

# SKILL POSITION RETURNEES; DEFENSIVE NUCLEUS HIGHLIGHT 2009 OUTLOOK

Most of the playmakers and a good majority of the play stoppers return as the Youngstown State football team looks to put a difficult 2008 season behind them and build some much-needed momentum as Spring practice begins on March 30.

On offense, five tailbacks, two wide receivers and a talented quarterback lead the way while on defense, 24 letterwinners are set to return, not including 2007 All-American Mychal Savage.

While last year was one to forget, some positives for the future came out of it. The Penguins were hamstrung with a wealth of injuries as 26 players missed at least one game, while 20 missed multiple contests. Because of the injuries, new faces had the chance to step in as 28 players started their first career contests.

Fourteen players had the chance to redshirt and because of the injuries six true freshmen saw playing time, including three defensive starters.

## OFFENSE

A major question last spring, the quarterback position will be a strength with the return of senior Brandon Summers. Summers took over the starting duties after the Penguins lost the first two games last year and righted the ship immediately.

He guided the Guins to wins over Central State and then No. 2-ranked North Dakota State. The next week he set a school record completing 32 passes for 334 yards and three touchdowns in a final-play loss to Liberty.

Then Summers was hurt at Southern Utah and missed the following two games. But in the final four weeks of the year he showed amazing potential.

In the final four contests, Summers completed 61 passes for 864 yards with 11 touchdowns and just two interceptions. Highlighting those numbers was a 347-yard performance at Illinois State.

For the year he was 122-of-195 for 1,540 yards with 18 touchdown passes and just seven interceptions. His 62.6 completion percentage set a school record as did his 152.18 passing efficiency.

While Summers was out, true freshmen Dailyn Campbell and Marc Kanetsky got thrown into the fire.

Campbell showed a bruising running

style when he was inserted into the lineup at Missouri State. He started against Southern Illinois. Campbell had 53 yards rushing on 22 carries while completing 32-of-51 passes for 224 yards and a score. Kanetsky saw action versus the Salukis and became the team's holder after the first two games.

At the fullback spot, redshirt freshman Gary Thornton will step in for senior Ben Lane. Also, junior Kyle Banna is set to return from a knee injury at fullback.



**QB Brandon Summers threw 11 touchdown passes and three INTs in the final three games of '08.**

The tailback position is loaded with sophomore Kamryn Keys, seniors Jabari Scott, Dana Brown and Kevin Smith all returning. Keys burst on the scene with a freshman school-record 804 yards rushing, including four 100-yard performances. He was named the Missouri Valley Football Conference Freshman of the Year for his efforts.

Scott started the year strong with 427 yards on 78 carries in the first seven games. But an injury limited him to just four offensive snaps in the final five games.

Brown came on strong at the end of the year and finished his first season with the program with 259 yards on 73 at-

tempts.

Smith, who was named to the conference's all-newcomer team in 2007, sat out last year with a hamstring injury. In 2007, he rushed for 524 yards on a team-high 123 carries and scored five touchdowns.

The tight end spot will see a big change. Veteran Derrick Bush is gone after starting for four seasons and the only player back on the squad at the position is David Rogers. Rogers moved to tight end after joining the program as a quarterback.

Like the tailback spot, the wide receivers return a lot of numbers.

Junior Dominique Barnes led the team in receptions last season while senior Donald Jones was the team leader in yards and touchdowns. Barnes and Jones combined for 69 receptions, 878 yards and 10 touchdowns. Jones finished with seven TD receptions, the most by a Penguin since 1998.

Jones and Barnes also became the first tandem of receivers to each have 100 yards since 1987. Both finished with more than 100 at Illinois State in November.

Two players who will see increased action are senior Aaron Pitts and sophomore Josh Lee. Pitts caught nine passes for 101 yards while Lee bounced back and forth between receiver and wideout. He caught one pass and had 13 carries for 118 yards.

Others who will be counted on to step in are Ely Ducatel, who missed the season with a knee injury and Dionte Snow, who was primarily on special teams.

Other wide receivers in spring camp are Ty Campana, Armani Johnson, Troy Rice and Zeke Sosanya.

The offensive line loses three starters with the departures of Brad Samsa, Tyler Booth and Nhemie Theodore. Starters returning from last year are Eric Rodemoyer (10 games), Bobby Coates (nine), Justin Rechihar (five) and Greg Sazdanoff (one).

Rodemoyer started eight games at right guard and two at right tackle. Coates started nine at right tackle, Rechihar started twice at guard and the final three games at center.

Senior Brian Mellott started nine games in 2007 on the line and should step in at guard in 2009.

The group of redshirts from 2008 in-

clude Bill Dugan, Andy Kowicki and D.J. Main. Other players who saw action that return are Rob Fernback, Tyler Figueroa and Kyle Brown. Ohio transfer Marcus O'Hara joins the program while Chris Gammon, who has played on both the offensive and defensive lines at YSU, is back on offense.

## DEFENSE

The defensive unit changed at the very top with Head Coach Jon Heacock taking over the coordinator duties. The last time Heacock called the plays on defense was in 2000, the year prior to his taking over as the Guins head coach.

The defense brings back a wealth of talent and experience. Overall, 24 letter-winners return from last year's unit while only seven depart. YSU started just one senior in the season finale at Western Illinois and on two other occasions during the year. The most senior starters YSU started in a single game was three.

The front four was hampered by injuries, but that was one spot that benefited from a youthful group. True freshmen Stephen Meadows and Joe Marshall started during the year and the position lost just one player, Bobby Lykes-Knight.

Senior preseason All-American Mychal Savage suffered a shoulder injury and in week two, defensive end Luke Matelan was lost for the year with a knee injury and tackle Torrance Nicholson broke his foot.

That put the unit behind the eight ball quickly and thrust numerous untested linemen into the mix.

The player who made the biggest impact was junior college transfer defensive lineman Crispin Fernandez. Fernandez was the only player on defense to start all 12 games. He earned second-team all-league honors finishing with 45 tackles and a team-best 6.5 tackles for losses and four sacks.

With the veterans sidelined and Fernandez entrenched as a starter, players like Joel Younkens, Stephen Meadows, Jaimie Frasure, Josh Myers, Chris Gammon and Roger Gillum were forced to step up.

Of the 12 players who started on the line, 10 return for 2009. Nicholson missed six games before returning to play the final four games to stabilize the unit and move Fernandez to the defensive end spot. Nicholson had 32 tackles in just six games played.

With the injuries, freshman Mike Wil-

liams was thrust into action on the line, but rush end Noah Taylor was able to red-shirt and will see his chance this spring.

Linebacker was another area hit hard by injuries and overall lack of experience.

Five first-time starters appeared at the position and of the 36 possible starts among the three positions, 30 were by underclassmen. Five backers finished with 43 tackles each while redshirt freshman John Sasson had 40.

The same four players started the last



**DT Crispin Fernandez led the team in sacks and tackles for losses.**

three games with Na'eem Outler at SAM, Deonta Tate at WILL and Roshon Simons at MIKE. Simons, a primary starter in 2007, did not start any of the first eight games in 2008. Tate was a true freshman while Outler was in his second year with the program. Converted tailback Jordan Edwards also had 43 stops and was in the starting lineup in six of the first seven games. Sasson made three starts in his first season.

Last year's secondary had experience and depth to start the season, but that took a hit when Jarvis Richards suffered

a season-ending knee injury versus North Dakota State.

Senior Lenny Wicks started the first 10 games before redshirt freshman Randy Louis started the final two. De'Angelo Wilson replaced Richards in the lineup and led the team with five interceptions. Wicks had 54 tackles to lead the corners in that category.

In January, YSU added Averick Walker while redshirt freshman Bryan Gaiters, a two-way standout in high school who was a first-team All-Ohio pick as a running back, will join the mix.

At the safety spots, three starters in Brandian Ross, Andre Elliott and Nick Gooden all return. Ross started 11 games, Elliott made 10 starts and Gooden had five appearances in the starting lineup last year. On two occasions all three players started the same game (Southern Utah and Missouri State). Making the future bright at the position is that all three are juniors.

Ross finished as the team's leading tackler with 98 stops while Elliott had the second most with 89. Gooden chipped in 30 as well. Redshirts David Fleming and Vinnie Patella will also be in the hunt for playing time this spring.

## SPECIAL TEAMS

The Penguins return kickoff specialist Stephen Blose and punter Ben Nowicki, but four-year starting placekicker Brian Palmer needs to be replaced.

Blose has handled kickoff duties the past two years and his strong leg will give him a shot to move into the placekicker role.

Nowicki improved his yards-per-kick average by four yards from the 2007 season to 2008. He averaged 41.1 yards per kick, placing 13 inside the opposition's 20-yard line. He also had nine punts of 50 yards or more.

Junior Erik Johnson stepped in when Nowicki suffered an injury late in the season to have a solid performance at punter. He punted nine times last season.

Reserve quarterback Marc Kanetsky returns to handle the holder duties while long snapper Nate Schkurko is back.

De'Angelo Wilson, one of the best punt returners in school history, must be replaced. Last year Wilson returned 18 punts for 216 yards.

At the kickoff return position, Dominique Barnes returns after leading the team with 399 yards on 17 returns in 2008.