



FCS Playoffs: SDSU At Montana



P&D FILE PHOTO

South Dakota State players celebrate after a Jimmie Forsythe interception during their matchup at South Dakota on Nov. 14 at the DakotaDome in Vermillion. SDSU opens play in the FCS playoffs today (Saturday) at Montana.

Late-Season Stumble Puts Jacks On Rough Road In Post-Season Play

BY TYLER TEAL

Jackrabbit Sports Service

BROOKINGS – Instead of the top-8 seed they had been chasing all season, South Dakota State's Jackrabbits drew a bear of an assignment for this weekend's Football Championship Subdivision playoffs. A grizzly bear, to be exact.

The 8-3 Jackrabbits will hit the road to take on the Montana Grizzlies, 7-4, in the opening round of the FCS playoffs at Washington-Grizzly Stadium in Missoula.

It's a bit of a downer considering that last weekend SDSU – now ranked No. 10 – was a few plays away from finishing the regular season 9-2, which almost certainly would have bought the team the top-8 seed and a bye this week.

Instead, the Jackrabbits face a team they've never beaten (they're 0-7 against Montana since the teams first played in 1969) in a stadium that's known to attract 20,000 very noisy Grizzly fans.

The whole situation has caused SDSU to refocus when it comes to philosophy.

"Play in the present," Jackrabbit coach John Stiegelmeier said. "Joke's over. We're done. That's all

**FCS PLAYOFFS**

**No. 10 SDSU (8-3)
at No. 16 Montana (7-4)**
WHEN: 1 p.m. Mountain Time (2 p.m. Central) Saturday
WHERE: Washington-Grizzly Stadium, Missoula, Montana
SERIES: Eighth meeting between the teams; Montana leads all-time series 7-0
RECORDS: SDSU 8-3, 5-3 Missouri Valley Football Conference; Montana 7-4, 6-2 Big Sky Conference
COACHES: SDSU: John Stiegelmeier, 128-89, 19th season; Montana: Bob Stitt, 7-4 in first season at Montana, 115-66 overall in 16 seasons as a collegiate head coach

we need to do, and if we do that in everything in our life we learn from it, move on and we'll be fine."

So the Jacks are stressing a positive attitude after a tough playoff draw. They've even managed to give the likely hostile environment they'll encounter in Missoula a positive spin, considering the road trip to they endured to Western Illinois that was last.

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Improving Griz Offense Takes On SDSU's Stingy Defense

MISSOULA, Mont. (AP) — South Dakota State brings a stingy defense with a chip on its shoulder into its Football Championship Subdivision playoff game against a surging Montana, whose offense has averaged 55 points in each of its last two games.

The first-round game kicks off at 1 p.m. Saturday in Missoula. It will be carried by ESPN3 and DirecTV's ESPN College Extra.

The Jackrabbits (8-3) have allowed just 16.7 points per game, the ninth-best mark in the FCS, and the defense really stiffens when its opponents are in scoring range.

"From about the 40 in, this whole year, we've really locked it in," said SDSU linebacker T.J. Lally, who has 88 tackles this year. "We've been really, really efficient in the scoring regions."

SDSU coach John Stiegelmeier said his team's red zone defense has been key in the past couple of years.

"Many times it's a mentality, it isn't a scheme," he told the Missou-

lian. "It's a chip on your shoulder. It's that we've got something to prove now."

Montana's offense has scored 111 points in its past two games with the return of starting quarterback Brady Gustafson, who has passed for 1,460 yards and nine touchdowns in five outings.

"We've got a great receiving corps and it's nice that we're really able to take advantage of them now," said first-year Griz coach Bob Stitt. "Brady really understands what the defensive secondary is doing. He can get the ball where it needs to go and can also check us into some really good plays that isolate our guys one-on-one."

Jamaal Jones averages 99 yards receiving per game and has nine TD catches.

SDSU's offense is keyed by receiver Jake Wieneke, who averages 122 yards receiving and has 11 touchdown catches.

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