threat to Mays’ dominance on the virtual field, having beaten him “multiple times.” But when it comes to living, breathing football, Mays handles the threat of head-hunting defenders like it’s just another day at the office.

Mays isn’t crushed by the expectations or the pressure of potentially being the new face of Utah State football, isn’t overly concerned with what defenses draw up in attempts to rein him in and doesn’t feel the need to hype himself up with an extreme pregame routine. All he needs is a pair of headphones, and a little time to think.

“I don’t like to get too pumped up or emotional,” Mays said. “I just like to chill and listen to music, thinking about great things like scoring and running over guys.”

Senior defensive end Ricky Ali’ifua, the lone returning starter on the Aggies’ front seven, nominated JuCo transfer wideout Alex Byers as the biggest threat to Mays’ dominance on the virtual field, having beaten him “multiple times.” But when it comes to living, breathing football, Mays handles the threat of head-hunting defenders like it’s just another day at the office.

Mays isn’t crushed by the expectations or the pressure of potentially being the new face of Utah State football, isn’t overly concerned with what defenses draw up in attempts to rein him in and doesn’t feel the need to hype himself up with an extreme pregame routine. All he needs is a pair of headphones, and a little time to think.

“I don’t like to get too pumped up or emotional,” Mays said. “I just like to chill and listen to music, thinking about great things like scoring and running over guys.”

Devante Mays never was much of a talker.

“NO ONE WANTS TO BE A LOSER.”
It’s Matt Wells’ fourth season at the helm of Utah State University’s football program and, at 43, he’s still young.

Now three years, two bowl victories and over a dozen conference wins into his tenure with the Aggies, Wells still ranks 12th-youngest among FBS coaches. He is one of just 18 coaches calling the shots in his old stomping grounds, having played quarterback for the Aggies from 1994-96.
PROUDLY SUPPORTS UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY ATHLETICS & CELEBRATES THE 2016-2017 FOOTBALL SEASON AT

MAVERIK STADIUM

Exclusive caterer to West Stadium Center
(435)797-1707 catering.usu.edu
Wells’ situation is unique because he is head coach of the newest team in the Mountain West Conference where he has helped establish a successful football program in a traditionally basketball-focused university. Not to mention he gets to reap the benefits of Maverik stadiums’ recent upgrade. But what is the one thing that he deals with, more than any other head coach that he faces? Coaching staff turnover.

Referring to Utah State as a springboard program is appropriate. In the three years since Wells took over for Gary Anderson, Utah State has hired 14 brand new coaches (six this season alone) replacing its defensive coordinator three times and the offensive coordinator twice.

With the coaching carousel that seems to constantly be spinning in Logan, no one would blame Wells and his team for getting dizzy. But that hasn’t been the case. Utah State, under the direction of Wells, continues to find ways to win.

Wells’ steady nature has guided the Aggies to an 18-6 conference record over three seasons, despite yearly staff changes, including three straight bowl appearances.

When Wells was hired in 2012 he said, “I look forward to diving right in hiring a staff, recruiting, and setting our players into a routine when they get back in January. When I look for a staff, first of all they’re going to love the players ... It’s not what’s best for the coaches, for support help or for the administration, it’s what’s best for those kids. At the end of the day, that’s what’s most important.”

The carousel ride may have changed faces around the program several times over, but Wells has proven loyal to this idea of making Utah State a place where coaches care about their athletes’ success first.

In 2012, Wells hired Todd Orlando as his defensive coordinator to replace Dave Aranda.

In his lone season under Andersen, Aranda helped coach the Aggies to a top 15 finish in the FBS in all four major defensive categories, including seventh in scoring defense with 15.4 points per game. When Aranda followed Anderson to a coaching job in Wisconsin, Orlando picked the Aggies up right
where they left off.

In two years under Orlando, the Aggie defense continued to thrive ranking 12th nationally in scoring defense in 2014 with 19.7 points per game. Orlando then left for a coaching job at the University of Houston, leaving a now consistently dominant defense in the hands of Kevin Clune. Utah State finished the 2015 season ranked 17th nationally in total defense, before Clune left to coach under Andersen at Oregon State.

The injury bug forced Wells to start four different quarterbacks in the last two seasons. Two linebackers were recently drafted to the NFL and just three defensive starters will return this season. Despite these changes, Utah State was picked to finish third in the Mountain Division.

“You think about the mountain West, it’s a tough league,” Wells said. “It’s a really tough league. There’s a lot of parity, really good coaches and really good players. You look at last year, there were five teams in our division that went to bowls ... You’ve got to be able to play week in and week out.”

In 2013, Wells had the most wins by a Utah State first-year head coach (nine), leading the Aggies to a first-place finish in the Mountain Division in their first year in the conference. Additionally, he earned Mountain West Coach of the Year honors. By the end of his second year he had upped his win total to 19 games. Now Wells is entering his fourth season boasting an overall record of 25-16.

In his time as head coach, Utah State has produced four NFL Draft picks, seen 15 NFL free agents sign contracts, boasted six All-Americans and three wins over AP Top-25 ranked teams. The fact that his coaches are constantly in high demand in programs all over the country should serve as a tip of the hat to the winning program he’s helped build in Logan.

With changes every year at key coordinator positions, players like starting quarterback Kent Myers are reassured by Wells’ constant presence.

“Coach Wells has been the head coach since I’ve been here and for the most part it’s still been his offense,” Myers said. “It should stay fairly the same with some new stuff and new ideas added.”

This carousel may keep spinning, and coaches will undoubtedly continue to come and go, but for now Utah State seems lucky to have Matt Wells as its head man — and he loves being here.

“I have fun,” he said during fall camp. “You know this is the best part of my day, the two hours on this grass.”
THE WILDCATS showed significant improvement in Jay Hill's second season as head coach. After a 2-10 outing in 2014, Weber State earned its first winning season since 2010 with a 6-5 record, including a road win over then-No. 12 Montana and a one-point road loss to Eastern Washington. The Wildcats have more acclaim heading into 2016, having been picked to finish in the top half of the conference in both the preseason coaches' and media polls. They were also ranked by Sporting News as the No. 23 FCS team in the nation. With 16 returning starters, including eight who earned all-Big Sky recognition last year, WSU has the potential to live up to the hype.

The man behind center for the Wildcats is senior Jadrian Clark, who completed more than 50 percent of his passes last season for 1,875 yards and 10 touchdowns, adding 362 yards on the ground. The focal point of the WSU attack, however, is the ground game with the two-headed monster of junior Eric Wilkes and sophomore Treshawn Garrett. Wilkes earned an honorable mention nod on the all-conference team for his 662-yard, five-touchdown performance. Garrett wasn't far behind with 562 yards and five scores of his own. The line is anchored by two seniors who were named to the preseason all-Big Sky team in guard Cameron Young and tackle Calvin Steyn.

Average number of yards per kick return by Eric Wilkes, best in the Big Sky conference

Total number of passes defensed by Taron Johnson, tied for 3rd in the conference

Weber State’s conference ranking for total defense (346.9 yards per game allowed)
The last year Alabama, USC’s first opponent, lost its season opener.

The total number of career pass attempts by junior quarterback Max Browne.

The number of receiving yards last season by junior receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster, the third-most in a single season in USC history.

THE TROJANS have been a team in turmoil the past several years, unable to rediscover the level of steady supremacy that defined the Pete Carroll era. Despite this turmoil, USC has still managed to stay near the top of the nation in recruiting rankings, though that off-season ascendancy has not translated to in-season success. The Trojans hope that’s all about to change.

Then-offensive coordinator Clay Helton was named interim head coach midway through last season, and had the interim label removed following a blowout win over rival UCLA at the end of November. Things won’t come easily, though, as Helton has been given the unenviable task of breaking in a new starter at quarterback while playing Alabama, Utah State, Stanford and division-opponent Utah in the first four weeks of the season.

The Trojans are returning nine starters on offense, but severely lack experience at the position that matters most. Though a junior, quarterback Max Browne will be making the first start of his collegiate career in primetime against the defending national champions. Browne does have talent and experience around him though, with all five starters on the offensive line returning, a potential 1,000-yard rusher in Ronald Jones II and uber-talented receiver JuJu Smith-Schuster, an All-America candidate who put up 89 receptions, 1,454 yards and 10 touchdowns last season.

Junior Adoree’ Jackson is one of the top cornerbacks in the Pac-12 and provides playmaking ability on the outside of the defense. USC returns all four starters in the defensive backfield, but are flush with inexperience throughout the rest of the defense. Sophomore inside linebacker Cameron Smith, the only returning starter among the front-seven, was named the Pac-12 Defensive Freshman a season ago. The line is a significant concern, as there are no upperclassmen who are expected to get significant playing time.
Though ASU wasn't highly-dependent on the passing game in 2015 (finishing 85th in the nation in per-game passing yards), replacing last year's starting quarterback is still the most important question head coach Blake Anderson must answer.

Sophomore Justice Hansen will likely get the nod. Though not the starter, junior running back Johnston White put up impressive numbers a season ago with more than 600 yards and 14 touchdowns. The diminutive Warren Wand is just 65 inches tall, but is the leading returning rusher with 709 yards and five scores. Offensive line is the strength of the unit as both Colton Jackson and Jemar Clark were all-conference selections. The strength of the Wildcats is their defense, and the strength of the defense is the linebacking corps. Junior Emmett Tela is the anchor of the defensive unit with 151 tackles, including 17.5 for a loss, and two all-conference selections in his two seasons in Ogden. Senior Tre’von Johnson joined Tela on the all-Big Sky second team in 2015 and led the team with 9.5 tackles for a loss and 4.5 sacks. Together, they make a formidable linebacker tandem.

Junior cornerback Taron Johnson set the WSU single-season record in 2015 with 12 pass breakups. He also collected two interceptions.

ARKANSAS STATE was the class of the Sunbelt Conference a season ago, defeating second-place Appalachian State in an early-November road game to preserve an undefeated conference record. The Red Wolves boast the 12th-best scoring offense in the nation, averaging 40 points per outing. ASU hasn't been afraid to schedule difficult opponents, playing the likes of USC and Missouri last year and Auburn this season. Though it's possible the Red Wolves will experience some regression in 2016, the team has talent all over the roster and should be in the running for a conference title once again.

ARKANSAS STATE
RED WOLVES

40.0 The average number of points scored by the Red Wolves’ offense last year, best in the Sun Belt

+8 Arkansas State’s turnover margin in 2015, good for the top spot in the conference and 23rd in the nation

2 Senior kicker J.D. Houston only missed two kicks inside 40 yards all of last season
LIGHTING THE FIRE:
Ceramics Education in the American West

August 17 – December 10

Opening Reception: Thursday, September 8, 7–9 P.M.
Gallery Talk with guest curator Matthew Limb: 7 P.M.

Laura Andreson. Bowl, 1982, porcelain, 3 x 8.5 x 21 inches. Gift of the Nora Eccles Treadwell Foundation.
AF Coach Troy Calhoun has built a consistent performer in his nine seasons directing the Falcons, but the success has yet to produce a Mountain West championship. The Academy did appear in the title game a season ago, however, after defeating Utah State and Boise State in the span of just six days and winning the Mountain Division title. A significant cog to the Falcons’ success recently has been their performance in home games — Air Force hasn’t lost a game in Falcon Stadium since 2013.

Offensively, AFA has a number of questions and a couple of answers, but the answers it does have are really, really good. Senior tailback Jacobi Owens is the workhorse of the Falcons’ triple-offense attack. He is joined by potent junior Timothy McVey, creating a significant one-two punch in AFA’s rushing attack. Senior receiver Jalen Robinette could be the surprising star of the Falcons’ 2016 offense. He caught just 26 passes for 641 yards last season, but averaged nearly 25 yards per reception. His receiving numbers could increase significantly with the passing-minded quarterback Nate Romine taking over the starting job.

Junior Adoree’ Jackson is one of the top cornerbacks in the Pac-12 and provides playmaking ability on the outside of the defense. USC returns all four starters in the defensive backfield, but are flush with inexperience throughout the rest of the defense. Sophomore inside linebacker Cameron Smith, the only returning starter among the front-seven, was named the Pac-12 Defensive Freshman a season ago. The line is a significant concern, as there are no upperclassmen who are expected to get significant playing time.
How good is Boise State? The Broncos were 9-4 last season, opening the year with a win against Washington and finishing with a dominant 55-7 bowl win over Northern Illinois. The season was considered mostly a failure, however, after a 52-26 evisceration at the hands of Utah State and consecutive home losses for the first time since dial-up internet was popular.

Sophomore quarterback Brett Rypien showed that he has the potential to live up to his NFL pedigree in 2015. He took over the starting position midway through September and ignited the previously stagnant offense as the team scored 40 or more points in each of his first three starts. Rypien finished the year with more than 3,300 passing yards, 20 touchdowns and just eight interceptions and was named to the all-Mountain West team as a freshman. He was joined on the all-conference team by Thomas Sperbeck, who returns as the top receiving target. Junior running back Jeremy McNichols is a threat on the ground and through the air, putting up nearly 1,900 yards combined and 26 touchdowns, tied for second in the nation.

The offense has explosive ability, but the Broncos will go as far as the defense will carry them in 2016. The unit was top-15 in the nation in total yardage allowed and boasted a top-5 performance against the run, but was the primary culprit in the November losses to Air Force and New Mexico that cost BSU the division. Seniors Ben Weaver and Tanner Vallejo anchor the linebacker corps and sophomore Dylan Sumner-Gardner’s return from a knee injury should strengthen the defensive backfield.

The biggest question mark is on the defensive line, as all four starters are gone.
COLORADO STATE

117  The Rams’ national ranking in turnover margin in 2015 (-12 for the year)

228.1  CSU’s average number of passing yards per game, second-best in the Mountain West

46.0  The average number of yards per punt by Hayden Hunt, good for 6th in the nation

COLORADO STATE was solidly average in head coach Mike Bobo’s first season at the helm. An undefeated November propelled the Rams to a bowl game and a third place finish in the Mountain division, but Bobo’s squad finished the year a lukewarm 7-6. If the Rams want to be more than average in 2016, they’ll need to take care of business in October. The month opens with the Border War against Wyoming before consecutive matchups against Utah State and Boise State.

Gone is highlight-reel receiver Rashard “Hollywood” Higgins, as well as all-Mountain West tight end Kivon Cartwright. Nick Stevens, the arm behind the aerial attack that finished second in the conference in 2015, is back for his junior season, however, and four of the five starters from his offensive line will also return. Though the Rams have talented pass-catchers, junior running back Dalyn Dawkins is the leading returning receiver with just 24 catches and 178 yards last year. The offense will rely on Dawkins to carry the load on the ground early in the year as Stevens develops chemistry with his receivers.

Defensively, CSU could be in trouble. The Rams were second in the MW in passing yards allowed per game, but it’s likely that was a result of providing minimal resistance in the ground game and allowing more than 200 yards per outing—ranking them 107th in the nation. Colorado State doesn’t have the benefit of consistency as it will be replacing as many as eight starters from the defensive unit of a season ago. New defensive coordinator Marty English is re-installing the 3-4 defense the team has had success with in the past. Interior linebacker is the strength of the unit as seniors Deonte Clyburn and Kevin Davis, who led the team with 101 tackles last year, provide some stability.
FRESNO STATE

just more than a year and a half ago, was competing in its second consecutive Mountain West championship game. Now the Bulldogs are fighting tooth and claw to avoid finishing at the bottom of the conference. The offense caved in 2015, finishing dead last in the MW in yards gained. The defense was similarly moribund, allowing nearly 450 yards per game and a repugnant 38.1 points. Though an overused sports cliche, reliance on heart, grit and determination have been self-identifying qualities of Bulldog football for more than a decade. Those characteristics were conspicuously absent in 2015. Can head coach Tim DeRuyter, now going into his fifth season at FS, bring back the energy that defined the football team for so many years?

If granted one wish for the 2016 season, DeRuyter would likely ask for stability at the quarterback position. Highly-touted recruit Chason Virgil broke his collarbone in his first start last season, leaving the Bulldogs without any consistency under center. Simply knowing who the signal caller will be week to week could make an enormous difference. Virgil will have an impressive group of receivers to throw to, led by sophomore Jamire Jordan who had more than 500 yards and five touchdowns receiving last year.

Tackles last season for returning linebacker Jeff Camilli

Starting quarterbacks used in 2015-16 season

Ranked offense in the NCAA

FRESNO STATE

76

4

121st

BULLDOGS

Tackles last season for returning linebacker Jeff Camilli

Starting quarterbacks used in 2015-16 season

Ranked offense in the NCAA

Senior cornerback Tyquwan Glass is a playmaker on the outside, snagging four interceptions and recording 62 tackles along the way. Paired with Washington State transfer Daquawn Brown, the Bulldogs could have an above-average cornerback unit. To say the rest of the unit has question marks, however, is putting it lightly. Senior and leading-tackler Jeff Camilli brings some consistency, but the rest of the front-seven is dependent on a number of unproven players. Two 300-plus pound junior college recruits at nose tackle will be relied on to provide some resistance up front.
Logan Institute of Religion

Friends ~ Food ~ Choirs ~ Service ~ Activities ~ Committees
Devotionals ~ 200+ Classes ~ 30+ Teachers

Sign Up Anytime: institute.lds.org/logan

Logan Institute
News and Events

435-752-4265
Adjacent to USU Campus ~ West of the TSC
The San Diego State Aztecs are primed to repeat as the Mountain West champions again this season. Last year's squad matched the school record with 11 wins and claimed the first outright conference title since the Reagan administration. The season started slowly, though, as the Aztecs dropped three of their four non-conference games, including a humiliating 34-27 home loss to South Alabama. The Aztecs turned it around in MW play with an undefeated record and tacked on a dominant 42-7 bowl win over Cincinnati for good measure. Heading into 2016, the team returns more than half of its starters including running back Donnel Pumphrey and cornerback Damontae Kazee who were named the offensive and defensive players of the year a season ago.

Pumphrey is the beginning and the end of the Aztec offense. He turned down the opportunity to jump to the NFL because he has his sights set on a different goal — beating Marshall Faulk's school record for career rushing yards where he is just 317 yards short. He led the team in receptions in 2015 with 28 catches. Sophomore quarterback Christian Chapman showed promise last season, leading the team to victories in the final three games of the season after an injury to the starter. However, he doesn't have a lot to work with on the outside compared to Pumphrey.

Kazee also considered a move to the professional league, even going so far as to declare for the draft, but decided to return to school to finish his degree. He was a turnover machine last year, forcing two fumbles and snagging eight interceptions. Senior outside linebacker Calvin Munson is also returning after leading the team in tackles (98) and sacks (9.5). The Aztecs will be hard-pressed to repeat the defensive dominance of last season — the team allowed 17 or fewer points in nine of the last 10 games — but bring back all of the tools to put together another special season.
Like a four-hour drive across the middle of Wyoming, the Cowboys’ performance in 2015 was not pretty sight. Head coach Craig Bohl, now in his third season at the helm, has been handed a difficult task. Fans of the university hope he can replicate a measure of the success he had in his previous stop, where he turned North Dakota State into a powerful team. He posted a 104-32 record in 11 years there, with only one losing season, and won the FCS National Championship his final three seasons (the team went on to win two after he left as well, giving them five consecutive national titles). Laramie, the campus is located, is a notoriously difficult location to recruit to, but the same can be said about Fargo, North Dakota and Bohl found a way to make that work. The Cowboys are young, but have some talent. Could they take another step this season?

The Mountain West has an incredibly deep pool of quality running backs and junior Brian Hill might be the best of the bunch. He set a single-season school record with 1,631 yards, putting him eighth in the nation at 135.9 yards per game. The team hopes to lessen the burden on Hill going forward, but he will be the focal point of the offense. Sophomore quarterback Josh Allen will return to the starting position after a broken collarbone forced him to miss all but a handful of plays a year ago. Seniors Tanner Gentry and Jake Maulhardt are talented receivers on the outside.

Sophomore safety Andrew Wingard is the primary player to know defensively after earning second-team all-conference honors as a freshman. He was credited with 122 tackles a season ago and led the conference with 6.9 solo tackles per game. Unfortunately for the Cowboys, strong defenses don’t usually have safeties picking up large numbers of tackles. Incremental improvement is the key for Wyoming in 2016.
New Mexico passed a major milestone in its climb back to respectability in 2015, finishing the year with a winning record for the first time since 2007. Bob Davie has done an impressive job in his four years as the head coach, winning more games in his first season (four) than the team had won in the previous three years combined (three). The highlight of the season was back-to-back wins in the first two weeks of November against Utah State and Boise State that temporarily pushed the Lobos into the conversation for the Mountain Division championship. A loss the following week to Colorado State ended that hope, but the Lobos laid a foundation for future success. They now need to build on that success.

While the Lobos’ option-rushing offense always places the team near the top of the nation in rushing yards, it wasn’t as potent last year as it has been. The primary culprit was a lack of consistency in the ground game. New Mexico was second in the nation with 22 runs of 30 or more yards, but also saw an increase in the number of runs for short gains. Senior Teriyon Gipson is the primary ball-carrier, but it’s the two quarterbacks who receive most of the focus. Junior Lamar Jordan is the running quarterback, finishing third on the 2015 team with 807 yards on the ground. Senior Austin Apodaca is considered the better passer and will use that skillset more this season.

On the other side of the ball, NMU returns nine starters to a defense that saw vast improvement a season ago. Davie favors a unique 3-3-5 defense and has an experience-laden crew to run it — 10 of the 11 projected starters are seniors. Linebacker Dakota Cox is the engine in the middle of the defense.

---

Average yards on passing defense, ranking last in the Mountain West

244.9

Average yards on rushing offense, ranking 9th in the nation

252.2

Defensive starters returning for the 2016-17 season

10
If recent history is any indication, the Nevada Wolfpack are in line for another mundane 7-6 season. Nevada has finished with the same slightly-above-average record in four of the last five years. The team did have the distinction, however, of playing in the first bowl game since 1994 not shown on national television — a 28-23 victory over fellow-Mountain West opponent Colorado State. The offense will likely improve with nine returning starters, but the defense could stumble with only one player in the front seven coming back.

After being fully invested in pistol offense for the past several years, the Wolfpack could see a slight change going forward.

New offensive coordinator Tim Cramsey from FCS Montana State is bringing aspects of spread offense he ran there (Cramsey heralds from the Chip Kelly coaching tree). Nevada will still run a lot of pistol, but hope the change in approach will breathe new excitement into the offense.

Senior quarterback Tyler Stewart will look to build on his more than 2,000 yards passing and 15 touchdowns from last year. He has two experienced receivers in Hasaan Henderson and Jerico Richardson. Junior running back James Butler rushed for 1,300 yards and 10 touchdowns while starting just one game in 2015.

Defensively, Nevada has a lot more questions than answers. Sophomore safety Asauni Rufus has a chance to make an all-conference team this season. Fellow-sophomore Dameon Baber led the team with six interceptions last year, and combines with Rufus to make a formidable tandem in the back end of the defense. The projected starters at linebacker only have three combined starts, however, and Salesa Faraimo is the only senior among the top eight players on the defensive line. The front seven will need to mature quickly to compete for the division title.
While most of the focus in recent weeks has been on the possibility of the Cougars wearing Big-12 patches on their jerseys in coming years, the team has a number of unanswered questions on the field this season. First-year head coach Kalani Sitake returns to his alma mater, looking to build on the success the team has had over the past decade. Improvements on the field might not show in the win column, however, as BYU has the most difficult non-Power 5 schedule in the nation.

Super-senior Taysom Hill surprisingly chose to return this season, forcing Sitake into a difficult situation at his quarterback position: give the starting position to the Hill, who has shown the ability to play at a high level against elite competition, or to sophomore Tanner Mangum, a rising star who led the Cougars to nine wins in his freshman season? Sitake has chosen to start Hill despite the looming threat of recurring injuries. Both quarterbacks benefit from the return of senior running back Jamaal Williams, who is just more than 900 yards short of breaking the school’s career rushing record. The loss of jump-ball receiver Mitch Mathews might hurt the offense, which struggled with consistency at times and will be breaking in new starters at both receiver positions and at tight end.

The Cougars are transitioning to a 4-3 defense in 2016, testing the depth of a defensive line that has been recruited solely for a three-man alignment the past few years. Senior Travis Tuiloma is the lone returning starter on that line. Senior Harvey Langi is the anchor in the middle of the linebacking corps. The defensive backfield is the most experienced unit with three returning starters, including both safeties. Senior safety Kai Nacua was the playmaker last season with six interceptions, including a game-sealing interception return for a touchdown that proved to be the final gut punch in the come-from-behind victory over Boise State.
THE NATION’S LARGEST UTILITY MANAGEMENT COMPANY

CON SERVICE
The Utility Experts®
HIRING FOR GROWTH
careers.conservice.com

Apply

WHY PEOPLE CHOOSE US
ADVANCEMENT OPPORTUNITY
MEDICAL INSURANCE
401k (with match)
PAID TIME OFF
CACHE VALLEY DISCOUNTS
GIVING BACK TO THE COMMUNITY

Accounting
.Net Developers
Utility Experts
Client Relations
and more!

JOIN OUR TEAM!

Corporate Headquarters: 99 East 700 South, Logan, UT 84321

STATE AND NATIONAL AWARD RECOGNITION FOR CONTINUED GROWTH AND SUCCESS
Hey Aggies, with us... there are no false starts.

CALL: 435-752-2877

OR VISIT US AT: WWW.CVTDBUS.ORG
Utah’s Nonprofit Student Loan
Apply Today at www.CompleteStudentLoans.org/logan