



MID-AMERICAN CONFERENCE

PROJECTED MAC STANDINGS

- 1 **W. MICHIGAN** BRONCOS
- 2 **TOLEDO** ROCKETS
- 3 **MIAMI** REDHAWKS
- 4 **OHIO** BOBCATS
- 5 **C. MICHIGAN** CHIPPEWAS
- 6 **EASTERN MICHIGAN** EAGLES
- 7 **KENT ST** GOLDEN FLASHES
- 8 **BOWLING GREEN** FALCONS
- 9 **BALL STATE** CARDINALS
- 10 **BUFFALO** BULLS
- 11 **AKRON** ZIPS
- 12 **SACRAMENTO ST** HORNETS
- 13 **UMASS** MINUTEMEN

Photo via Hustle Belt



Jalen Buckley - RB - Western Michigan

Another Round of MAction

If you're a die-hard fan of college football, the MAC offers something that few conferences do these days: regionality. With a couple of exceptions, the MAC is one of the few conferences that have been able to hang on to their own concise geographical footprint. That's good news for fans of the MAC, but it's good news for college football fans at large, especially those who shake their head at Stanford in the Atlantic Coast Conference and USC in the Big Ten.

The MAC has also been the conference with the most consistent parity in the sport. That's especially been true over the last decade. On any given season, a MAC team will emerge out of nowhere and eventually claim the championship in Detroit. Last season was yet another example, Western Michigan won their first conference title in a decade despite being picked just 7th in the preseason poll. That parity exists beyond just the champion of the league, however. Kent State was picked dead last by a country mile after failing to win a game in 2024. However, the Golden Flashes surged and nearly made a bowl game, finishing well above expectations.

Will a team emerge out of the "middle" of the pack against this season? Western Michigan, Toledo, Miami, and Ohio are widely considered the favorites and there's a bit of a drop-off after that, or so we think. The beauty of MAction is that only time will tell, and the journey to Detroit will be fascinating.

A rare repeat?

There hasn't been a repeat winner in the MAC since Northern Illinois posted back-to-back championships in 2011 and 2012. If you're looking for the last back-to-back champion from a current MAC program, you have to go back to the days of Dan LeFevour at Central Michigan. He guided the Chippewas to three championships in his career including in both 2006 and 2007.

Western Michigan has a chance at that rare repeat in 2026. Remarkably, the bring a lot of talent back from last year's 10-win team, a feat all by itself in the current NIL and transfer portal era. The week before conference play starts, Western Michigan will host Boise State in a major Group of 6 clash. Typically, the

many "buy" games that MAC teams play in the non-conference doesn't allow much margin to get to the College Football Playoff. However, while the Broncos do face Michigan in Week 1, that game against Boise State gives them a chance to significantly bolster their resume. Could the first MAC Playoff team come from Kalamazoo, Michigan?

5-Year Test Run

Welcome to the FBS, Sacramento State! While the MAC perhaps isn't the most obvious fit for the Hornets, the program was eager for a chance to jump to the FBS, the highest level of college football. Sacramento State is quite literally putting their money where their mouth is by writing a very large check just to make the leap. Beyond that already high price tag, Sacramento State will forgo any TV revenue that would otherwise head their way. In addition, the Hornets will cover the travel costs for other MAC teams who will make the long flight out to Sacramento. This last part isn't necessarily a new concept, Hawaii does this for their opponents. However, the most unique part of Sacramento State's new deal with the MAC is that it is a five-year agreement. If, at the end of the 2030 season, the MAC decides that the conference is better off without the Hornets, they can make that move. However, if the door opens to a different conference (especially one located much closer to Sacramento), the program can also opt out of the MAC after 2030. The next five years will be fascinating to see how Sacramento State ascends into the FBS and if they plant any real roots in the MAC.

On This Day, 80 Years Ago

Happy 80th birthday, MAC! In 1946, five charter members including Ohio, Butler, Cincinnati, Wayne State, and Western Reserve University founded the conference. The Bearcats overcame a grueling two-game conference slate and finished their overall campaign with a solid 9-2 record. The more you know.

Weekday MAction

Weekday games are a double-edged sword. It can be difficult to attract fans to venture out to a midweek night game in frosty weather in November, but the TV exposure and the almost cult-like following midweek MAction brings is undeniable.

Photo via Mid-American Conference



Last 5 Conference Champions



'21

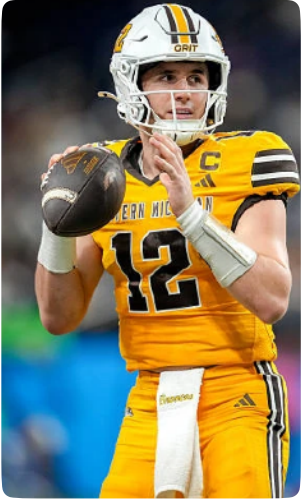
'22

'23

'24

'25

Offensive MVP



Broc Lowry - QB



Defensive MVP



SaVeon Brown - LB



Top Newcomer



Andrew Zock - DE



Top Freshman



Drew Esper - LB



15 MUST-WATCH MAC GAMES

Aug 29 - Sacramento St. @ Eastern Michigan
Sep 12 - Ohio vs. Jacksonville State
Sep 19 - Miami vs. Cincinnati
Sep 26 - South Florida @ Bowling Green
Sep 26 - San Diego State @ Toledo
Sep 26 - Boise State @ Western Michigan
Oct 17 - W. Michigan @ C. Michigan
Oct 24 - Akron @ Kent State
Oct 24 - Western Michigan @ Toledo
Nov 4 - Eastern Michigan vs. Central Michigan
Nov 10 - Ohio @ Miami
Nov 17 - E. Michigan @ W. Michigan
Nov 20 - Bowling Green @ Toledo
Nov 24 - Miami @ Western Michigan
Nov 27 - Toledo @ Ohio

MAC Championship Game
Ford Field - Detroit, MI
Sat, Dec 5 - 12:00 PM ET (ESPN)



5th and Goal Preseason All-MAC Team

First Team

QB	Broc Lowry - Western Michigan	Dru DeShields - Kent State
RB	Jalen Buckley - Western Michigan	Vaughn Blue - Central Michigan
RB	Jordan Gant - Akron	Duncan Brune - Ohio
WR	Adjatay Dabbs - Toledo	Da'Realyst Clark - Kent State
WR	Langston Lewis - Central Michigan	Jasaiah Gathings - Buffalo
WR	Nick Devereaux - Eastern Michigan	Keith Reynolds - Miami
TE	Joshua Long - Eastern Michigan	Max Dowling - UMass
OG	Hunter Whitenack - Western Michigan	Stephan Gales - Toledo
OT	Eric Smith - Miami	Joshua Anderson - Eastern Michigan
C	Nicholas Gallegos - Eastern Michigan	Colin Lyons - Akron
OT	Chad Schuster - Western Michigan	Evan Malcore - Miami
OG	John Iannuzzi - Central Michigan	Hunter Whitenack - Western Michigan
K	Reice Griffith - Toledo	Rudy Kessinger - Eastern Michigan

Second Team

First Team

DE	Carter Evans - Eastern Michigan	Xavier Williams - Sacramento State
DT	Eriq George - Bowling Green	Thomas Aden - Kent State
DT	Nehemiah Dukes - Ohio	Ronald Hull - Akron
DE	Andrew Zock - Toledo	Korver Demma - Central Michigan
LB	SaVeon Brown - Buffalo	Tyler Martin - UMass
LB	Malcom McCain - Miami	Derek Houston - Sacramento State
LB	Charlie Christopher - Ohio	Mike Molnar - Ohio
CB	Mychal Yarbrough - Miami	Javarius Sims - Western Michigan
CB	Jaion Jackson - Central Michigan	Kaleb Martin - Miami
S	Bryce Llewellyn - Eastern Michigan	Joey Pope - Western Michigan
S	DJ Walker - Ohio	Kal-El Pascal - Bowling Green
P	Pierse Stainton - Miami	Ryan Millmore - Western Michigan



WESTERN MICHIGAN BRONCOS

2025 Record: 10-4 (7-1 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Kalamazoo, MI



Can Broncos Ride to Rare MAC Repeat?

What a season it was in Kalamazoo. In Lance Taylor's third year, the team surged to 10 wins and won their first MAC title in a decade. For many teams in Western Michigan's position, they face the "price of success." In other words, many teams in the Group of 6 that have breakthrough seasons see coaches and players depart for "greener grass." However, that's not the case here. Taylor is back and so are several very meaningful contributors on the 2025 team including the dynamic QB/RB duo of Broc Lowry and Jalen Buckley.

The continuity is partially explained by the culture that Lance Taylor has built, and the buy-in of his players is a reflection of that culture. "Grit" is at the heart of everything Western Michigan does. This offseason, that included drafting teams for the spring game and having quarterbacks in live contact. You'd be hard pressed to find another team in the country willing to compete like that in the spring. Football prowess has been the cherry on top for an athletic department that has enjoyed all-around success, including a national championship in hockey. Sports are thriving in Kalamazoo, and there's a very good chance that success continues into 2026.

OFFENSE

The reigning MAC Offensive Player of the Year returns in **Broc Lowry**. His run-first, hard-nosed mentality makes him very easy to root for and while the coaching staff would probably like to see him slide more in 2026, he's not afraid of contact. His running skills are ahead of his passing skills, but as a passer he did the job when needed, completing 63.4% of his passing and he threw three times the number of touchdowns to interceptions.

Running the ball is the identity of this team, and they could be even more dangerous this season with **Jalen Buckley** returning. Even though he wasn't healthy for the full 2025 season, he still posted 1,000 yards and he went on a rampage down the stretch of the season. In the postseason, specifically, he pummeled Miami in the MAC championship game for 193 yards and 2 touchdowns and he needed only eight carries to amass 174 yards in a rout of Kennesaw State in the Myrtle Beach Bowl. A fully healthy Buckley is one thing, but the Broncos believe they've added even better depth behind him this season. **Cole Cabana** appeared in two games last year but is a versatile pass-catching back. **AJ Green** is a bigger back, and while he didn't see the field much last season, he at least brings some lessons from the SEC with him. The Broncos should be able to lean on a solid offensive line, and **Chad Schuster** is one of the best in the conference. As a group, this is one of the biggest offensive lines in all of the Group of Six.

Last year's receiver by committee approach featured four receivers with at least 25+ catches, and two of those players are back in **Baylin Brooks** and **Aveion Chenault**. The real loss might be felt at the tight end position, where Blake Bosma resided. The answer to his departure will probably be found in portal signings like New Mexico State transfer **Adam Park**. On the receiver front, **Harper Hughes** could end up starting as a true freshman.

DEFENSE

The Broncos were able to play complementary football thanks to a very stingy defense. After allowing 30+ points per game in Taylor's first two seasons, the Broncos clamped down on opponents, giving up just 17.4 points per game. This group isn't quite as experienced as the offense, but new defensive coordinator Greer Martini still has some weapons to work with. The defensive line takes the biggest hit with the FBS sack leader Nadame Tucker graduating. It will be almost impossible to replicate his play or the 43 sacks collected by a team as a whole, and the edge positions will feature young players.

With questions on the defensive line, the Broncos need other position groups to step up, like linebacker. **Domanick Moon** could end up being a leader here after appearing in 24 games over the last two seasons for WMU. **Joshua Franklin** has also been here the past two seasons and will play the nickel role.

The secondary figures to be the strength of the defense. Opponents will feel the crunching tackles of safeties **Joey Pope** and **Micah Davis**. **Javarius Sims** started in all but one game at corner and brings back the most tackles of any returner at 64.

HC: Lance Taylor
(4th Year, 22-19)

OC: Walt Bell
(3rd Year)

DC: Greer Martini
(1st Year)

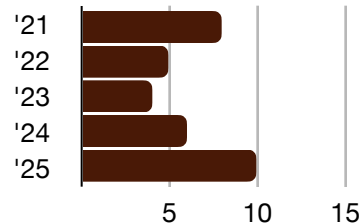
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
113

Transfer Portal
110

Via 24/7 Sports

WMU WIN TREND



2025 Results (10-4)

@ Michigan State (L 6-23)
North Texas (L 30-33 OT)
@ Illinois (L 0-38)
Toledo (W 14-13)
Rhode Island (W 47-14)
@ UMass (W 21-3)
Ball State (W 42-0)
@ Miami (OH) (L 17-26)
C. Michigan (W 24-21)
Ohio (W 17-13)
@ No. Illinois (W 35-19)
@ E. Michigan (W 31-21)
vs. Miami (OH) (W 23-13)
MAC Championship
vs. Kennesaw St. (W 41-6)
Myrtle Beach Bowl

JALEN BUCKLEY – RB

Photo via Western Michigan University

2026 WMU Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	@ Michigan
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Monmouth
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Rice
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. Boise State
5	Sat, Oct 3	@ Buffalo
6	Sat, Oct 10	vs. Kent State
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ C. Michigan
8	Sat, Oct 24	@ Toledo
9	Sat, Oct 31	vs. Bowling Green
11	Tue, Nov 10	@ Akron
12	Tue, Nov 17	vs. E. Michigan
13	Tue, Nov 24	vs. Miami (OH)

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 26 vs. Boise State: The Broncos vs. the Broncos, two conference champions from 2025 who have aspirations of repeating this season and punching their ticket to the College Football Playoff along the way.

Oct 17 @ Central Michigan: The environment for the Victory Cannon rivalry will be a loud one, and the Broncos will have to overcome that adversity if they want to win four of five in their series with the Chippewas.

Nov 24 vs. Miami: A chance for revenge against the RedHawks, who dealt the Broncos their only MAC loss last season.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Mid-American Conference



CHAD SCHUSTER – OL

All Schuster has done as a lineman is help his team win games. In high school, the Wisconsin product helped guide his team to an undefeated state championship season and since becoming a stalwart up front for the Broncos, Western Michigan has seen great success. He's the standout on a group that paves the way for a relentless ground attack. Running to the right where Schuster patrols is a solid gameplan.

2025 STATS: 14 Starts, 1st Team All-MAC

Photo via @micahj.davis



MICAH DAVIS – S

Keep your head on a swivel if you have the football in Davis' general vicinity. He initially began his career for Michigan, but after not seeing the field, he transferred to Western Michigan and immediately provided a major impact for the Broncos defense. He's a big reason why teams tallied just 180 yards per game through the air and he'll come up to the line of scrimmage and aid the rush defense, too.

2025 STATS: 60 TKL, 1 TFL, 1 INT

Photo via Western Michigan University Athletics



Waldo Stadium (36,361)

Photo via Western Michigan University Athletics



Broc LOWRY

SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game was an interesting adventure last season. The coaching staff wasn't afraid of sending **Palmer Domschke** out for long field goal attempts, and he hit 10 field goals of 40 yards or longer. But he was just 3 of 6 inside of 40 and there were also two extra point misses. Assuming he's back to health after offseason knee surgery, special teams coordinator Dan Sabock will be looking for a little more stability from him. Punter **Ryan Millmore** gives the Broncos the opportunity to play the field position game.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There hasn't been a repeat winner in the MAC since 2011-12 (Northern Illinois), but Western Michigan has the talent, experience, depth, and coaching to make a real run at snapping that streak in 2026. The culture has been created by Taylor, and there will be no shortage of confidence in the locker room based on what the Broncos accomplished last season. Western will hang their hat on their "grit" mentality and try to punish opponents on the ground.

The Michigan MAC trophy and a MAC championship are once again achievable goals in 2026. The non-conference features Michigan and Boise State, but as long as the Broncos emerge healthy, the real season begins on October 3 in Buffalo. The Broncos have been particularly stingy at home (12-4 in Taylor's career), so getting three of the last four games in Waldo Stadium could end up being perfect timing. Western Michigan is the premier threat in the MAC until proven otherwise and a darkhorse CFP contender.

Appointment Television



VS.



Tue, Nov 24 - Time TBD

What will be on the line in the season finale? Will the Broncos or RedHawks be looking for a win to clinch a spot in the MAC title game? In any case, this game will be the third meeting in a 15 month span. Miami defeated the Broncos in Oxford last season, holding Western Michigan to their lowest scoring output in conference play. However, the Broncos got the last laugh when they flipped the script in Detroit.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	24.9	88	Points	17.4	9
Rushing	204.2	16	Rushing	125.6	34
Passing	138.5	131	Passing	179.9	18
Total	342.7	103	Total	305.5	17
Sacks For/Against: 43/22			Turnover Margin: +9		

2026 Projection
9-3
1st in MAC

XO
National
Champions

X4
MAC
Champions

1966
1988
2016
2025

3-10
Bowl
Record

0
Playoff
Appearances

Trophy Case



TOLEDO ROCKETS

2025 Record: 8-5 (6-2 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Toledo, OH

Rockets With Fresh Energy, Ready For Takeoff

Jason Candle departs for a new head coaching gig at UConn, but not before becoming the most winningest coach in program history. Since his tenure began in 2016, the Rockets never had a losing season and went .500 only once in 2019. However, while most teams (especially in the MAC) would kill for that level of consistency, from a fan perspective, some believed the program seemed to keep bumping its head on the "ceiling" so to speak, and there were "only" two MAC titles under Candle.

New head coach Mike Jacobs inherits this program where the floor has been seemingly elevated to no worse than a bowl game each season. Jacobs is very familiar with the Buckeye state, having played his college football at Ohio State, and he cut his teeth in coaching as a head coach at the Division II level here as well. Almost all of the production from last year's team, a group that missed out on the MAC title game by a tiebreaker, is gone. So, Jacobs will have some work to do in his first season.

OFFENSE

Multi-year starter Tucker Gleason departs, so the job will now be in the hands of **John Alan Richter**. At 6'3" 225, Richter has good size combined with a very strong arm. He's more of a prototypical-type passer, and if Cris Reisert runs some of the same schemes that he did at Gardner-Webb, Richter will orchestrate an up-tempo RPO-style of offense. He's been waiting in the wings over the last two seasons and he's looked good in what little spot duty he has been given. **Khamoni Robinson** is likely Richter's backup and adds more of a dual-threat wrinkle.

The top four rushers are gone last season including 1,000-yard back Chip Trayanum. Those departures open up a door for Mercer transfer **CJ Miller** to walk through and make an immediate impact. After running for nearly 1,000 yards at a 5.7 yard per carry clip, he's the likely RB1 for Toledo this season. At 5'11" and 238 pounds, he can use his frame to muscle his way to extra yards, but he also has sneaky top-end speed. **Cory Smith**, a transfer from Penn State adds depth along with Toledo's leading returning rusher **Connor Walendzak**. Both Smith and **Noah Sanders** offer a distinct change of pace from Miller's running style. The offensive line in front of them only returns **Stephan Gales**, but there is experience throughout the unit and both **Jonathan Harder** and **Ibrahim Traore** played significant snaps last season.

Almost every single reception is gone from the 2025 season aside from **Terrell Crosby's** 16 catches for 194 yards and a touchdown. The good news is that Mike Jacobs brings in his star wide receiver and first-team all-conference performer **Adjatay Dabbs**. He is a versatile speedster, and the coaching staff will line him up all over the field and try to get the ball into his hands as much as possible. His great route running skills helped him accumulate 856 yards on a very notable 19.1 yards per catch last season. **Daryl Barnett** is a local product and a former walk-on, and his remarkable story continues as he has a real chance to breakout for the Rockets. Tight end has been a key position in the passing game and **Jake Newell**, a transfer from Akron, is the presumptive starter.

DEFENSE

On paper, last year's defense was one of the best in the entire country, which makes last year's 8-5 finish feel like somewhat of a missed opportunity. Like the offense, most of the position groups on this side of the ball will need retooled. Up front, the Rockets inherit an absolute stud with defensive end **Andrew Zock**. There are of UAB transfers in **Zach Johnson** and **Ezra Odinor** who will play on the other side of the field, and they could see their production surge with offenses paying a lot of attention to Zock. The Rockets do need to find some solutions on the interior.

At linebacker, the Rockets will be heavily reliant on two more Mercer transfers **Isaac Prince** and **Julian Fox**. Both were solid for the Bears but need to translate their production to the FBS ranks.

The secondary last season was one of the best in the country. Two players from that unit were drafted including Emmanuel McNeil-Warren. The other two members have since transferred but were also NFL talents, so there is a massive void that needs filled. **Kaleb Hutchinson** was very productive with Mercer and had three interceptions from his safety position. At cornerback, Toledo is extremely young, so this group will likely take a step back overall.



HC: Mike Jacobs
(1st Year, 0-0)

OC: Cris Reisert
(1st Year)

DC: Jahmal Brown
(1st Year)

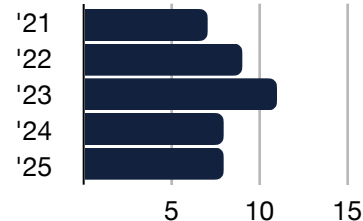
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
120

Transfer Portal
94

Via 24/7 Sports

TOLEDO WIN TREND



2025 Results (8-5)

@ Kentucky (L 16-24)
W. Kentucky (W 45-21)
Morgan State (W 60-0)
@ W. Michigan (L 13-14)
Akron (W 45-3)
@ Bowling Green (L 23-28)
Kent State (W 45-10)
@ Washington State (L 7-28)
No. Illinois (W 42-3)
@ Miami (OH) (W 24-3)
Ball State (W 38-9)
@ C. Michigan (W 21-3)
vs. Louisville (L 22-27)
Boca Raton Bowl

STEPHEN GALES – OL

Photo via Opendorse

2026 Toledo Schedule

Wk		
1	Fri, Sep 4	@ Michigan State
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. C. Conn St.
3	Sat, Sep 19	vs. Temple
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. San Diego St.
5	Sat, Oct 3	@ Ball State
6	Sat, Oct 10	vs. Buffalo
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ E. Michigan
8	Sat, Oct 24	vs. W. Michigan
10	Wed, Nov 4	@ Sacramento St.
11	Wed, Nov 11	vs. UMass
12	Fri, Nov 20	vs. Bowling Green
13	Fri, Nov 27	@ Ohio

■ Home ■ Away ■ Neutral

Key Games

Sep 26 vs. San Diego State: The Aztecs finally make the return trip to the Glass Bowl after Toledo lost a close, low-scoring affair in San Diego back in 2022. A chance to grab a win against the new look PAC-12 while building momentum for MAC play.

Nov 20 vs. Bowling Green: A loss to the Falcons was a distinct low point in the 2025 season and it ultimately cost the Rockets a spot in Detroit.

Nov 27 @ Ohio: The Bobcats and Rockets have played only once in the regular season over the last four seasons, but this one could be big.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Toledo Blade



ANDREW ZOCK – DE

Zock popped immediately as a freshman and still managed to outdo his 2024 with a breakout campaign in 2025. The FCS Defensive Player of the Year essentially spent the entire season in the backfield and kept offensive coordinators up at night. At 6'2" 250, Zock had offers to go other places including Colorado, so it's a major victory that he's here, and he'll soon be a household name in the MAC.

2025 STATS: 46 TKL, 20 TFL, 11.5 SACK (Mercer)

Photo via GreeneSportsZone



ADJATAY DABBS – WR

After a solid sophomore season that included 28 catches for 417 yards, Dabbs blew right past those numbers, and right past opposing corners, for 45 catches for 856 yards. Those yards were the most in the Southern Conference and his average yards per catch of almost 19.0 yards also topped the league. Paired with the strong arm of John Alan Richter, Dabbs could be a premiere threat in another conference, the MAC.

2025 STATS: 45 REC, 856 YDS, 8 TDS (Mercer)

Photo via Ohio Football Stadiums



Glass Bowl (36,852)

Photo via Sentinel Tribune



**Connor
WALENDZAK**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Toledo attempted only 11 field goals last season, but they did hit eight of those tries and made everything inside of 40 yards. For 2026, Mercer's all-time leading scorer **Reice Griffith** assumes the starting position. Head coach Mike Jacobs was much more willing to use him relative to how frequently Candle sent out the unit for the Rockets last season. **Emilio Duran** is back at punter yet again and is a veteran and rare returning starter for the Rockets.

THE BOTTOM LINE

How this roster shapes up will be a bit of a mystery until the ball is kicked off in East Lansing on September 4. There are a lot of new faces and there is only one returning starter on offense and defense combined, so the Rockets will be reliant on the play of 27 non-FBS transfers. The majority of that group is from Mercer, but the overall philosophy is to bank on these kinds of players with proven production in the lower levels as opposed to grabbing P4 bench players. Whether that strategy is the right one remains to be seen, but Jacobs has had tremendous success everywhere he's been and led Mercer to conference titles in each of the last two seasons, their first in program history.

Jacobs will get seven games in the Glass Bowl this season including two intriguing non-conference games against Temple and San Diego State. The Rockets avoid Miami and get Western Michigan and rival Bowling Green at home. A Black Friday road trip to Ohio could have major implications on a potential trip to Detroit. Yes, there are a lot of unknowns, but the potential of this team is still that of a MAC championship contender.

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Oct 11 - Time TBD

Bowling Green coach Eddie George earned a victory in his first attempt at the I-75 matchup, and now Mike Jacobs can do the same thing. The 23-28 loss in 2025 as 10-point favorites was not only one of four one-possession losses, but the eventual elimination game for MAC title contention. For this late November matchup, there will be a lot to play for, and revenge will be first and foremost on the minds of Toledo fans.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	30.8	38	Points	13.3	4
Rushing	177.2	41	Rushing	96.3	9
Passing	238.1	57	Passing	158.0	5
Total	415.2	34	Total	254.3	2
Sacks For/Against: 37/17			Turnover Margin: +6		

2026 Projection

8-4

2nd in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X 12

**MAC
Champions**



12-11

**Bowl
Record**



0

**Playoff
Appearances**



MIAMI REDHAWKS

2025 Record: 7-7 (6-2 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Oxford, OH



Four Straight Trips to Detroit?

Chuck Martin and the Miami RedHawks have proven to be one of the most tenacious teams in college football. Despite the odds, Miami has made three straight trips to the MAC title game. Those odds have included losing a starting quarterback in two of those three seasons, and last season there was an added twist of the starter leaving the team in the middle of the year. Martin, now one of the longest tenured coaches in the sport, hangs his hat on defense and fundamentals and for the most part doesn't care all that much about what the analytics say.

Now, the more glass half empty view is that the RedHawks have been blown out in the last two MAC title games and they've scored only 16 points combined in those two Detroit ventures. However, it's by no accident that Miami has had a chance to bring home a trophy the last three seasons and the expectations are the same in 2026.

OFFENSE

There hasn't been much question about who would suit up for RedHawks at quarterback recently, at least in the preseason. However, that changes a bit heading into 2026. There are three different options in the mix, each with unique skill sets. **Thomas Gotkowski** brings experience back from last season when he started the year as the third-string quarterback. Although he completed less than half of his passes, he did help lead the RedHawks to victories over both Ball State and Buffalo. He's more of a prototypical pocket passer and there would be more of RPO and shotgun looks if he ends up seeing more playing time. **Caleb Heavner** transfers in from the DII ranks and his strength is his alertness in the pocket and ability to scramble. Redshirt freshman **David McComb** has the most to prove as a passer, but he's the most athletic option and is a capable and willing runner. His style of play likely aligns best with what Miami has been used to the past few seasons.

Martin loves to have a solid rotation at running back which is one of the reasons why the RedHawks have only ever had one 1,000-yard rusher in his long tenure. That committee approach will be in full effect again in 2026, likely led by **Rodney Nelson**. He posted gaudy numbers as the workhorse for Monmouth last season with 1,802 yards on an astounding 293 carries. He went for over 100 yards in all but three games for the Eagles. **D'Shawntae Jones** made the most of his 63 carries for Miami and led the team with 7 touchdowns. Wisconsin transfer **Cade Yacamelli** could end up rounding out the rotation. While the last memory from the 2025 offensive line wasn't a good one, a veteran group returns in what could be one of the MAC's best.

The top two receivers from last year are now in the Power 4 ranks. To find their replacements, Martin typically favors players who have been in the system, so that means that a trio could emerge in **Keith Reynolds**, **Braylon Isom**, and **Lynel Billups-Williams**. **Damarion Witten** transfers in from Ohio State, a program that doesn't typically make mistakes at the wide receiver position, so he could be a factor as the season progresses.

DEFENSE

The offense doesn't typically blow the doors off of their opponents, instead, Martin and fifth year defensive coordinator Bill Brechin rely on smothering teams with their tenacious defense. That's been a winning recipe in Oxford, but five of the top six tacklers are gone heading into 2026. Those departures includes defensive end Adam Trick who broke out for the RedHawks with 8.5 sacks. Will another pass rusher emerge like Trick? That may be a tall order, but **Bai Jobe** is a potential candidate following a four sack season and 27 pressures, and he should get a lot more playing time in 2026.

Linebacker has been a staple of the Brechin defense and it should be strong again even without a 100+ tackler in the fold. That's because **Malcolm McCain** returns after tallying 73 tackles last season. Technically speaking, McCain wasn't even a full-time starter, so he could move into that triple-digit territory like some of his recent predecessors.

The RedHawks will miss the play off first-team All-MAC safety Eli Blakey, but to combat this loss, Miami will be able to start two all-conference caliber cornerbacks in **Kaleb Martin** and **Mychal Yharbrough**. At safety, Northwestern transfer **Dillon Tatum** could be the featured option.

HC: Chuck Martin
(13th Year, 72-74)

OC: Gus Ragland
(1st Year)

DC: Bill Brechin
(5th Year)

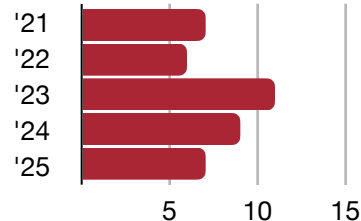
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
107

Transfer Portal
84

Via 24/7 Sports

MIAMI WIN TREND



2025 Results (7-7)

@ Wisconsin (L 0-17)
@ Rutgers (L 17-45)
UNLV (L 38-41)
Lindenwood (W 38-0)
@ No. Illinois (W 25-14)
@ Akron (W 20-7)
E. Michigan (W 44-30)
W. Michigan (W 26-17)
@ Ohio (L 20-24)
Toledo (L 3-24)
@ Buffalo (W 37-20)
Ball State (W 45-24)
vs. W. Michigan (L 13-23)
MAC Championship
vs. Fresno State (L 3-18)
Arizona Bowl

ERIC SMITH – OL

Photo via Miami RedHawks Athletics

2026 Miami Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	@ Pittsburgh
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Holy Cross
3	Sat, Sep 19	vs. Cincinnati
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. UConn
5	Sat, Oct 3	vs. Bowling Green
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ UMass
7	Sat, Oct 17	vs. Akron
8	Sat, Oct 24	@ C. Michigan
10	Tue, Nov 3	vs. Buffalo
11	Tue, Nov 10	vs. Ohio
12	Tue, Nov 17	@ Kent State
13	Tue, Nov 24	@ W. Michigan

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 19 vs. Cincinnati: The last currently scheduled game in the Battle for the Victory Bell. The last time these teams played in the city of Cincinnati, the RedHawks pulled off a stunner.

Nov 10 vs. Ohio: The Battle of the Bricks rivalry is the MAC's most played series with over 100 total matchups. Ohio has won the last two games including the 2024 MAC Championship.

Nov 24 @ Western Michigan: Miami won this matchup in Oxford last season, but the Broncos got the last laugh in Detroit. If these teams rematch in the 2026 MAC title game, this game will be played two weeks in a row.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Miami RedHawks Athletics



MYCHAL YHARBROUGH – CB

One of the most experienced corners in the MAC also happens to be one of the most talented. At 6'2", Yharbrough has the length to interrupt the passing game. After briefly stepping into the portal, his return to Oxford gives the RedHawks another stellar secondary in 2026 and he gets the opportunity to play with his younger brother Desmon. Mychal has the chance to be one of the best cornerbacks in the MAC.

2025 STATS: 47 TKL, 2 TFL

Photo via @mwhiteburgh on X



SCOOP SMITH – WR

Don't take the 5'4" Smith for granted, the true freshman can fly. The two-time Mr. Pennsylvania in football has electric speed and could earn some snaps immediately. He could slot in as a returner right away, but the RedHawks also utilized him as a red zone threat in the spring game. In a relatively tall wide receiver room, Smith offers a change of pace and could be a big play threat.

2025 STATS: 57 REC, 23 TDS (High School)

Photo via Wikipedia



Yager Stadium (30,087)

via @malcolmmccaini on Instagram



Malcolm MCCAIN

SPECIAL TEAMS

Most programs would panic if they lost the most accurate kicker in school history like Miami did with Dom Dzioban. To be clear, it's no small feat to replace a kicker who connected on 20 of 23 of his field goals, but Martin puts a big emphasis on special teams and the results usually don't disappoint. **Kellan McLaughlin** has been waiting in the wings and has been the kickoff specialist for the past two seasons. Punter **Pierse Stainton** is back and is one of the MAC's best.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Over the last few seasons, the RedHawks have overcome anything from key departures, brutal non-conference stretches, turnover at the quarterback position, and more. Yet, at the end of each season since 2023, the RedHawks have been vying for the ultimate prize in the MAC. Because Miami has fallen just short of bringing home the trophy the last two seasons, there's going to be a chip on the shoulder of this team even with the number of wins Martin and company have been stacking recently. The RedHawks should be in the mix yet again for a conference title.

It also helps that, relative to past seasons, the non-conference schedule is a lot more manageable. The RedHawks will play only five games away from Yager Stadium this season, although one of those road games is at Western Michigan in the season finale. Miami has actually defeated the eventual MAC champion in each of the last two years, so in 2026, it's about getting to Detroit and finishing the job.

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Sep 19 - 3:30 PM ET (ESPN+)

The Battle for the Victory Bell is the longest running non-conference rivalry in the sport, but this is unfortunately the last currently scheduled meeting between the Bearcats and RedHawks. That means that the 2026 showdown from FC Cincinnati's home pitch will carry a lot of weight and major bragging rights for the foreseeable future. Which team will ring the bell?

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	23.5	96	Points	21.7	41
Rushing	150.3	78	Rushing	134.3	46
Passing	187.3	106	Passing	200.4	39
Total	337.6	108	Total	334.6	36
Sacks For/Against: 41/26			Turnover Margin: +5		

2026 Projection

8-4

3rd in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X17

**MAC
Champions**

'48 '50 '54
'55 '57 '58
'65 '66 '73
'74 '75 '77
'86 '03 '10
'19 '23



9-8

**Bowl
Record**



O

**Playoff
Appearances**



OHIO BOBCATS

2025 Record: 9-4 (6-2 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Athens, OH



New Coach, Same Expectations

After years and years of coaching stability under Frank Solich, the Bobcats head into the 2026 season on their third head coach in as many seasons. John Hauser came to the rescue and coached the Bobcats to a Frisco Bowl victory over UNLV after Brian Smith was dismissed due to substantial issues off the field. That audition gave Hauser the keys to the program and he becomes the next head coach in Athens. Solich drastically improved the overall expectations of this program and his successor Tim Albin got the Bobcats over the hump and to a MAC title game win. Can Hauser follow in their footsteps?

Hauser is no stranger to the program, his defenses over the last few years are a major reason why the Bobcats have had such success. To keep that trend moving this season, he'll have to replace key production at all most every position group. The top passer, top two rushers, top four pass catchers, and top two tacklers are all gone from last year's 9-4 team. The 2026 season will be a test of how resilient this Ohio program can be and if they can compete once again at the very top of the MAC.

OFFENSE

The Bobcats have enjoyed terrific quarterback play in a lineage that includes Nathan Rourke, Kurtis Rourke, and Parker Navarro. Which quarterback steps up in 2026 is a major question. There are actually four options who could all realistically see the field. **Nick Poulos** might have the edge considering his time spent in OC Scott Isphording's system, and he does have experience playing against premier opponents like Ohio State and Kentucky. He has a great arm, but he's not the typical mobile threat that made Navarro so effective. **Matt Vezza** weilds a more similar playing style to Navarro and posted very respectable numbers at New Hampshire. **Levi Davis** is a true freshman who led his high school team to an undefeated season and state championship in Ohio's highest division. Redshirt freshman **Hype Grand** rounds out the list.

Ohio was one of the best running teams in the country thanks to the legs of Navarro, but also because of All-MAC performer Sieh Bangura. His 1,392 yards and 15 touchdowns made him a reliable star, and his backup **Duncan Brune** now assumes his starting role. Finding Brune's backup will be key. **Victor Rosa**'s best seasons came in 2022 and 2023, but he's a versatile back that showed speed and athleticism at UConn. **Mike Taylor** is a redshirt freshman and potential breakout candidate. The bigger question in the run game is what the performance of the offensive line will be like. All five starters are gone, although it was a group last year that took some time to finally round into form. There's not a single player in the projected starting lineup who has started a game at the FBS level, so this is perhaps the biggest concern on the entire roster.

The top four pass catchers are gone, and the top three are all playing Power 4 football now. **Dom Dorwart** is a major speed threat and the hope is that he emerges as a true WR1. **Preston Bowman** is also a player to watch. He's a former 4-star recruit who originally signed with Kentucky, but now transfers to Athens to play in his home state.

DEFENSE

Hauser will still have his hand in the defensive play calling and he welcomes back Kurt Mattix who was a defensive ends coach for the Bobcats in their MAC championship season. Mattix will need to get right to work on that position, specifically. Ohio rotated a lot up front last season, so while there's not necessarily a player with eye-popping numbers returning to campus, there's a decent amount of experience. **Ike Ackerman** came out of nowhere and had a great bowl game to wrap up 2025, so he could be a featured player this season on the edge. **Nehemiah Dukes** makes a lot happen on the interior.

Linebacker appears to be the unequivocal strength of the defense, and maybe the team as a whole. **Mike Molnar**, **Charlie Christopher**, and **Jack Fries** all bring meaningful talent and experience, and this could be the best trio in the conference.

DJ Walker is a defensive leader, and in the secondary, specifically, he'll have a lot on his shoulders with a relatively young group around him. The cornerback position needs to come through for Ohio this season.

HC: John Hauser
(1st Year, 1-0)

OC: Scott Isphording
(2nd Year)

DC: Kurt Mattix
(1st Year)

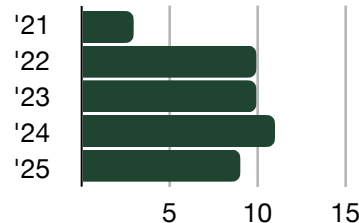
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
104

Transfer Portal
127

Via 24/7 Sports

OHIO WIN TREND



2025 Results (9-4)

@ Rutgers (L 31-34)
West Virginia (W 17-10)
@ Ohio State (L 9-37)
Gardner-Webb (W 52-35)
Bowling Green (W 35-20)
@ Ball State (L 14-20)
No. Illinois (W 48-21)
@ E. Michigan (W 28-21)
Miami (OH) (W 24-20)
@ W. Michigan (L 13-17)
UMass (W 42-14)
@ Buffalo (W 31-26)
vs. UNLV (W 17-10)
Frisco Bowl

JACK FRIES – LB

Photo via The Athens Messenger

2026 Ohio Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	@ Nebraska
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Jacksonville St.
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ South Alabama
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. Stonehill
5	Sat, Oct 3	@ Kent State
6	Sat, Oct 10	vs. C. Michigan
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ Sacramento St.
8	Sat, Oct 24	vs. E. Michigan
10	Tue, Nov 3	@ Akron
11	Tue, Nov 10	@ Miami (OH)
12	Tue, Nov 17	vs. Ball State
13	Fri, Nov 27	vs. Toledo

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 12 vs. Jacksonville State: A unique matchup that features two conference champions in 2024, these two teams love to utilize the quarterback run just about as much as any team in the country.

Nov 10 @ Miami: The Battle of the Bricks is the longest running MAC rivalry, and recently this game has had massive implications on the conference standings.

Nov 27 vs. Toledo: The Bobcats and Rockets both have first year head coaches who each inherit lofty expectations for their respective teams. Is this a play-in game for a MAC title spot?

Player Spotlight

Photo via The Athens Messenger



CHARLIE CHRISTOPHER – LB

Christopher was one of the most productive true freshman in the country last season. He broke onto the scene with 65 tackles (ranked third-most on the team), and he only got better as the season went along. In addition to his strong production, he has a great personality, he's a very hard worker, and has great athletic lineage, with multiple generations playing Division I sports in the state of Ohio.

2025 STATS: 65 TKL, 3 TFL, 1.5 SACK

Photo via @chris_hummer on X



DUNCAN BRUNE – RB

If your teammates give you the nickname of the "Terminator", you're probably the kind of running back that no defensive players want to see running towards them through the hole. That's exactly the case for Brune. Originally from Germany, Brune is more than happy to run over defenders. His work in the weight room speaks for itself and he'll have plenty of opportunity to deal out punishment in 2026.

2025 STATS: 120 RUSH, 585 YDS, 8 TDS

Photo via Ohio Bobcats



Peden Stadium (25,210)

Photo via Ohio University



DJ WALKER

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kicking was identified as a potential concern heading into 2025, and unfortunately, that materialized all throughout the season. In the end, the Bobcats attempted only 12 field goals and made only seven of them. There was even a stretch where Ohio kickers somehow managed to hit an upright on three consecutive extra point attempts. This year, the staff has addressed the position both through the portal and recruiting. Kent State transfer **Will Hryszko** figures to be the starter and will hopefully solve some of the problems of last season. **Magnus Haines** returns to punt but averaged just 36 net punting yards.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The Bobcats have turned in a very impressive 40 wins in just the last four seasons. Very few teams across the entire sport of college football can boast that kind of success. There are a lot of uncertainties throughout the roster, but Ohio has proven over the years that they can find the answers to offseason questions, and expectations will remain very high heading into 2026. After being on the wrong side of a tiebreaker at the end of 2025, the Bobcats have their eyes set on a return to the MAC title game.

The schedule is manageable, even with a trip to Lincoln to begin the season. There's no Western Michigan on the schedule and the Bobcats get to host Toledo at the end of the season. That game, along with the rivalry game against Miami, will have huge implications on the overall success of the season.

Appointment Television



VS.



Tue, Nov 10 - 7:00 PM ET (TV TBD)

This rivalry has had its twist and turns over 102 total meetings, but recently, the intensity has hit a fever pitch. A lot of that has to do with how successful the Bobcats and RedHawks have been recently, and the two teams have met four times in just the last three seasons thanks to a 2024 MAC Championship victory by Ohio. Aside from the usual bragging rights, the 2026 meeting will once again feature two MAC juggernauts.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	27.8	66	Points	21.9	42
Rushing	227.4	9	Rushing	144.0	62
Passing	184.2	109	Passing	208.1	48
Total	411.5	37	Total	352.1	51
Sacks For/Against: 22/24			Turnover Margin: -2		

2026 Projection
8-4
4th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

National
Champions



X6

MAC
Champions

1953
1960
1963
1967
1968
2024



9-8

Bowl
Record



0

Playoff
Appearances



CENTRAL MICHIGAN CHIPPEWAS

2025 Record: 7-6 (5-3 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Mt. Pleasant, MI



Chips Fired Up From Breakout Season

After three straight losing seasons, a 7-6 record that included a bowl game in Detroit was a breath of fresh air under first year coach Matt Drinkall. The Chippewas were in contention for the MAC title game up until the final week of the season, and the internal expectation for 2026 is to make that game in Detroit.

A common misnomer in college football is that a team gets to pick up where they left off, but any coach would tell you that's not how it works. For Drinkall, his team will have a fresh look on offense and must replace a lot of production on a defense that was one of the best in recent memory. What will carry over from 2025 to 2026, however, is fan excitement and heightened expectations.

OFFENSE

Drinkall isn't afraid of a multi-quarterback system and played three different signal callers at the beginning of last year. Eventually, injuries began shaping that room and Joe Labas ended up as the primary option. He departs, but two quarterbacks remain from last year in **Angel Flores** and **Jadyn Glasser**. Glasser was injured early in the season, so Flores ended up seeing a lot more action which might give him the edge as the starter for 2026. Flores is actually the team's leading returning rusher and both he and Glasser had more rushing attempts than they did passing which gives a window into what the 2026 offense will look like. Look for the Chips to run a power option system which means that the passing numbers will likely go down.

The run game has a chance to be potent if Liberty transfer **Vaughn Blue** is able to stay healthy. He's a dynamic playmaker with top-end speed and he's shown a keen ability as a pass catcher with the Flames. Like Blue, **Brock Townsend** is an all-around talent and he should benefit from the playing time he unexpectedly saw as a freshman last year. **Jayden Clerveaux** isn't afraid to run angry and he toted the rock for 762 yards with Holy Cross last year. Combine this group with veteran offensive line, and the hope is that the Chippewas can exert their will in the MAC. The return of **John Iannuzzi** from injury only adds to the potential of the line. **Jake Russell** and **Martin Koivisto** each started all 13 games for CMU last season.

Time will tell how impactful the wide receiver position will end up being in the new look offense, but in terms of actual personnel at the position, the Chippewas bring back their leader **Langston Lewis** for his senior year. **Nasir Williams** is a potential burner on the outside who scored a touchdown in the spring game while **Dontae Robinson** is a tight end turned wide receiver who could be a go-to target in the red zone.

DEFENSE

Last year's defense directed by coordinator Sean Cronin was a night and day improvement from the 2024 unit. Even though the total defense improved only slightly, the scoring defense improved by nearly a touchdown. Only one of the top ten tacklers is back from that group, so the coaching staff will have their hands full if they want to hit last year's production. The biggest challenge will be replacing Michael Heldman's 10.5 sacks, if that's possible. The staff is hopeful that several players will emerge up front in the 3-4 scheme so that there's a rotation to keep the unit fresh. **Korver Demma** needs to be a havoc-maker on the edge for the Chips.

The linebacker room is potentially the biggest question mark on the team with three senior starters having graduated. The coaching staff is high on the potential of true freshman **Drew Esper** who could end up starting right away. **Xavier White** got to learn from those three seniors ahead of him and could make an immediate impact this season aided by his overall athleticism.

There are some roles to fill on the secondary, too, but that group has an obvious anchor in team captain cornerback **Jaion Jackson** who has All-MAC potential. He has been a starter in Mt. Pleasant since day one which means he has two dozen starts already under his belt. A transfer safety pairing of **Darrell Bryant** (Northern Colorado) and **Justin Taylor** (Wyoming) should help the Chippewas avoid a big drop off in the secondary.

HC: Matt Drinkall
(2nd Year, 7-6)

OC: Jim Chapin
(2nd Year)

DC: Sean Cronin
(2nd Year)

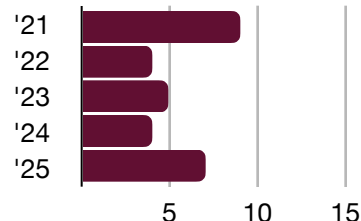
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
96

Transfer Portal
131

Via 24/7 Sports

CMU WIN TREND



2025 Results (7-6)

@ San Jose State (W 16-14)
@ Pittsburgh (L 17-45)
@ Michigan (L 3-63)
Wagner (W 49-10)
E. Michigan (W 24-13)
@ Akron (L 22-28)
@ Bowling Green (W 27-6)
UMass (W 38-13)
@ W. Michigan (L 21-24)
Buffalo (W 38-19)
@ Kent State (W 28-16)
Toledo (L 3-21)
vs. Northwestern (L 7-34)
GameAbove Sports Bowl

BROCK TOWNSEND – RB

Photo via Central Michigan University Athletics

2026 CMU Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	@ New Mexico
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Colgate
3	Sat, Sep 19	vs. Wyoming
4	Sat, Sep 26	@ Miami (FL)
5	Sat, Oct 3	vs. Akron
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ Ohio
7	Sat, Oct 17	vs. W. Michigan
8	Sat, Oct 24	vs. Miami (OH)
10	Wed, Nov 4	vs. E. Michigan
11	Wed, Nov 11	vs. Sacramento St.
12	Wed, Nov 18	@ Buffalo
13	Sat, Nov 28	@ Ball State

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 19 vs. Wyoming: The last time a non-conference FBS team came to Kelly/Shorts Stadium, it was a Mountain West team (San Diego State) in 2024. Can the Chippewas replicate their victory over the Aztecs against the Cowboys?

Oct 17 vs. Western Michigan: The Chippewas welcome in rival and defending MAC champion Western. The Broncos and Chippewas will face off in Mt. Pleasant on a Saturday for the first time since 2016.

Nov 4 vs. Eastern Michigan: The Chips are hoping this game at Ford Field against the Eagles won't be the only one they play in Detroit in 2026.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Central Michigan University Athletics



KORVER DEMMA – DE

The departure of Michael Heldman and other key pieces of the defensive line leaves a void, and Demma could be the perfect candidate to step up into a bigger role. He actually had the second-most sacks on the team last year behind only Heldman and started every game last season. He has the size and talent to become a game wrecker for the Chippewas especially as he settles into another year in the system.

2025 STATS: 27 TKL, 8.5 TFL, 3.5 SACK

Photo via Central Michigan University Athletics



JAION JACKSON – CB

Jackson started on day one upon his arrival in Mt. Pleasant and is quickly approaching 100 career tackles from his cornerback position. It's hard to say he will be a "breakout" player in 2026 considering he's already a known commodity for Chippewa fans. However, he does have the potential to become a household name in the Mid-American and end up on an All-MAC team at the end of the season.

2025 STATS: 48 TKL, 4 TFL, 2 SACK, 1 INT

Photo via Central Michigan University



Kelly/Shorts Stadium (35,127)

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Nov 1 - Time TBD

This game, more than any other on the schedule, is the one that Chippewas want to win. Not only has Western taken down Central in three of the last four meetings, but the Broncos are fresh off a MAC title. These two teams typically face one another in a mid-week MACtion game, so a Saturday home game will have Kelly/Shorts stadium rocking and will be one of the can't miss games in the MAC this season.

SPECIAL TEAMS

The kicking game was generally reliable last season, but a new starter must be identified in 2026. There's confidence that special teams coach Keith Murphy will be up to the task and he was notably the only coach who was retained by Driskall from the previous staff. It appears as though kicking duties will come down to freshmen **Caden VanHuis** and **Braxton Doak**. **Declan Duley** retains punting duties but averaged just 37.8 net yards per punt in 2025.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Since joining the FBS, the Chippewas are currently in their longest streak without winning a MAC title in program history. Fans in Mt. Pleasant have been eagerly awaiting a team that has the potential to get to the title game. Like Driskall, the previous head coach Jim McElwain had a great first season and did actually lead the team to Detroit in 2019, but had only one winning season the rest of his tenure. Can Driskall keep the positive momentum going after a successful first year?

Surviving a front-loaded schedule will be key. An opening week road trip against Mountain West favorite New Mexico will be an immediate test and another Mountain West team shows up in Mt. Pleasant two weeks later. The goal against Miami should be to return home in one piece. Then, a three game stretch against Ohio, Western Michigan, and Miami will set the tone for how successful CMU can be in the MAC. If the Chippewas can emerge from the first eight games with a 4-4 or even 5-3 record, they should still be in play even though there's only one home game in the final four contests.

2026 Projection

8-4

5th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X7

**MAC
Champions**

**1979 1980
1990 1994
2006 2007
2009**



4-10

**Bowl
Record**



0

**Playoff
Appearances**



EASTERN MICHIGAN EAGLES

2025 Record: 4-8 (3-5 MAC) Mid-American Conference Ypsilanti, MI



Antsy Ypsilanti

If something good happened in Eastern Michigan football history, there's a good chance Chris Creighton was behind it. When he took over in 2014, it had been almost 20 years since the Eagles had posted a winning record. In his 12 seasons, he's had Eastern Michigan bowl eligible six different times. However, recently, the program has trended in the wrong direction.

Last year's eight losses were the most since 2015, Creighton's second year, and that tally included an embarrassing loss to FCS Long Island as 22-point favorites. Perhaps more importantly, the Eagles are now just 1-5 over the last three years against their in-state rivals. Creighton has brought this team through much worse, but because of the success of prior teams, patience is wearing thin in Ypsilanti. The veteran head coach retooled the coaching staff and the Eagles will try to soar their way into the postseason once again despite only five home games.

OFFENSE

There haven't been many times in Creighton's tenure where he's had a starting quarterback return for another season, but he has that in 2026 with fifth-year senior **Noah Kim**. In fact, Kim played quite literally every snap last season and totaled nearly 3,000 yards. The coaching staff would ideally like to see him bring his turnover numbers down after 11 interceptions last season. The one downside to Kim's remarkable ability to stay on the field is that there is very little experience behind him. However, the upside and improvisation that Kim provides gives the Eagles an opportunity to take a meaningful step forward this season.

The top two running backs are gone from last season including 1,000-yard performer Dontae McMillan and Tavierre Dunlap. In fact, this duo along with Kim registered nearly every single rush attempt in 2025, so the run game will look a lot different this season. Don't be surprised if the Eagles spread the wealth more in 2026. **Joey Mattord** can make defenders miss, and he's a solid pass catching option. **Amareon Blue** uses his low center of gravity to his advantage and is difficult to corral. **Braydon Bennett** is easily the most experienced running back on the roster with well over 2,500 career yards and reunites with Kim from their time at Coastal Carolina. The offensive line took a big step forward last season and aided the run game, but was hit hard by the portal. The Eagles will rely heavily on returning starters **Nicholas Gallegos** and **Joshua Anderson**. The former is a leader of the unit at center and a team captain.

Nick Devereaux returns to Ypsilanti after leading Eastern Michigan in receiving yards and touchdowns with 510 and seven, respectively. His top-end speed makes him especially dangerous. **Harold Mack** exhibits great body control, a useful skill to possess as a slot receiver. **Joshua Long** is a do-it-all tight end for the Eagles who is as adept at catching a pass as he is throwing a big block in the run game.

DEFENSE

In order for Eastern Michigan to get back to bowl contention, the defense simply must improve. Statistically, last year's numbers were the worst since 2021 and opposing teams punished the Eagles on the ground to the tune of 232 yards per game. Two new co-defensive coordinators have coined the moniker "TTE" which stands for tackling, takeaways, and effort. Tackling was poor last season, especially early, so it was a major point of emphasis in the spring. **Carter Evans** is the motor of the defensive line but needs help from teammates like **Quincy Byas** who won Eastern Michigan's defensive newcomer of the year award last season.

Linebacker could be a strength this season with **Barry Manning**, **Zach Mowchan**, and **Bryce Llewellyn** all returning. That trio combined for 218 tackles. The safety room would probably stake a claim to Llewellyn's 102 tackles and two interceptions, but he plays the linebacker/safety "star" hybrid position in the multiple 4-2-5 defensive scheme for the Eagles. **Kadin Bailey** is back after missing nearly the entire season with an injury.

Especially if you include Llewellyn, the safety position may have the best blend of depth, talent, and experience of any position group on the team. **Jason Marshall** and **Juan Salas** are both seniors who will help aide a cornerback room that is a question mark this season.

HC: Chris Creighton
(13th Year, 61-83)

OC: Mike Piatkowski
(4th Year)

Co-DC: Tate Omli
(1st Year)

Co-DC: Kasey Teegardin
(1st Year)

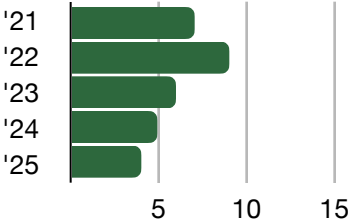
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
106

Transfer Portal
132

Via 24/7 Sports

EMU WIN TREND



2025 Results (4-8)

@ Texas State (L 27-52)
Long Island (L 23-28)
@ Kentucky (L 23-48)
Louisiana (W 34-31)
@ C. Michigan (L 13-34)
@ Buffalo (L 30-31 OT)
No. Illinois (W 16-10)
@ Miami (OH) (L 30-44)
Ohio (L 21-28)
Bowling Green (W 27-21)
@ Ball State (W 24-9)
W. Michigan (L 21-31)



BRYCE LLEWELLYN – S

Photo via @EMUFB on X

2026 EMU Schedule

Wk		
0	Sat, Aug 29	vs. Sacramento St.
1	Fri, Sep 4	vs. San Jose State
2	Sat, Sep 12	@ Michigan State
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Wisconsin
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. Lindenwood
5	Sat, Oct 3	@ UMass
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ Akron
7	Sat, Oct 17	vs. Toledo
8	Sat, Oct 24	@ Ohio
10	Wed, Nov 4	vs. C. Michigan
12	Tue, Nov 17	@ W. Michigan
13	Tue, Nov 24	vs. Kent State

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 4 vs. San Jose State: A rematch of the 2022 Potato Bowl, the Eagles welcome in a Spartans team who will be traveling cross-country on a short week. How will the Eastern secondary hold up against the vertical passing attack of San Jose State?

Nov 4 vs. Central Michigan: The Eagles will technically play host in this rivalry game at Ford Field in Detroit.

Nov 17 @ Western Michigan: The second leg of the Michigan MAC trophy, the Eagles are searching for their first win over the Broncos, winners of the MAC last season, since 2022.

Player Spotlight

Photo via @carterevans33 on X



CARTER EVANS – DE

Evans is an unquestioned leader on the defense and he happens to be one of the most disruptive, too. On multiple occasions last season he wore the coveted #0, awarded to the defensive player of the game. Entering his sixth season in Ypsilanti with a total of 36 games played in an Eastern Michigan uniform, could he post career numbers for the second consecutive year? Opposing quarterbacks, beware.

2025 STATS: 37 TKL, 5.5 TFL, 1.5 SACK, 1 FF

Photo via @ernulf on Instagram



**Noah
KIM**

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Eagles have historically produced high level talent at the kicking and punting positions. **Rudy Kessinger** performed well for a redshirt freshman and didn't miss a kick inside 40 yards. Replacing talented punter Mitchell Tomasek will be a very tall task.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Creighton is optimistic about the 2026 team. This is a veteran-laden team that didn't have to worry about the repercussions of a spring portal window. 19 of the 28 members of the freshman class were on campus in the spring. In total, the quarterback, top receiver, top tight end, top three tacklers, and kicker all return which is more than a lot of MAC opponents can say. Although there are some serious issues to address from last season such as run defense, it doesn't feel like Eastern Michigan has to start completely from scratch like they have in the past.

Road trips to Michigan State and Wisconsin will help pay the bills and could be body blows, but the early portion of the schedule still provides a potential window to a 4-2 start. The Eagles will need to capitalize on the opportunity for a fast start because the schedule ramps up from there. Included in that stretch is a period of almost 40 days in which the Eagles won't play a single home game. Creighton's teams have historically played in a lot of close games, don't be surprised if the Eagles turn a lot more of those contests in their favor in 2026.

Photo via 247 Sports



BRAYDON BENNETT – RB

With a 1,000-yard running back gone, there's a void at the running back position. He got a cup of coffee at Virginia Tech last season but his real damage came in the Sun Belt where he ran for 781 yards for the Chanticleers of Coastal Carolina. For his career, he averages 6.0 yards per carry and he's also a dynamic pass catcher who has a connection with QB Kim when both were in Conway, SC.

2025 STATS: 4 RUSH, 8 YDS, 1 TD (Virginia Tech)

Photo via Stadium Journey



Ryneearson Stadium (26,188)

Appointment Television



vs.



Wed, Nov 4 - 7:00 PM ET (TV TBD)

Eastern Michigan is the only team in the MAC (besides recent additions UMass and Sacramento State) who has never made an appearance in Detroit for the MAC Championship. Against the rival Chippewas, they'll get a taste of football in the Motor City. Is it possible that the Eagles will have completed a turnaround from last season's disappointing 4-8 campaign and be in contention at the top of the MAC standings by November 4?

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	24.1	90	Points	29.8	100
Rushing	142.5	82	Rushing	232.1	134
Passing	234.8	59	Passing	184.2	20
Total	377.2	76	Total	416.2	111
Sacks For/Against: 14/12			Turnover Margin: -6		

2026 Projection
7-5
6th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X 1

**MAC
Champions**

1987



2-5

**Bowl
Record**



O

**Playoff
Appearances**



KENT STATE GOLDEN FLASHES

2025 Record: 5-7 (4-4 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Kent, OH



Can Flashes Shock Again?

Mark Carney may have had the most impressive coaching performance of the 2025 season, and yes, that includes what happened in Bloomington, Indiana. Carney inherited the steepest rebuild in the sport with a floundering Golden Flashes team that had won just one game in two seasons (and that win came against an FCS opponent).

Despite the odds, Carney guided a young team that was picked apart in the transfer portal to a 5-7 season, a massive success considering the preseason expectations. In fact, two close losses against Buffalo and Ball State is ultimately what stood in front of the Golden Flashes from reaching just the fifth bowl game in program history. Last year's success leads to much higher expectations in 2026, what can Carney and his team do as an encore?

OFFENSE

One of the biggest reasons for Kent State's success, especially in MAC play, was the emergence of quarterback **Dru DeShields**. He posted a spectacular touchdown to interception ratio of 18/3 and used his quickness for another three touchdowns on the ground. Unlike last season, there's no question who the Kent State starting quarterback will be in 2026, and if DeShields can somehow beat his performance from last year, he'll be one of the best quarterbacks in the conference. His mobility and ability to make throws on the run and off-rhythm was a big reason why Kent State avoided a third straight season of 40+ sacks allowed. The offensive line could be improved this season and will ideally provide DeShields with more time in the pocket. Part of left tackle **Tyler Meadows**' initiation to the position as a true freshman was blocking Texas Tech's David Bailey, so it really only gets easier from here. **Dustyn Morell** is a veteran leader who earns the honor of wearing the #54 jersey.

If the performance of the offensive line is improved, then the Golden Flashes should run for more than 3 yards per carry for the first time since 2022. That is, assuming a host of new running backs can also take a step forward. DeShields is the team's leading returning rusher with just 36 yards (~150 yards if you negate sack yardage). Kent State will probably take a committee approach to the position until someone (hopefully) heats up. **Jakorion Caffey** and **Brandon White** will give defenses different looks with Caffey as the strong physical runner and White the more elusive speedster. **Donovan Delaney** is a power back and could be the featured option in short yardage situations.

Kent State's offensive numbers don't jump off the page, but the Golden Flashes were able to stay afloat with big plays. Cade Wofford, who departs, was a microcosm of that trend. He averaged a ridiculous 26.7 yards per catch and led the team with 7 touchdowns despite not receiving a target in the red zone. If there's someone who can take the top off the defense like Wofford did, it's probably **Da'Realyst Clark**. He was remarkable in the return game and should be a more significant part of the passing game. **Wayne Harris** was DeShields' favorite target in 2025 and that relationship should only deepen in 2026. **Jared Kelley** is a smaller wideout at 5'9" but the coaching staff was impressed by his 1-on-1 skills in spring ball.

DEFENSE

Cherokee Valeria was named the defensive coordinator with only a few weeks until the 2025 campaign kicked off, but he still managed to distinctly improve the Golden Flashes defense despite a group full of young, inexperienced players. The overall group is still young, but the lessons learned last season could prove invaluable. There is optimism from the program that there will be pressure generated on the interior through players like **Thomas Aden** and **Josue Cordoba**. That will be needed with question marks on the edge in the 4-3 formation Valeria employs.

After a brief stint at South Florida, **Rocco Nicholl** is back at his familiar linebacker position. His return is a welcome one considering 87% of the tackles from linebacker are gone from last year. **Trey Rubinstein** is a potential breakout player and has a great motor.

Because Kent State played so many run-heavy offenses, the corners didn't get tested a lot relatively speaking. **Derrick Johnson** and **Joel Cordoba** will hold it down at safety after both started as true freshmen.

HC: Mark Carney
(2nd Year, 5-7)

OC: Clay Patterson
(1st Year)

DC: Cherokee Valeria
(1st Year)

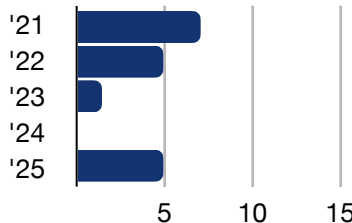
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
124

Transfer Portal
126

Via 24/7 Sports

KENT STATE WIN TREND



2025 Results (5-7)

Merrimack (W 21-17)
@ Texas Tech (L 14-62)
Buffalo (L 28-31)
@ Florida State (L 10-66)
@ Oklahoma (L 0-44)
UMass (W 42-6)
@ Toledo (L 10-45)
Bowling Green (W 24-21)
@ Ball State (L 13-17)
@ Akron (W 42-35 OT)
C. Michigan (L 16-28)
@ No. Illinois (W 35-31)

WAYNE HARRIS – WR

Photo via Kent State Athletics

2026 Kent State Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	@ South Carolina
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Wofford
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Ohio State
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. Ball State
5	Sat, Oct 3	vs. Ohio
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ W. Michigan
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ South Florida
8	Sat, Oct 24	vs. Akron
9	Fri, Oct 30	@ Sacramento St.
11	Tue, Nov 10	@ Bowling Green
12	Tue, Nov 17	vs. Miami (OH)
13	Tue, Nov 24	@ E. Michigan

■ Home ■ Away ■ Neutral

Key Games

Sep 26 vs. Ball State: As it turns out, a clutch Cardinal comeback drive in the fourth quarter is partially what prevented Kent State from getting that all-important sixth win. This time, the Golden Flashes welcome Ball State to town to kick off MAC play.

Oct 24 vs. Akron: The Battle for the Wagon Wheel will always have the utmost importance on the Kent State schedule, and it also happens to be a lone home game in a 31 day span.

Oct 30 @ Sacramento State: The Golden Flashes will embark on their longest road trip of the season on a short week to face the Hornets.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Kent State Athletics



DA'REALYST CLARK – WR

If there's any player on the roster who best embodies a "Golden Flash", it's Clark. His blinding speed got the best of both Merrimack and UMass. In fact, his 100+ yard kick return in the season opener ended up as the game winning touchdown and helped the Golden Flashes snap their losing streak. He even completed two passes last season and he's an instant threat for a big play.

2025 STATS: 3 REC, 108 YDS, 1 TD

Photo via @dru_deshields_22 on Instagram



**Dru
DESHIELDS**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Kent State was limited in the kicking department last season. Will Hryszko did make 8 of his 11 attempts, but the Golden Flashes ventured just one field goal attempt beyond 40 yards, and it missed. Is there an option on the roster who can help provide more range? Aussie punter **Jake Stoeckel** should elevate that operation. Da'Realyst Clark was an absolute menace in kick returns and took two to the house. He might almost be too talented for his own good as teams may avoid kicking the ball in his direction this season.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Kent State was quite literally the worst of any team in the FBS when Carney took over and he had the Golden Flashes a couple plays away from bowl eligibility, and most importantly claimed a win over "that team down the road." His team pulled off three upsets and two of those were away from Kent.

It would be easy to assume his team will take another jump in 2026, but it's not quite as simple or easy. The usual murderer's row of non-conference teams awaits the Golden Flashes, although this year they'll face only one team (probably) in the Top 25 as opposed to three like they did in 2025, and the games are more evenly distributed on the schedule. For a 10th straight season, there are only five home games, so the Golden Flashes will likely need to win two out of the three MAC road games against Sacramento State, Bowling Green, and Eastern Michigan. That could prove to be a tall task depending on how healthy this team remains, but Carney has overcome worse odds.

2026 Projection
4-8
7th in MAC

Photo via Opendorse



ROCCO NICHOLL – LB

Nicholl took a year hiatus at South Florida where he recorded seven tackles, a small sample of his proven production in past years with the Golden Flashes. Nicholl is back in Kent, and figures to be a leader in the middle of the defense. When he was last here, he posted a 61 tackle season and it'll only take a couple weeks into the season before he eclipses 100 career tackles. He's a huge piece in a young linebacker room.

2025 STATS: 7 TKL (South Florida)

Photo via @Profan9 on YouTube



Dix Stadium (27,363)

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Oct 24 - Time TBD

Last year's dramatic Battle for the Wagon Wheel needed overtime to decide a winner and there were a handful of lead changes along the way. This year, the rivalry shifts to Akron and the game will be played on a Saturday. In addition, the rivalry will be played as early in a season as it has since 2022. Four road games sandwich the meeting with Akron, so as always, this matchup is do-or-die.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	21.3	115	Points	33.6	128
Rushing	97.3	131	Rushing	191.4	121
Passing	197.1	100	Passing	236.0	102
Total	294.3	128	Total	427.4	125
Sacks For/Against: 24/27			Turnover Margin: -3		

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X 1

**MAC
Champions**

1972



1 -4

**Bowl
Record**



O

**Playoff
Appearances**



BOWLING GREEN FALCONS

2025 Record: 4-8 (2-6 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Bowling Green, OH



Can Falcons Soar to Bowl Game?

It's not surprising that one of the great running backs in the sport wanted his team to exude physicality and toughness in a run-heavy scheme. The actual execution of that system under Eddie George in year one was hit or miss, but it's also worth noting that he was hired very late in the coaching style.

What does year two look like for the Falcons? George put together the top recruiting class in the conference, and some of those freshman may factor in immediately considering Bowling Green is one of the least experienced teams in the country. To improve from last year and reach a bowl game, the Falcons need to take an important step forward against MAC competition, specifically.

OFFENSE

One of the main reasons why the run game wasn't as dynamic as George or the fan base had hoped is because quarterback play left a lot to be desired. Injuries played a definite factor, but between a rotation of four quarterbacks used last season, there was very little consistency. While **Hunter Najm** is the lone returner from that group, Oregon transfer **Austin Norovad** is the likely starter in 2026. While he saw very little playing time with the Ducks, that program rarely makes mistakes at the quarterback position, and the hope is that his ceiling is very high and he easily adjusts to the starting role. If the Falcons are looking for more of a running threat, **Jay Kastantin** fits that mold and he does bring playing experience, albeit at the DII level.

Because the Falcons want to run the ball a lot, they'll rely on multiple bodies at running back, although **Austin Dendy** might be the most featured option considering his strong finish to the 2025 campaign. **Ke'Marion Baldwin** had a productive season at Charleston Southern. This room will really need to step up with uncertainties on the offensive line. The Falcons graduate all five starters up front, so a position that was a strength last season with 100+ career starts becomes a major question mark in 2026.

The receiver room can really only improve, and the struggles partially contributed to the offensive coordinator being let go in November. Greg Nosal remains in place now as the sole coordinator and he'll rely on **Brennan Ridley** and **Winn Sharp** to make noise in the passing game. In a way, it helps that Bowling Green is another year removed from Harold Fannin's record-breaking 2024 season. He left impossible shoes to fill and the Falcons felt his departure. Still, tight end is a focus of this scheme and there will most often be two of them on the field together. **Eli Jacon-Duffy** made a handful of starts last season as a freshman and could end up as the top tight end option.

DEFENSE

The Falcons regressed on defense relative to 2024, but there was only one starter back in 2025 and inconsistencies on the other side of the ball didn't help either, so this group probably overachieved last season. Once again, there's not a lot of returning production this year, so it's a challenge defensive coordinator Joe Bowden must face in his first year in the role. Up front, the group is led by **Myles Bradley** who generated 27 pressures last season. Although he flirted with the portal, his return is a needed one for the Falcons. **Eriq George**, Eddie's son, will move to the interior after recording four sacks on the edge in 2025.

The linebacker position might be the biggest question mark on the roster, and the Falcons will need to lean into Bowden's half decade of experience as a linebackers coach. This group loses the heartbeat of the 2025 defense in Gideon Lampron, whose 119 tackles and 15 tackles for loss will be employed by Colorado this season. **Dorian Pringle** was putting up gaudy numbers at the beginning of the season alongside Lampron, but an ACL tear ended his season in September. A lot will be asked of Pringle this year even as he rebounds from his injury, and depth is a concern at the position as a whole.

The cornerback position is also a question mark. **Jojo Johnson** broke up 13 passes last year and will be looked to as the top corner in 2026. Returning safeties **Preston Estoesta** and **Kal-el Pascal** will need to take a step forward and help the Falcons improve on vertical passing defense.

HC: Eddie George
(2nd Year, 4-8)

OC: Greg Nosal
(4th Year)

DC: Joe Bowden
(1st Year)

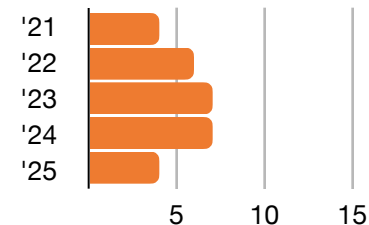
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
70

Transfer Portal
119

Via 24/7 Sports

BOWLING GREEN WIN TREND



2025 Results (4-8)

Lafayette (W 26-7)

@ Cincinnati (L 20-34)

Liberty (W 23-13)

@ Louisville (L 17-40)

@ Ohio (L 20-35)

Toledo (W 28-23)

C. Michigan (L 6-27)

@ Kent State (L 21-24)

Buffalo (L 3-28)

@ E. Michigan (L 21-27)

Akron (L 16-19)

@ UMass (W 45-14)

MYLES BRADLEY – DE

Photo via BGSU Athletics

2026 BGSU Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	vs. Tarleton
2	Sat, Sep 12	@ Nebraska
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Iowa State
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. South Florida
5	Sat, Oct 3	@ Miami (OH)
6	Sat, Oct 10	vs. Sacramento St.
7	Sat, Oct 17	vs. Ball State
8	Sat, Oct 24	@ Buffalo
9	Sat, Oct 31	@ W. Michigan
11	Tue, Nov 10	vs. Kent State
12	Fri, Nov 20	@ Toledo
13	Sat, Nov 28	vs. UMass

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 26 vs. South Florida: Two former Buckeyes face off against one another as head coaches for the first time. The Falcons face an already tough non-conference schedule, so a win against the Bulls would build major momentum heading into MAC play.

Nov 20 @ Toledo: George took down the Rockets in his first try in the rivalry, can he repeat success on the road?

Nov 28 vs. UMass: The Falcons snapped a five game losing streak against the Minutemen to end the 2025 campaign, will the meeting in 2026 be a potential bowl clinching matchup?

Player Spotlight

Photo via BGSU Athletics



KAL-EL PASCAL – S

After appearing in spot duty as a true freshman, Pascal started every game in 2025 and made the most of his elevated role. Now the team's leading returning tackler, the most experienced Falcon in the secondary will play an even bigger role as Bowling Green brings along a new look cornerback room. While he'll aid the cornerbacks, he'll also jump into the mix to help stop the run game.

2025 STATS: 80 TKL, 3.5 TFL, 1 INT

Photo via BGSU Athletics



ERIQ GEORGE – DT

Ironically, the son of a Heisman-winning running back will be tasked with stopping the run for the Eagles. He flashed his skills last season when he made the jump from the FCS to the MAC, and now he takes on a new challenge - changing positions. At defensive end, he tallied four sacks and he'll line up on the interior this season. If history tells us anything, it's that he'll make this transition smoothly and be impactful.

2025 STATS: 26 TKL, 4.5 TFL, 4 SACK

Photo via ESPN



Doyt Perry Stadium (33,527)

Photo via BGSU Athletics



**Austin
DENDY**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Special teams was a strength for the Falcons last year, but that group must be retooled in 2026. **Travis Kenner** has served as the team's holder the past two seasons but will now have a teammate hold for him as he battles for the starting kicker role. **Ryan Kingston** returns to the MAC after two years at Eastern Michigan and, more recently, a stop at Southeast Missouri. Based on his FCS numbers, he has a chance to improve upon Bowling Green's 2025 performance.

THE BOTTOM LINE

There's uncertainty on both sides of the ball and a tough non-conference schedule makes the outlook for the season a bit more cloudy. The Falcons will likely be working uphill when it comes to bowl game eligibility since a 1-3 record to begin the season is likely, and the first conference game is a tough road game at Miami. Fortunately, the home MAC slate is very manageable (at least, according to preseason expectations) and the Falcons will need to do damage at Doyt Perry Stadium to have a shot at six wins.

In the long term, although last year's 4-8 record may have tempered expectations, there is still optimism that the Eddie George era will be a success. A win over Toledo was a great start and recruiting has picked up as well. At risk of stating the obvious, the key to keep momentum moving in the right direction will be to turn in positive results on the field. Better quarterback play will go a long way in helping the offense and will prevent opponents from stacking the box to negate the run game. A better offense will also help protect a defense that might be a work in progress in the early stages of the season. Reaching a bowl game won't be easy, but it is achievable.

Appointment Television



VS.



Fri, Nov 20 - 7:30 PM ET (ESPN2)

Eddie George won the I-75 rivalry in his first attempt, and now he and the Falcons will try to prevent new Toledo coach Mike Jacobs from doing the same. George and Jacobs narrowly missed one another's playing careers in Columbus. Turning the attention to the rivalry, the all-time series is deadlocked at 43-43-4, which makes a late November matchup on a Friday night that much more of a blockbuster.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	20.5	117	Points	24.3	64
Rushing	155.5	71	Rushing	141.4	55
Passing	151.3	126	Passing	201.7	40
Total	306.8	124	Total	343.1	42
Sacks For/Against: 22/28			Turnover Margin: +2		

2026 Projection

4-8

8th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X 12

**MAC
Champions**



5-10

**Bowl
Record**



0

**Playoff
Appearances**



BALL STATE CARDINALS

2025 Record: 4-8 (3-5 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Muncie, IN



"Coach U" in Year Two

Although the Cardinals turned in their fourth straight losing season, there's hope that head coach Mike Uremovich (or "Coach U") laid a foundation for success during the 2025 season. His team was actually still in the mix for a bowl game and even MAC title contention heading into November, but three straight losses by an average margin of more than 21 points squashed those hopes. Although the finish to the season was disappointing, the Cardinals had their best showing in front of their home fans in recent memory and an upset over Ohio was a major achievement.

To keep building on that foundation, Coach U must guide a much younger group of players through a tricky schedule and must improve Ball State's consistency on the road. Year three in a system is often when there is the biggest "pop" and that could be the case here in Muncie too, but could the Cardinals overachieve in year two?

OFFENSE

Uremovich isn't afraid of shaping the offensive scheme around the strengths and traits of his quarterback. For Kael Kelly, that meant a run heavy scheme in which the QB has largely featured and ended up as the team's leading rusher. With a completely revamped quarterback room, there should be a little more balance as **Keldric Luster** takes over. While the 5'10" 248-pound quarterback is a surprisingly agile runner, his arm talent is what could drive the offense down the field and score more points beyond just the 15.8 tallied per game in 2025.

Ball State might employ a running back by committee approach, but, according to the program's internal outlook, it's not because they are searching for capable weapons. Rather, the Cardinals feel confident in multiple backs on the roster including leading returner **TJ Horton**. If there is a player who emerges as a true RB1 candidate, it might be **Jalen Bonds** who received praise in spring for his blend of patience and power.

Although just about every pass catcher is gone, there's hope that the group as a whole will be a lot more productive with a better thrower at quarterback. Seven new players enter from the transfer portal at wide receiver and tight end. It's a little uncertain how the roles will shake out, but returner **Donovan Hamilton** might be the top option. Tight ends are a key part of the blocking scheme, so there probably won't be a Tanner Koziol-caliber pass catcher. That group will aid an offensive line led by **Chris Hood**. **Tristan Cook** is a veteran bruiser at the other tackle position.

DEFENSE

With minimal scoring from the offense, the defense helped carry the Cardinals to their four wins this season. The challenge now is to replace almost 80% of the production from last year's veteran group that is now a lot greener. The loss of Nathan Voorhis alone leaves the coaching staff with a lot of work to do on the defensive line. The staff likes the overall depth up front with projected starters **Ben Marsh** and **Ameir Glenn**, but replacing Voorhis' 12 sacks from last season is a tall task, and the Cardinals will have to prove they can meet that challenge.

The biggest question on the roster might be the linebacker position. Essentially every inside linebacker who played for the Cardinals has departed, primarily via graduation. For the most part, this year's starting group will be players who have been in defensive coordinator Jeff Knowles' system for at least a year, but who haven't seen many snaps in real action. **Cincear Lewis** is a potential breakout candidate and transfers in from Cincinnati.

The secondary got a big boost when **Willizhuan Yates** came back to campus after spending time in the portal. His 34 tackles from the cornerback position are tied with safety **DJ Fields** as the most from any returner. **Sterling Smith** transfers in from Purdue and is expected to join Fields as the other starting safety position. A lot more will be asked of this group assuming the sack numbers and havoc plays dip on the defensive line. In Knowles' 3-4 scheme, the Cardinals need to find a reliable starter at the hybrid "sniper" position. The secondary as a whole is still a question, but not as big as the one hanging over the front seven.

HC: Mike Uremovich
(2nd Year, 4-8)

DC: Jeff Knowles
(3rd Year)

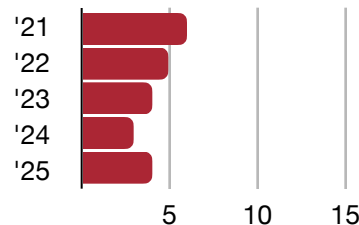
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
111

Transfer Portal
111

Via 24/7 Sports

BALL STATE WIN TREND



2025 Results (4-8)

@ Purdue (L 0-31)

@ Auburn (L 3-42)

New Hampshire (W 34-29)

@ UConn (L 25-31)

Ohio (W 20-14)

@ W. Michigan (L 0-42)

Akron (W 42-28)

@ Northern Illinois (L 7-21)

Kent State (W 17-13)

E. Michigan (L 9-24)

@ Toledo (L 9-38)

@ Miami (OH) (L 24-45)



WILL YATES – CB

Photo via Ball State Athletics

2026 Ball State Schedule

Wk		
1	Sat, Sep 5	@ Ohio State
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Stony Brook
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Liberty
4	Sat, Sep 26	@ Kent State
5	Sat, Oct 3	vs. Toledo
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ Northwestern
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ Bowling Green
8	Sat, Oct 24	vs. Sacramento St.
10	Wed, Nov 4	@ UMass
11	Wed, Nov 11	vs. Buffalo
12	Tue, Nov 17	@ Ohio
13	Sat, Nov 28	vs. C. Michigan

■ Home ■ Away ■ Neutral

Key Games

Oct 3 vs. Toledo: A rare home game sandwiched between four road games, could the Cardinals take a Rockets team under a first-year head coach by surprise?

Oct 24 vs. Sacramento State: The internet's favorite game of the season, the Hornets will travel to what is technically their closest MAC opponent for the first time ever.

Nov 11 vs. Buffalo: The Cardinals still had a chance at a bowl game last season with three games left to play but finished the year 0-3. Those misfortunes in the final three games can't be repeated if the Cardinals take down the Bulls.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Ball State Athletics



KELDRIC LUSTER – QB

There aren't a lot of quarterbacks in college football that check in at 248 pounds, but Luster's size allows him to run the ball almost like a running back. That is, a running back with a cannon attached to his shoulder. His arm talent should elevate the passing game this season, especially in the nitty gritty of MAC play. The SMU and Texas State transfer will need to quickly build relationships with a new receiver room.

2025 STATS: 28 YDS (Texas State)

Photo via @donovanhamiltonn on Instagram



DONOVAN HAMILTON – WR

After redshirting at Purdue in 2024, Hamilton was thrown in the mix as a redshirt freshman last year and he adjusted well to a bigger role, finishing second on the team in receiving yards even if he recorded just 244 yards. As essentially the only returner in the wide receiver room, could his experience in the system help build a connection with new quarterback Luster? If so, his production should surge in 2026.

2025 STATS: 20 REC, 244 YDS

Photo via Wikipedia



Schuemann Stadium (22,500)

via Ball State Athletics



**TJ
HORTON**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Special teams play was inconsistent at best last season. Ball State connected on only 9 of their 16 field goal attempts and the Cardinals didn't flip the field often despite punting 71 times. As a result, the kicker and punting roles (and long snapping for that matter) were all up for grabs in fall camp. **Brady Boehm** could theoretically solve the kicking and punting issues in one fell swoop.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Even with a heavy focus on the run game last year, the Cardinals still allowed 49 sacks which contributed to a choppy passing attack. To improve and take a step forward in year two under Coach U, the Cardinals need more consistent offensive line play. The offense struggled mightily away from Scheumann Stadium which led to an 0-7 record away from the friendly confines. That side of the ball will need to show stark improvement considering the losses sustained on defense.

For a second straight year, there are only five home games on the docket. Luckily, there are winnable games at home. The path to a bowl looks like replicating the 4-1 home record from 2025 while winning two on the road. It's possible, but far from a guarantee. Winning six games would be a major achievement for Coach U and the Cards.

Appointment Television



VS.



Sat, Oct 24 - Time TBD

Yes, the internet will have a field day with this game, but it's a matchup that could end up carrying a lot of importance for Ball State. With Northern Illinois off to the Mountain West and no Miami on the schedule this season, the Cardinals don't play a true rival in 2026. Could a unique rivalry develop with the Hornets? They're still three time zones apart, but Ball State is the closest MAC team to Sacramento.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	15.8	132	Points	29.8	103
Rushing	131.8	98	Rushing	178.8	107
Passing	139.9	130	Passing	226.8	83
Total	271.7	134	Total	405.7	104
Sacks For/Against: 23/49			Turnover Margin: -3		

2026 Projection
4-8
9th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

National
Champions



X6

MAC
Champions

1976
1978
1989
1993
1996
2020



1 - 8

Bowl
Record



0

Playoff
Appearances



BUFFALO BULLS

2025 Record: 5-7 (4-4 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Buffalo, NY



A Bulls Bounce Back?

After a remarkable first season under new head coach Pete Lembo, the Bulls couldn't quite capture the same magic in 2025 and scuffed their way to a 5-7 record. November struggles, a common theme for Buffalo in the 2020s, popped up once again and a second-straight bowl game appearance slipped through their fingers three weeks in a row.

Ironically, total offense and total defense was improved in 2025 compared to the previous season. However, the win column didn't translate due to turnover issues and struggles in close games. In fact, all but two of the seven losses came by a single possession. After posting a 5-1 record at home in 2024, the Bulls won just one home conference game all year. Can Lembo get this team to resemble the 2024 squad, or will Buffalo be on the outside looking in at the postseason again in 2026?

OFFENSE

Ta'Quon Robertson threw for better than 2,500 yards, but the trade off was 12 interceptions. Because the defense struggled to generate turnovers of their own, the result was a turnover margin of -7 compared to +9 in 2024. His replacement will be either **Elijah Holmes** or **Jason Wright**. Holmes posted a very respectable season at the Division II level and has a lot more experience, but that level of play needs to translate to the FBS. Wright was on the roster last year but was used exclusively as a runner. In any case, the quarterback run should be a more significant piece of the UB offense.

Buffalo may be a running-back-by-committee operation while they figure out what life looks like post- Al-Jay Henderson who paced the Bulls with 755 yards. That was almost more than every other runner on the team combined. **Terrance Shelton** could be the eventual RB1 and he was the primary backup to Henderson when he was dealing with health issues. The between the tackles runner represented the team at MAC Media Days which might be an indication he'll be heavily involved this season. If all of that goes to plan, **James McNeil** could be his backup and a featured option in short yardage situations. While a mobile quarterback will help, the offensive line is a potential concern. A group that returns only one starter was beat up in the spring and didn't have a chance to work together as much as Buffalo would have wanted. The lone returner is **Alex Heininger** who missed all of spring due to shoulder surgery.

The Bulls have the unenviable task of replacing not one but two first team all-MAC wide receivers. Nik McMillan was the outside threat while Victor Snow was the reliable target in the slot. **Jasaiah Gathings** was the third option in that trio and now is the expected top target for whichever quarterback emerges as the starter. **Chance Morrow** is the only other returner with production from last year's team. **Tyrell Simmons** was a standout in high school and could help answer the questions at wide receiver.

DEFENSE

Brian Dougherty is the new defensive coordinator, but he's not new to Buffalo following three seasons as the nickel and safety coach. It's no surprise that he'll keep the nickel 4-2-5 formation as the main strategy heading into 2026. The Bulls have collected 30+ sacks in each of the last two seasons, but a trifecta will be a challenge considering most of the production from last year is gone. **Stantavious Smith** stood out in the spring game and recorded two tackles from his tackle position. True freshman **Malachi Ervin** is the second-highest ranked recruit in program history, so it may only be a matter of time before he sees the field at defensive end.

Linebacker play has been extraordinary the last two seasons. Shaun Dolac and Red Murdoch were absolute stars and both are now in the NFL. Murdoch capped off a wonderful career with a whopping 142 tackles. Replacing his production will be virtually impossible considering he leaves college football as the career leader in forced fumbles.

SaVeon Brown won't be a 1-for-1 replacement, but he's a versatile athlete who will make important contributions at both linebacker and nickel. The secondary is somewhat young, but **Kobi Blackwell** emerged from his trial-by-fire at corner as a freshman with the team lead in pass breakups.

HC: Pete Lembo
(3rd Year, 14-11)

OC: Tony Tokarz
(1st Year)

DC: Brian Dougherty
(1st Year)

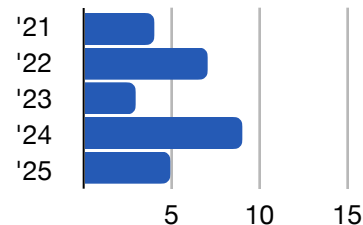
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
95

Transfer Portal
116

Via 24/7 Sports

BUFFALO WIN TREND



2025 Results (5-7)

@ Minnesota (L 10-23)
Saint Francis (W 45-6)
@ Kent State (W 31-28)
Troy (L 17-21)
UConn (L 17-20)
E. Michigan (W 31-30 OT)
@ UMass (W 28-21)
Akron (L 16-24)
@ Bowling Green (W 28-3)
@ C. Michigan (L 19-38)
Miami (OH) (L 20-37)
Ohio (L 26-31)

CHANCE MORROW – WR

Photo via @ubuffalofb on Instagram

2026 Buffalo Schedule

Wk		
1	Thu, Sep 3	vs. Albany
2	Sat, Sep 12	@ Florida Intl
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Penn State
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. Robert Morris
5	Sat, Oct 3	vs. W. Michigan
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ Toledo
7	Sat, Oct 17	vs. UMass
8	Sat, Oct 24	vs. Bowling Green
10	Tue, Nov 3	@ Miami (OH)
11	Wed, Nov 11	@ Ball State
12	Wed, Nov 18	vs. C. Michigan
13	Fri, Nov 27	@ Akron

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Oct 3 vs. Western Michigan: With schedule shifts, the Bulls and Broncos have faced off only once in the last four seasons. MAC play kicks off against the defending champs.

Oct 17 vs. UMass: With the Minutemen's return to the MAC, Buffalo has a conference opponent nearby and the two schools have dubbed the blossoming rivalry the "Flagship Cup." The Bulls survived with a wild comeback with only :41 remaining last year.

Nov 18 vs. Central Michigan: The Bulls went 0-3 in bowl-clinching opportunities, including the Chips in 2025. Can that change this year?

Player Spotlight

Photo via @ubuffalo on Instagram



JASALIAH GATHINGS – WR

In a loaded receiver room, Gathings was the tertiary option last season for the Bulls, but he's also no stranger from being the premier threat in the passing game. With Akron in 2023, he posted a career high 575 yards and was named to an All-MAC team. He was an important piece of UConn's 2024 team and now could benefit from staying in the same system for more than one year with the Bulls.

2025 STATS: 36 REC, 410 YDS, 3 TDS

Photo via UB Athletics



SAVEON BROWN – LB

Buffalo has had some of the best linebacker play in the entire country over the last two years. Brown is talented in his own right and should be a featured star for the Bulls in 2026. He's not a prototypical linebacker in the same sense as Shaun Dolac and Red Murdoch, but his ability to play all over the field in the nickel role sets him apart. As his role expands this season, so too should his production.

2025 STATS: 52 TKL, 6.5 TFL, 2 SACK

Photo via University at Buffalo



UB Stadium (31,000)



Miles
GREER

SPECIAL TEAMS

Buffalo was superb in special teams last year in just about every aspect. The Bulls managed to block four punts, and Victor Snow was dangerous as a punt returner. The kicking/punting duo was arguably the best tandem in the MAC. Those pieces are all gone and the lone returner in the unit as a whole is Shelton as a kick returner. However, as the projected starting running back, will that role fall to someone else? In totality, the special teams unit of 2025 is a very hard act to follow in 2026.

THE BOTTOM LINE

A combination of too many turnovers on offense and not enough turnovers on defense made it difficult to gain an edge in close games. That trend will need to change in 2026 considering the significant amount of production that left this offseason. The Bulls will lean on the run game this season, but success in that endeavor will come down to the play of the offensive line. As long as there isn't a huge drop off in quarterback pressure, the defensive strength likely lies in the secondary.

In terms of the schedule, it's a manageable non-conference slate especially when compared to other teams in the MAC. There is a road trip to Penn State, and it will be important for the Bulls to emerge relatively unscathed. Last year, the offensive line was jumbled as they tried to backfill due to injuries from the non-conference, and the resulting performance in MAC play reflected those issues. There are two FCS opponents on the schedule, so the Bulls will need to hit seven wins this season to be bowl eligible. If they achieve that mark, they'll take aim at five bowl wins in a row.

2026 Projection
4-8
10th in MAC

Appointment Television



VS.



Wed, Nov 18 - Time TBD

Last year, a game against the Chippewas kicked off an unfortunate 0-3 streak in games in which the Bulls could have clinched their second straight bowl game. This year, a mid-week MACtion game wraps up the home slate. Will the Bulls have an opportunity to clinch the postseason like they did last year? If nothing else, Buffalo will have a chance to improve on their 2-5 2025 record at UB Stadium.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	24.0	93	Points	23.5	55
Rushing	132.3	96	Rushing	157.2	80
Passing	229.0	64	Passing	186.4	23
Total	361.3	86	Total	343.6	44
Sacks For/Against: 36/24			Turnover Margin: -7		

Trophy Case



XO

National
Champions



X 1

MAC
Champions

2008



4-3

Bowl
Record



0

Playoff
Appearances



AKRON ZIPS

2025 Record: 5-7 (4-4 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Akron, OH



The Build to a Bowl

It's been a long, grueling process, but the Zips have slowly but surely increased their win total throughout Joe Moorhead's tenure. Even last season, when the Zips were ruled ineligible for a bowl game and theoretically didn't have anything to play for, Akron still surged and won four conference games for the first time since 2017. That season also happened to be the last time the Zips went bowling. A decade later, can Akron clinch those all-important six victories?

There's no guarantee that Akron will hit the six-win mark, especially with a non-conference schedule that includes two Power 4 road trips and a home game against Mountain West favorites UNLV. However, there's enough continuity within both the roster and coaching staff to give the Zips a real shot at giving their fans something to cheer about.

OFFENSE

The quarterback position may be a work in progress this year. After longtime starter Ben Finley posted the best statistical season since Moorhead took over, the Zips found his replacement in Miami and North Texas transfer Reese Poffenbarger. Or, at least they thought they found Finley's replacement. Unfortunately, Poffenbarger was denied eligibility for the 2026 season at the very last second, leaving **Brayden Roggow** as the likely QB1. He saw limited playing time last season, completing 11 of 17 passes for 91 yards, but at least he's familiar with the system used by Moorhead. That system has sometimes included a run-first quarterback to handle snaps in certain situations. If that's a part of the offense in 2026, **Cibastian Broughton** is probably the one running it.

Akron did well to hang onto **Jordan Gant**, a 1,000-yard rusher for the Zips, and it's actually the first time they've had such a prolific returning runner on the roster since joining the FBS. The depth should be improved around him this season with players like **Gavin Curry** and **Chris Gee** joining from the portal. Meanwhile, **Sean Patrick** returns 274 yards. Although Gant was a solid bell cow, the Zips still have lots of room for improvement in the run game, especially when it comes to explosive plays. A veteran offensive line led by **Colin Lyons** should help.

Quarterback uncertainty could put a damper on what might be Moorhead's best receiver room he's had. **Marcel William**'s return at WR1 has a lot to do with this group's potential success. **Kyan Mason** is also back after a strong redshirt freshman season that included 481 yards. In total, this is a bigger and longer wide receiver room that could win a lot of 50-50 battles. The tight end position plays a big role in Moorhead's offense, so look for **Conner Cravaack** and Michigan State transfer **Wyatt Hook** to be impactful.

DEFENSE

From a statistical perspective, last year's defense was the best it has been under Moorhead and defensive coordinator Tim Tibesar by a pretty wide margin. Although the 26 sacks collected by last year's Zips team is a run-of-the-mill number nationally, for Akron, it was a major step in the right direction. Unfortunately, many of the producers from last year's defense, including the top eight tacklers, must be replaced. A key catalyst for the 2026 season is **Cyrus Durham**, who entered the portal but eventually opted to return. **Ronald Hull** started all 12 games on the interior of the defensive line last year and his production will be key once again.

The linebacker position is a major question mark. The Zips will need to lean on their transfers at this position and it's quite possible the roles themselves won't be fully settled until the season kicks off. **Donelius Johnson** didn't play last season due to injury, but he was a productive member of Kennesaw State in 2024. Tibesar's scheme typically funnels the play towards the linebackers, so how successful the defense can be as a whole will depend a lot on who ends up emerging at this position.

The secondary returns **Aamii Branch** and **Mehki Flowers**. Branch, along with **Alex Branch** (no relation) could both feature at the nickel position. At safety, **Daymon David** is coming off of back-to-back seasons that ended prematurely due to knee injuries, but he is an outstanding player when healthy. Who slots in at starting corner is a question, but there's at least several candidates with legitimate experience.

HC: Joe Moorhead
(5th Year, 13-35)

DC: Tim Tibesar
(5th Year)

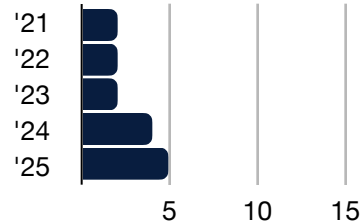
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
134

Transfer Portal
124

Via 24/7 Sports

AKRON WIN TREND



2025 Results (5-7)

Wyoming (L 0-10)
@ Nebraska (L 0-68)
@ UAB (L 28-31)
Duquesne (W 51-7)
@ Toledo (L 3-45)
C. Michigan (W 28-22)
Miami (OH) (L 7-20)
@ Ball State (L 28-42)
@ Buffalo (W 24-16)
UMass (W 44-10)
Kent State (L 35-42 OT)
@ Bowling Green (W 19-16)

JORDAN GANT – RB

Photo via Mid-American Conference

2026 Akron Schedule

Wk		
1	Thu, Sep 3	@ Wake Forest
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Robert Morris
3	Sat, Sep 19	@ Minnesota
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. UNLV
5	Sat, Oct 3	@ C. Michigan
6	Sat, Oct 10	vs. E. Michigan
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ Miami (OH)
8	Sat, Oct 24	@ Kent State
10	Tue, Nov 3	vs. Ohio
11	Tue, Nov 10	vs. W. Michigan
12	Wed, Nov 18	@ UMass
13	Fri, Nov 27	vs. Buffalo

■ Home ■ Away ■ Neutral

Key Games

Sep 26 vs. UNLV: Moorhead was Dan Mullen's successor at Mississippi State, and now the two coaches face off against one another. A win would be a major feather in the cap for the Zips.

Oct 24 @ Kent State: The Zips would like to prevent a back-to-back winner in the Wagon Wheel Rivalry for the first time since Akron did it in 2022. That year also happens to be the last time this game was played on a Saturday.

Nov 27 vs. Buffalo: If everything has gone to plan and Akron is poised to improve their win total yet again, could the season finale against the Bulls be the game that clinches a bowl?

Player Spotlight

Photo via @iamcmd_ on Instagram

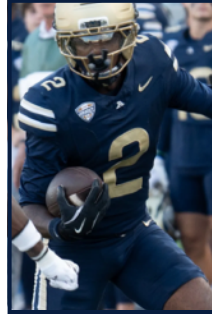


CYRUS DURHAM – DE

Pressure on the quarterback has been hard to come by recently, but Durham's play in 2025 was one of the reason's why the Zips topped 25 sacks for the first time in nearly a decade. With the majority of those 25 sacks gone in 2026, Durham will have even more responsibility in making life difficult for opposing quarterbacks. Akron eagerly welcomes his return after he briefly dipped his toes in the portal.

2025 STATS: 31 TKL, 8.5 TFL, 3 SACK

Photo via Akron Beacon Journal



MARCEL WILLIAMS – WR

For a quarterback who is being thrown into the starting role at the last minute, Williams is a great safety blanket to have. As a freshman, he started all 12 games and led the team in receptions and yards. He endeared himself to the Akron fanbase with a breakout 206-yard performance against rival Kent State that also included both of his receiving touchdowns. Expect the sophomore to find the end zone more in 2026.

2025 STATS: 45 REC, 641 YDS, 2 TDS

Photo via Ohio Football Stadiums



InfoCision Stadium (30,000)

via Akron Athletics



**Matthew
SCRAMM**

SPECIAL TEAMS

Matthew Schramm missed just one field goal last season, and it was from 40+. Now as the full-time starter, he should help give a meager special teams unit from 2025 a boost. **Joseph Castle** is back at punter, and as long as the punt return coverage is better, there should be improvement in field position play, too.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Akron has been through the ringer. As if a five-year stretch with a record of 7-47 wasn't enough, academic issues not only prevented the Zips from being bowl eligible last season, but practice time was affected, too. Those problems are hopefully behind the program, which means Moorhead can run his system with a full compliment of practice hours for the first time in three years.

There are still lingering questions on what support Moorhead and this team have from both a fan and athletic department perspective, even though there have been improvements. However, one thing is for certain, a bowl game appearance would cure a lot of what has ailed the Zips over nearly a decade. Akron has just three postseason appearances in their history and only one bowl win (2015 Potato Bowl). To reach that point this season, the Zips will need to take care of business at home (probably going no worse than 4-1) and claim a couple upsets on the road.

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Oct 24 (Time TBD)

Is there anything more college football than two teams (whose campuses are a mere 10 miles away) measuring their entire season's success on bringing home a wooden wagon wheel? It's beautiful. Three of the last four games in this series have been decided by a touchdown or less, including an overtime affair that went the way of the Golden Flashes. Can the Zips similarly spoil the party in Kent in 2026?

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	22.3	108	Points	27.4	86
Rushing	134.5	94	Rushing	155.3	78
Passing	219.0	79	Passing	229.2	87
Total	353.5	94	Total	384.4	81
Sacks For/Against: 26/35			Turnover Margin: +3		

2026 Projection

4-8

11th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



X 1

**MAC
Champions**

2005



1 - 2

**Bowl
Record**



O

**Playoff
Appearances**



SACRAMENTO STATE HORNETS

2025 Record: 7-5 (FCS)

Mid-American Conference

Sacramento, CA



The FBS Adventure Begins

Welcome to the FBS, Sacramento State! While the Mountain West and PAC-12 didn't necessarily extend an inviting hand like the program would have preferred, the MAC welcomes in the new kid on the block and backfills Northern Illinois' departure. Success was hit or miss in the FCS, but the Hornets did make three straight playoff appearances from 2021-2023 and they missed out on the postseason by only a single game last year.

It's a brand new ball game in 2026, Sacramento State has never faced a MAC opponent in their history. There hasn't been a ton of success against the FBS historically, but the Hornets did sting Stanford in 2023 after wiping out Colorado State in a landslide the year before. There will be lots of learning to do for this program in 2026 and new head coach Alonzo Carter will be the one to help forge the path.

OFFENSE

The passing game was inconsistent last season to say the least. In a do-or-die season finale against UC Davis with a spot in the FCS playoffs on the line, the Hornets completed only three passes. To solve this issue, Sacramento State is going back to the future with quarterback **Carson Conklin**. Most recently, Conklin saw a brief spell of playing time at Fresno State and actually helped take down the eventual Mountain West champions Boise State. However, in 2024, Conklin was an FCS freshman All-American with these same Hornets, setting school records for a freshman with nearly 3,000 passing yards and 28 touchdowns. Conklin's return should make the offense (or at the very least the passing game) much more dynamic.

There will be major personnel changes at running back with 377 carries gone from last year's group. **Jamar Curtis** was actually the projected RB1 heading into last year, but injuries slowed him down significantly. If healthy, he's a very capable back who is very strong and isn't afraid to run over defenders. **Davion Godley** rushed for 512 yards for Weber State last year and transfers in. There are other transfers who will take reps and true freshman **Isaiah Ene** is a player to watch. The offensive line is a potential concern especially as the Hornets adjust to FBS defenses. Almost all of last year's starting unit graduated, so there are question marks at almost every position.

Wide receiver production should surge relative to last season with **Onterio Smith** as a potential WR1 candidate. Although it may end up being receiver by committee, Smith's route running skills and NFL heritage may help him both literally and figuratively separate at the position. **Jace Wilson** gives the Hornets a mismatch to exploit in the red zone with his athletic 6'4" frame. Transfers round out the wide receiver position. At tight end, look for **Jordan Williams** to have a bigger impact.

DEFENSE

After a rough showing in 2024, the defense improved from 34.8 points per game allowed to 26.3 in 2025. New defensive coordinator Adam Clark will primarily arrange his team in a 3-4 formation, but he'll add lots of creative wrinkles in the secondary in an attempt to trick and confuse opposing quarterbacks into throwing interceptions. That plan only works if catalysts like **Xavier Williams** can sustain pressure on the quarterback. Last year's group generated 38 sacks in only 12 games. That number may prove difficult to replicate in 2026, but the Hornets do at least have FBS-size at their disposal up front with players like **Jamel Howard** and **Malachi Kindle**.

Linebacker will likely be position of strength on the defense and it's one of the few units on the team that brings back meaningful starts from last season. **Derek Houston** is an impact player for this defense and his presence was sorely missed when he sustained an injury in the middle of the season and was lost for the year. If fully healthy, he's capable of 80+ tackles. In general, the linebacker corps will be critical to help slow down several run-happy MAC offenses.

The secondary is a major unknown, especially at cornerback. Sacramento State will need to hit on their portal signings, and pass defense could be a work in progress this season. Portland State transfer **Dionte Thornton** is a likely starting candidate at corner considering his experience gained last year with the Vikings.

HC: Alonzo Carter
(1st Year, 0-0)

OC: Eric Kiesau
(1st Year)

DC: Adam Clark
(1st Year)

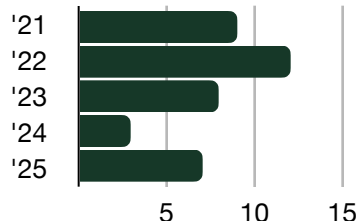
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
128

Transfer Portal
93

Via 24/7 Sports

SAC ST. WIN TREND (FCS)



2025 Results (7-5)

@ South Dakota St. (L 3-20)
@ Nevada (L 17-20)
Mercyhurst (W 49-28)
C. Arkansas (W 45-16)
Cal Poly (L 24-32)
@ Weber State (W 55-27)
No. Colorado (W 40-35)
Montana (L 35-49)
@ E. Washington (W 35-13)
@ Portland State (W 52-24)
Idaho (W 23-20)
@ UC Davis (L 27-31)

DEREK HOUSTON – LB

Photo via Sacramento State

2026 Sac St. Schedule

Wk		
0	Sat, Aug 29	@ E. Michigan
1	Sat, Sep 5	vs. Miss Valley St.
2	Sat, Sep 12	@ Fresno State
3	Sat, Sep 19	vs. N. Dakota St.
4	Sat, Sep 26	vs. UMass
6	Sat, Oct 10	@ Bowling Green
7	Sat, Oct 17	vs. Ohio
8	Sat, Oct 24	@ Ball State
9	Fri, Oct 30	vs. Kent State
10	Wed, Nov 4	vs. Toledo
11	Wed, Nov 11	@ C. Michigan
13	Sat, Nov 28	@ Hawaii

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Aug 29 @ Eastern Michigan: No time to waste, Sacramento State dives right into both FBS and MAC play in Week 0 when they head to the "Factory" to face the Eagles. This game will go down in history for the Hornets, so why not make it a win?

Sep 26 vs. UMass: The Minutemen embark on a cross country flight, could the Hornets take advantage of some weary travel legs?

Nov 28 @ Hawaii: A unique non-conference twist to end the regular season. The Hornets have never faced the Rainbow Warriors and will have to adjust to their run and shoot offense.

Player Spotlight

Photo via Dallas Morning News



JACE WILSON – WR

Ridiculous vertical ability runs in the family. Jace's brother Jalen played basketball for Kansas and most recently averaged better than six points per game with the Brooklyn Nets. Jace uses his abilities on the gridiron, where he floats in the air effortlessly at 6'4". He provides the Hornets with a potential advantage in the red zone, don't be surprised if he posts a breakout season in his senior year.

2025 STATS: 3 REC, 56 YDS

Photo via Sacramento State



XAVIER WILLIAMS – DE

It's hard to miss Williams due of his size and playmaking ability. However, his vocal leadership and personality also make him almost impossible to overlook. The California native has been with the program since 2020 and has played in 37 games with the Hornets. After missing all of 2024 with an injury, Williams had the opportunity to shine on the field in 2025 and he posted career bests in almost every category.

2025 STATS: 31 TKL, 8 TFL, 6 SACK, 1 FF

Photo via Wikipedia



Hornet Stadium (21,195)

Photo via Sacramento State



Carson CONKLIN

SPECIAL TEAMS

The Hornets didn't use **Grant Meadors** a lot on field goals last season, but he did connect on 12 of his 15 attempts. Outside of a field goal attempt against Nevada that would have likely given Sacramento State a third FBS win in five seasons, he was otherwise very reliable. Thanks to 51 made extra points, he finished the season as the team's leading scorer. **Jay Brockhaus** transfers in from Southeastern Louisiana to handle punting duties.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Sacramento State's journey to the FBS is certainly a unique one, and not just because a west coast team ended up in the Mid-American Conference. The program is essentially taking a \$23 million gamble that the transition will pay dividends both on and off the field and in a relatively short amount of time.

Those questions have been discussed over the last few months ad nauseam, but thankfully fans in sports-crazed Sacramento will be able to turn their attention to the football field very soon. There will likely be a lot of growth pains throughout the 2026 campaign. There are plenty of recent examples of new FBS teams who have popped in year one, but Sacramento State's transition period was much more last minute than the Jacksonville States and Kennesaw States of the world. Any FBS win that the Hornets can claim is a good win, and anything beyond three wins this season is probably a success in year one.

Appointment Television



vs.



Sat, Sep 19 - 10:30 PM ET (ESPN)

The two newest members of the FBS square off in a home-in-home which heads to Sacramento State first. Although both schools were members of the FCS for some time, the last meeting came back in 1988 in the Division II postseason. This game (and the 2027 rematch in Fargo) will serve a litmus test for each program looking for success in their first season at college football's most prestigious level.

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	33.8	-	Points	26.3	-
Rushing	262.6	-	Rushing	150.3	-
Passing	163.0	-	Passing	216.6	-
Total	425.6	-	Total	366.9	-
Sacks For/Against: 38/24			Turnover Margin: +2		

2026 Projection

3-9

12th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

**National
Champions**



XO

**MAC
Champions**



O-O

**Bowl
Record**



O

**Playoff
Appearances**



UMASS MINUTEMEN

2025 Record: 0-12 (0-8 MAC)

Mid-American Conference

Amherst, MA



Minutemen Aiming For Positives

There's really nowhere to go but up for UMass. The Minutemen were the lone FBS team to finish the season without a win, and the loss column included a game against FCS opponent Bryant. There hasn't been a win over an FBS opponent in two full seasons, and the last time the home fans saw a win against an FBS opponent was 2021.

There are upgrades needed at basically every part of the roster, but offense is the most glaring issue. Last year's team mustered an FBS-worst 11.1 points per game, and the ground attack was a complete slog. In year one of their return to the MAC, UMass only kept two conference games within 21 points. Can Joe Harasymiak and his staff help produce a much more positive season in 2026 in year two and at least put a competitive product on the field?

OFFENSE

Between injuries and inconsistencies, the quarterback room was a revolving door last season. By season's end, UMass quarterbacks had tossed only eight touchdowns compared to nine interceptions. The room gets a complete facelift in 2026 with **William "Pop" Watson** as the expected starter. There's excitement for what the Massachusetts native can do with the football. He saw meaningful playing time for Virginia Tech in 2024 which included leading a victory over rival Virginia. His dual threat ability alone should help elevate quarterback play relative to last season.

The running game really never got started last season and there wasn't a runner with more than 400 yards. Marshall transfer **Justin Williams-Thomas** is a downhill runner who could end up being the bell cow for an otherwise young position group. **Jordan Washington** may be utilized when UMass needs a pass catching option out of the backfield. As a whole, this unit is a major question mark and it's entirely possible Watson ends up as the team's leading rusher as long as sack yardage doesn't negate his production. The offensive line will still be a work in progress, but there's decent size. Colorado State transfer **Aitor Urionabarrenechea** started at center for the Rams but projects as a guard for the Minutemen.

Approximately 85% of the team's receiving yards have left either through the portal or graduation, but a fresh restart might be needed at this position. Outside of perhaps Jacquon Gibson, there was very little consistent separation or playmaking. **T.Y. Harding** was injured in the opener last year and was essentially lost for the season. His return paired with Wisconsin transfer **Joseph Griffin** gives the offense potential for improvement. New offensive coordinator Max Warner will increase the use of 12 personnel, which means tight end **Max Dowling** could be a featured pass catcher.

DEFENSE

The struggles last season were compounded by how frequently the offense hamstrung the defense. After recording only 13 sacks last season and allowing well over 200 rush yards per game, patching up the defense starts in the trenches. The defensive line doesn't return a single sack from 2025, so the Minutemen will be reliant on **Joshua Nobles** to bounce back from an Achilles tear. While he's getting settled, William & Mary transfer **Justin Krueger** will be asked to shoulder a lot of the pass rushing responsibility.

Despite the doom and gloom of last season, the linebacker corps held their own and it could be a position of strength for the team and maybe even one of the best in the MAC. **Tyler Martin** led the way with a team-best 104 tackles and **Timmy Hinspeter**'s level of play may have been even better than Martin's before an injury prematurely ended his season. Added to the room is **Joshua Iseah** who has extensive experience in the FCS ranks.

Opponents completed 67% of their passes against the Minutemen, throwing only five interceptions all year. Those numbers could improve this season simply by virtue of better health. **TJ Magee** is the top corner and he was lost for the season before MAC play even began. **Isaiah Reed** is a solid option across from Magee. The Minutemen also welcome back their safety pairing of **Kendall Bournes** and **Zeraun Daniel** who combined for over 130 tackles last season. Transfers like **Jahmad Harmon** from Ball State and **Michael Robinson** from Rutgers should help build better depth in the secondary, and Robinson could end up starting at the hybrid "star" position.

HC: Joe Harasymiak
(2nd Year, 0-12)

OC: Max Warner
(1st Year)

DC: Jared Keyte
(2nd Year)

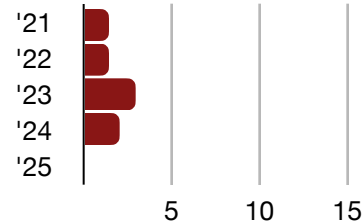
2026 Class Rankings

Recruiting
119

Transfer Portal
109

Via 24/7 Sports

UMASS WIN TREND



2025 Results (0-12)

Temple (L 10-42)
Bryant (L 26-27)
@ Iowa (L 7-47)
@ Missouri (L 6-42)
W. Michigan (L 3-21)
@ Kent State (L 6-42)
Buffalo (L 21-28)
@ C. Michigan (L 13-38)
@ Akron (L 10-44)
No. Illinois (L 3-45)
@ Ohio (L 14-42)
Bowling Green (L 14-45)

TYLER MARTIN – LB

Photo via @martin5tyler on Instagram

2026 UMass Schedule

Wk		
1	Thu, Sep 3	@ Rutgers
2	Sat, Sep 12	vs. Sacred Heart
3	Sat, Sep 19	vs. Stonehill
4	Sat, Sep 26	@ Sacramento St.
5	Sat, Oct 3	vs. E. Michigan
6	Sat, Oct 10	vs. Miami (OH)
7	Sat, Oct 17	@ Buffalo
8	Fri, Oct 23	@ UConn
10	Wed, Nov 4	vs. Ball State
11	Wed, Nov 11	@ Toledo
12	Wed, Nov 18	vs. Akron
13	Sat, Nov 28	@ Bowling Green

Home Away Neutral

Key Games

Sep 3 @ Rutgers: There are several connections to Rutgers within the UMass program. LB Timmy Hinspeter and S Michael Robinson are both former Scarlet Knights and the most obvious link is head coach Harasymiak who is Rutgers' former DC.

Sep 26 @ Sacramento State: If the Minutemen can survive the long travel, they'll have an opportunity for a statement in their MAC opener, two FCS opponents prior to this game gives them a shot at a 3-1 start.

Oct 23 @ UConn: The previous matchup was a barnburner, what about 2026?

Player Spotlight

Photo via @NCAAFNation247 on X



MAX DOWLING – TE

With almost the entire 2025 receiving corps gone, Dowling and tight end running mate Reece Adkins are the two leading returners. New OC Max Warner will lean heavily on the tight end position. For evidence to support that claim, check out what Harold Fannin did at Bowling Green when Warner was there. Dowling won't match that insane level of production, but he'll be a primary weapon in the passing game.

2025 STATS: 20 REC, 199 YDS, 3 TDS

Photo via @joshuanobles2 on Instagram



JOSHUA NOBLES – DE

The Minutemen are desperate for pass rushing help, and a healthy Joshua Nobles would help answer that plea. He has experience in the MAC and most recently he was a standout player at Jackson State and amassed 10 sacks. His season here in Amherst ended before it even began with an unfortunate Achilles tear, but if he gets back to his pre-injured level of output, he'll give this defense a big boost.

2025 STATS: DNP (Injury)

Photo via American Football Wiki



McGuirk Alumni Stadium (17,000)

Photo via UMass Athletics



T.Y. HARDING

SPECIAL TEAMS

UMass faces a tall task in replacing their first-team All-MAC punter. Keegan Andrew's frequently flipped the field and helped the scoreboard from getting worse. The punting results in spring, especially in light of Andrew's performance, were less than desirable. The coaching staff took note of that and added Australian punter **Michael Streeter** to the roster and he's the projected starter. Kicker **Derek Morris** was inconsistent last year, but he does have a strong leg and tied a school record with a 55-yarder.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Although this team inherits a 16-game losing streak, it's a new season for UMass. They do benefit from two FCS opponents in back-to-back weeks and then they make the cross-country journey to face the newest FBS and MAC squad in Sacramento State. November mid-week home games against Akron and Ball State represent the two most likely conference wins in what would be their first since rejoining the MAC.

It's still going to be an uphill battle for the Minutemen, but there's cautious optimism from fans and those covering the team that there will be obvious signs of improvement and even multiple wins. Simply staying competitive in their games will be a major improvement, even if the result doesn't always get put in the win column. A lot will be asked of new QB Watson, and his legs and skill in the play action game will be critical, as will keeping him healthy. Reaching three wins this season with at least one of those coming against a MAC team would be a mark of success.

Appointment Television



vs.



Fri, Oct 23 - 7:00 PM ET (CBSSN)

The Minutemen have dropped the last three games against the neighbor Huskies. UConn has a lot of roster churn heading into this season with a familiar face in the MAC, Jason Candle, now taking over. The Minutemen will be entrenched in conference play by the time these two meet, but could they claim a Friday night victory in Storrs to build momentum heading into midweek MACtion?

2025 Statistics

Offense			Defense		
Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank	Statistic	Per Game	FBS Rank
Points	11.1	136	Points	38.6	136
Rushing	82.4	133	Rushing	221.3	134
Passing	165.1	120	Passing	212.5	55
Total	247.5	136	Total	433.8	129
Sacks For/Against: 13/34			Turnover Margin: -7		

2026 Projection
2-10
13th in MAC

Trophy Case



XO

National
Champions



XO

MAC
Champions



O-O

Bowl
Record



O

Playoff
Appearances