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## Game Day Kaimin, November 21, 2015

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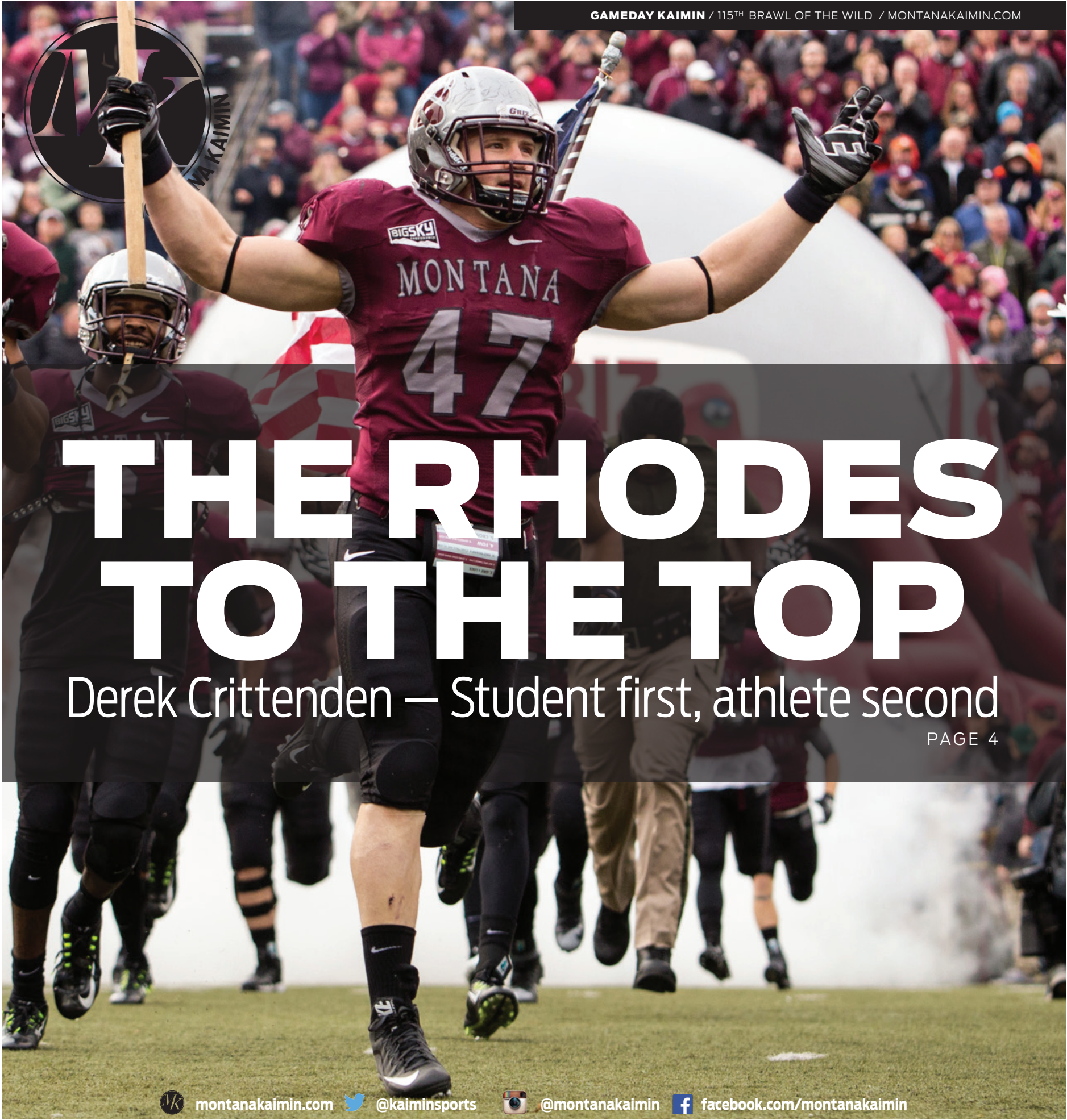
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# THE RHODES TO THE TOP

Derek Crittenden — Student first, athlete second

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# Brothers in arms: UM's star receivers take the Big Sky by storm

**Andrew Houghton**

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Jamaal Jones and Ellis Henderson have so much in common they could practically be brothers. They live together, they catch footballs together, they play video games obsessively, and they're constantly trying to kick one another's asses. They're two of the best athletes in the Big Sky Conference, and they are a major reason why Montana's offense is one of the most explosive in the country.

But all that barely scratches the surface or their relationship. To understand why it goes deeper than football, deeper than FIFA and goofing around, you need to hear the story of how they met and how one brother saved the other's life.

Both were gifted athletes who grew up in Washington. Both initially attended a big Division I school on the west coast. And both had to come a long way to get to where they are now.

Jones was born in Heidelberg, Germany and lived in Kansas for a while before his father Alvin, an Army veteran, moved the family to Washington.

Jones was a basketball player first — a point guard, and a good one — but his size and speed stood out more on the football field.

He was big into music too, playing the piano and drums, but it became apparent that football would be his ticket to college.

He chose the University of Washington because it was close to his family, but after missing his senior year of high school with an injury, he wasn't able to get on the field at all his freshman year for the Huskies, taking a redshirt.

Jones played a little more in his second year, but it was all on special teams, and he didn't see a route to more playing time.

"It was pretty much a mixture of bad first impressions, just being a freshman with a bad attitude, and I couldn't recover from that," Jones said. "I always thought that...I'd be able to go in there and work my way up to a spot, but since that didn't happen, it was extremely difficult."

So after the fall of his sophomore year at Washington, he decided to transfer.

For a hometown kid who was once rat-

ed the No. 11 prospect in the whole state, it was a tough call to make, but the Grizzlies stepped in quickly.

Montana wide receiver coach Torrey Myers, who had recruited Jones out of high school, put in a call to Jones and convinced him to come to Missoula for a visit.

Jones' first impressions of Montana took him back a little bit.

"A lot of land, a lot of mountains. Luckily it wasn't snowing, but it looked kind of slow compared to city life," Jones said.

Despite that, Jones liked the coaching staff and the team at UM and decided to transfer in for the 2013 season.

He was still confident in his ability after going against future first-round picks Desmond Trufant and Marcus Peters in practice at UW, and he was excited to get back on the field.

There was just one thing left for Jones to do — find a place to live. Luckily, there was one other transfer receiver at UM that year, and he just happened to have an extra room at his place.

Ellis Henderson's first sport was baseball. One of his cousins was Oakland A's legend Rickey Henderson, and several of his other cousins played pro baseball as well.

Henderson's mother Maggie Mohammadi can remember pitching balls to him since he was two or three years old.

"We would throw it up in the air, and he would hit perfectly," Mohammadi said. "Even if I threw it a little bit off, he would hit it right on the perfect middle of the bat, and we would just do that all the time. He would always want to be racing people at the daycare."

Henderson played soccer and golf, went into the Boy Scouts, volunteered at soup kitchens and played the drums.

"He's definitely a new-age athlete," said his father, Ron Henderson.

His parents wouldn't let him play organized football until he was in eighth grade — "They were big health and safety nuts," Henderson said — but once he put the pads on, he was a natural, as the speed that helped him star in baseball and soccer transferred over.

"I ended up being really good at it, to be honest. It wasn't something I planned on



*Evan Frost for Skyline Sports*

Jamaal Jones (6) and Ellis Henderson (7) go up for a chest bump after Jones' 45-yard touchdown grab in the third quarter.

doing, but I enjoyed it."

Henderson, like Jones, was a star in high school and got offers from schools up and down the west coast.

Unlike Jones, he decided not to stay close to home, taking an offer to play at Hawaii.

"I ended up liking them a lot. I liked the offense we got to visit a couple times, and I liked the place, and I just loved the culture. It was a place I've always wanted to be," Henderson said.

Henderson took a grayshirt his first year, meaning that he couldn't practice with the team as he tried to preserve a year of eligibility while rehabbing from a

shoulder injury that he suffered his senior year of high school.

After a semester of grayshirting, the coach who had recruited Henderson to Hawaii resigned.

Henderson, uncertain about his place on the team, decided to transfer and originally committed to Portland State before choosing Montana.

His father had known then Montana head coach Robin Pflugrad when Pflugrad was a graduate assistant and Ron Henderson played at Portland State.

"It was a natural fit to be recruited by them. They always went the extra mile for



**Evan Frost for Skyline Sports**

Wide receiver Ellis Henderson (7) tries to avoid a tackle by Eastern Washington's Victor Gamboa (27) on Nov. 14, 2015.

Ellis, and I think that was a big part of what won Ellis over," said Ron Henderson.

Henderson had 23 catches in 2012 for the Grizzlies, establishing himself as a big play threat by averaging over 15 yards a catch.

That winter after football season, Ja-maal Jones came to town, hoping to turn his career around just as Henderson had.

"He had an extra room in his house, so he asked if I wanted to room there, and we ended up living together," Jones said.

The two receivers hit it off immediately — "He just reminded me of a familiar person," Henderson said, but the story didn't end there.

Henderson, who had dealt with depression since his days in high school and again at Hawaii, felt it come back with a vengeance when he got to Montana.

Despite feeling like Montana was a fresh start, and the success that he had on the field, he couldn't shake off his feelings of despair.

"Psychologically it came from lots of things, just the daily stressors of being a college athlete, a college student and the pressure of trying to be a good example to my younger family as well," Henderson said. "For the most part, I think I just lost touch of who I wanted to be and who I was as a person. I think in college you find out who you are and who you want to be as an individual, and I think with the hectic schedule with school and transferring, I had so many things going on that I kind of lost touch of who I wanted to be."

**A** lot of people have similar anxieties in college, but they hit Henderson particularly hard.

There were days when he couldn't leave the house, the hours piling up on each other while he sat in his room. He couldn't do his classwork, couldn't go to practice. He lost weight.

"I'll tell you honestly, it was probably my toughest year of life as a person, as a

father, a friend, definitely my toughest and I'm sure his toughest year," Ron Henderson said.

Through it all, Jones was there, trying to help his friend through.

"It was just bad coming home every day and seeing him the way he was," Jones told the Missoulian. "He just wasn't who I had known him to be."

Ellis tried to make it back for football season but was a shell of his former self.

A season after he led the Grizzlies with 1,008 yards and 14 touchdowns, Henderson could only manage to play in five games in 2014.

It was a long road for Henderson, but with the support of Jones, his family and friends, he was able to beat back his depression.

"I just want to be a good person, not when people are watching me but all the time," he said. "I want to be able to wake up every morning and look in the mirror and be happy with the person I'm looking

back at. I think overall I want to be a happy person, and I think that's a tough thing to accomplish in life."

This season, he and his roommate have been able to get back to being the one-two punch that they envisioned when they first came to Montana.

Both Henderson and Jones have visions of making it to the NFL, and both of them are glad that they were able to take the next step on their long journeys together.

"He's just a chill, relaxed dude — the type of person that doesn't really make up a lot of excuses and takes accountability in always wanting to get better, so we both push each other," Jones said.

Henderson agreed. "He's very talented, very competitive. I think he's a very unique person, and I like to consider myself as a unique person and surround myself with people who are a little different and a little quirky, and I definitely get that vibe off of him." ■

# On the Rhodes to success:

## For Derek Crittenden, it's chemistry on and off the field

**Jackson Wagner**

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When the Montana football team boards the bus to return home following a game on the road, most players lounge in their seats to close their eyes after a long day of work. Some turn their eyes to the monitors above them, watching movies to pass the time.

Derek Crittenden sits in the back of the bus, his books out under the dim light above his head. Crittenden can't close his eyes like the rest of his teammates, because for Crittenden, the work never stops.

A chemistry major who graduated last spring with a minor in math, he had to find another major after graduation to remain eligible in the eyes of the NCAA. He chose philosophy, and is expected to leave Montana with a minor in the field.

His diverse fields of study are part of the reason that Crittenden was named a finalist for the Rhodes Scholarship, one of the most prestigious academic awards in the country. Crittenden has made it to the final stage of the Rhodes process: interviews in Seattle.

Seattle represents an opportunity to improve Crittenden's life by an immeasurable amount. It is a once in a lifetime opportunity for the redshirt-senior from Whitefish, but there is one downside to the situation.

Crittenden travels to Seattle for the interview on Nov. 20 and 21. Unfortunately, the annual Cat-Griz will be played in Bozeman on the second day of the interview process, and Crittenden says there is a 95 percent chance he will miss what might be the final game of his senior year.

The process that led Crittenden to this point started over five years ago, when Grizzly football looked drastically different. Bobby Hauck and his staff recruited Crittenden in 2009, a year that saw Montana reach the FCS National Championship before falling to Villanova.

Since then, Crittenden has played under three different head coaches. The coaches have come and gone, but Crittenden has remained excellent both on the football field

and in the classroom.

On the field, he has taken part in 46 games in maroon and silver. In the classroom, he has maintained a 4.0 GPA through his entire academic career.

"He's a student-athlete, in that order, and he's the definition of a student-athlete," Grizzly defensive coordinator Ty Gregorak

Any way that I can get a 4.0 and keep the streak going, regardless of the amount of work it will take, I just do it.

**Derek Crittenden**

said. "What he is doing, and what he has done, is nothing short of exceptional."

His classes have ranged from organic chemistry to philosophy, the latter of which is starting to show in the 22-year-old.

"Any way that I can get a 4.0 and keep the streak going, regardless of the amount of work it will take, I just do it," Crittenden said. "It's also pretty easy, because I really like what I'm doing. Aristotle once said, 'Passion [sic] in the job puts perfection in the work.'"

After the interview process in Seattle, two of the finalists from the Northwest district will be chosen as recipients of the Rhodes Scholarship. The honor brings with it two to three years of paid education at Oxford University.

The official process began over two years ago, when the Rhodes advisers on campus contacted Crittenden. A major part of the application is a 1,000 word essay about yourself, which needs to include everything from who you are and what your goals are to how you fit with Oxford and what you plan to do with an Oxford education.

After writing over 30 drafts, Crittenden

submitted his final essay. In addition to that, the committee looks for broadly educated students, which is part of the reason Crittenden has a major and a double minor.

The Grizzly football captain demonstrates his leadership abilities through football, and his broad education proves he is a man of the world, another characteristic that the Rhodes Committee emphasises.

In Seattle, the main emphasis will be put on the interview process. He said that when he interviews, he just wants to go in and be himself. He wants to show that he is the type of person who will do well if he is given the Rhodes Scholarship.

As preparation, Crittenden interviews with his Rhodes advisers, professors on campus and as many media opportunities as he can get. He still holds out a very small hope that he could make it back for the game, but he will be following along and he trusts his teammates will get the job done.

When Crittenden prepared to make his collegiate decision, there were two schools on his radar: the University of Montana and Montana State. He decided to come to Missoula because he fit better within the system, and also because he felt that the Grizzlies were the superior program.

Now, Crittenden will be forced to miss his final chance to prove what brought him to Missoula back in 2010.

"This game, it's my last year to prove to myself and prove to everybody in the state that we are the superior program in the state," Crittenden said. "It means the world to me, and it's unfortunate that I will probably have to miss it, but I trust the team and I know they will get it done."

The game against Montana State is highlighted on the schedule every season. This year, the game may prove to be particularly important. The Grizzlies face Eastern Washington on Nov. 14, and if Montana wins that game the rivalry might prove to be the determining factor in UM's playoff fate.

Gregorak knows that the game against Eastern is the most important game of the season at this point, but you can't tell him that the Brawl of the Wild isn't the highlight

of the season.

"It's not maybe the most important, it is the most important," Gregorak said. "I tell the defense every year, this is not just another game, and anybody who tries to downplay it doesn't understand the rivalry."

Montana State serves as the final regular season opponent for Montana, and could very well represent the last chance that Crittenden will ever have to run out of the tunnel in a Grizzly uniform.

While the emotional aspect may weigh on Crittenden, in the end the decision was a no-brainer, according to his step-father Bill Carter.

"The perfect thing would have been to beat the Bobcats and win the Rhodes Scholar, I mean those are the two greatest things," Carter said. "It's a bummer, but at the same time, and I'm not trying to minimize it, but that's a game, and the Rhodes could be the rest of his life."

If Crittenden wins the Rhodes Scholarship, he will travel to England and attend Oxford University. He plans to study organic synthesis in the direction of pharmaceuticals, either at Oxford or at grad school in the case that he doesn't win the award.

In high school, Crittenden found a deep interest in biology and thought he would pursue medical school. Then he took organic chemistry, and fell in love.

"When I was little, I loved playing with LEGO's. It was just following step-by-step procedure to build whatever I was trying to build, and organic chemistry was the exact same way, it was just using carbon molecules instead of little LEGO pieces," Crittenden said.

The comparison of LEGO's to organic chemistry is underselling by a bit. A large part of organic chemistry is connecting a starting molecule with a desired molecule by filling in the intermediate products and reactions. It is like following LEGO instructions, if most of the steps along the way were cut out.

His current focus is primarily on the Rhodes Scholarship. If that falls through, he will look to attend grad school, and in

either situation he just wants to make the most out of organic synthesis.

It is difficult for him to see anything beyond his next step of schooling. After he graduates, he could see himself running his own lab at a university or possibly owning his own pharmaceutical company.

The outcome of the Rhodes Scholarship will not change his work ethic and his desire for success. It is difficult to wrap your head around the amount of work that Crittenden puts in on a daily basis. Often getting less than six hours of sleep in a night, he still balances football workouts and practice with class and homework.

Some weeks he spends around 25 hours in the library, and there is a joke within the team that if you can't find Derek, he is probably in the library. He stays up until 2 a.m. some nights because he can't fall asleep

unless the job is done.

How does someone still have the energy to play such a physical sport, at such a physical position, when he sometimes has less than five hours of sleep? His thirst for success.

"I get one accomplishment, and I say, OK, that's not quite good enough, I need to do more, I need to do more," Crittenden said. "In doing more, I accomplish more, and when I see the results for working so hard, then I'm fueled and it gives me a bunch more energy, and even though it's artificial, it's something I can thrive off of."

Crittenden

inspires those around him, who know that the sky is the limit for this young man.

"His achievements, who knows what they will be, because he can achieve anything he wants to," Carter said. "It's certainly one of those things as I parent that I don't have to worry about, because I might be calling him for advice."

His father will call him for advice, and his coach will be raising his kids with Derek in mind.

"He is someone that I would hope my two sons, if I could have my two sons grow up into something, I would hope they could be half of what Derek Crittenden is."

**O**n Saturday, Nov. 21 the Montana Grizzlies and Montana State Bobcats will meet for the 115th time. Montana rides a

two-game winning streak into the game against their rival, and owns a dominating 73-36-5 record against the cross-state school.

The game will be the biggest moment of some the seniors careers, who have worked all season with the Bobcat game circled at the end of the schedule. All of Montana will turn their eyes to Bozeman, but Crittenden has the chance to be the first Rhodes Scholar from the University of Montana since 1993.

Derek Crittenden's opportunity transcends sport. It doesn't matter if the fans are wearing blue and gold or maroon and silver, a whole state will be behind Crittenden as he prepares for the biggest moment of his life. This is his Cat-Griz game, and he is prepared. ■



Photo Illustration: Ryan Hawk/Evan Frost

# MONTANA



## the heart of Montana's most competitive tradition

**Tiffany Folkes**

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There are two types of people that inhabit the state of Montana: Griz fans and Cat fans.

The rivalry sparked in 1893, the year that the University of Montana and Montana State University both came into establishment. Four years later, the first Brawl of the Wild occurred on a snowy Thanksgiving Day. From that day on, the state became divided.

For an outsider, it doesn't take long to notice an overwhelming amount of Griz-Cat attire flanking Montana's streets or team posters hung up in local businesses. Former University of Montana sports information director, Dave Guffey, hardly knew where Montana was when he first came to Missoula, let alone what the Griz-Cat rivalry was all about, but he was quick to catch on.

"The second game of my career was the Griz-Cat game in Missoula in 1978," Guffey said. "I figured it out pretty quick how big of a deal it was. It was pretty intense."

This historical rivalry starts at the heart of the universities with a constant tug-of-war for the best students, athletes, facilities ... the list is endless. University staff and outside analysts may fawn over the numbers, but once you choose (or have been born into) a side, there's no going back.

From the very beginning, Griz-Cat was always the most eventful game of the year during football season since the state holds no professional team. Team rosters would be chalk full of Montana bred players, said Guffey, with brothers playing brothers and third generation players making their mark on the field. Everybody knew of somebody to watch.

As the universities grew older and inherited the attention of people outside of the state, the rosters evolved from their strict Montana roots, but the heat of the game didn't die. The intensity only grew higher with a bigger fight for athletes, greater media attention, and the eventual completion of Washington-Grizzly stadium in 1986, Guffey said.

"If you look at the history, Grizzly football did not have a losing season after

1986 until 2012, and Washington-Grizzly stadium had a lot to do with it," Guffey said. "It became a lot more fun socially and easier to recruit people because of better facilities."

After that initial 59-28 win for UM at Washington-Grizzly stadium, they went on to hold the Great Divide trophy for the next 16 years. Currently, Montana is on a two-year streak for holding the trophy and are going to have to fight for a third ... or are they?

With the exception of last year's win for Montana at home, Guffey has noticed an odd pattern among the alternating wins between the two teams: neither one can seem to win at home.

"It's kind of bizarre," he said. "Both places are tough places to play, yet the home team has had trouble winning the rivalry for the past few years."

16 years ago, the Brawl of the Wild expanded off the field with the new tradition of "can the Cats-Griz" where the Missoula and Bozeman communities come together to help feed local Montana families. Last year, a combined total of over 290,000 lbs of food and \$150,000 was

raised, according to the Can the Bobcats and Can the Griz websites.

Both communities hold great pride in supporting their teams, but Montana State has come out on top in the competition in all but one year since its inauguration. Montana fans need to step up their giving game.

This year will be the first game in 37 years that Guffey will not physically attend, but he definitely has some ideas of how the game will roll out. Historically, the Griz-Cat game seems to be a fight for a playoff seed or conference champion title, but this year each team may be fighting for a winning season.

"It's going to be more intense for a different reason," he said. "A winning record is a big deal."

Currently, the Griz are beating the Bobcats in the century long fight for possession of the Great Divide trophy with a winning record of 73-36-5. The intensity and overall logistics of the game have evolved over the years, but as the whole state stops to watch the 115th brawl this year, it will nevertheless end in heart-break for the losing team.▪

# Kaimin Sports Q+A: Griz CB Nate Harris

**Joshua Thomas**

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Step onto any Griz football sideline, be it a practice, scrimmage or a game, and there's a good chance you are going to hear the voice of their defensive stalwart Nate Harris.

Sometimes you can find him barking orders, joking around with teammates or individually talking with a player about things he's been noticing, but he is never quiet. It's his willingness to communicate that has made him such an integral part of Bob Stitt's defensive system, and it's why he is widely considered one of the vocal leaders for Montana.

As one of UM's most-tenured players, Harris has picked up numerous nods from the Big Sky Conference and the FCS in his Grizzly career that started back in 2011, when he redshirted as a freshman.

A California native, Harris has loved living in Montana, and Missoula has grown to be a second home. But on Nov. 21, he will step onto Martel Field at Bobcat Stadium in Bozeman to conclude his run in one of Montana football's greatest traditions, the Brawl of the Wild.

The Grizzlies throttled the Bobcats last year in Missoula, a game

in which Harris recorded five tackles. MSU hasn't won the Cat-Griz duel since 2012 when they took down Montana in Missoula, 16-7, and the Cats hope to scratch UM this year as they play hosts for the latest Brawl of the Wild installment.

Before Harris hit the field in preparation for his last rivalry week, he sat down with Kaimin Sports to discuss his final year helming the Grizzly secondary, the Cat-Griz rivalry and more.

**Montana Kaimin:** Where are you originally from and what was your high school experience like?

**Nate Harris:** I'm originally from Chino, California and I went to Chino Hills High School. It's a smaller California town, but it's definitely driven by the two pretty big high schools in the area that hold a rivalry similar to Cat-Griz. Back home is kind of like Missoula in that everybody knows everybody, so it made my transition a lot easier.

**MK:** As one of the most experienced players on the team, you're known as a vocal leader. In your opinion, what makes a leader and how do you try to fit the bill?

**Harris:** A lot of people think leaders are the loudest voices, but to me, it's most important to lead by example. When I get on guys, I'll give them advice but I'll also be the first one to point out where I'm in the wrong and I'll say 'Let's do an extra set', I won't just tell them to do an extra set. Or sprints or weights. I'll do things with my teammates to get better.

**MK:** How do you like to approach games where you know there is a specific major pass threat, like say an EWU with Kupp and Bourne or ISU with Madison Mangum?

**Harris:** I think I do it different than a lot of guys because they'll get nervous and freak themselves out. Me though, I figure some receivers are doing that good for a reason, they've beaten all the other defenses in the

conference so why would I get psyched out? You just have to stay level-headed and relax. I personally believe we have some of the best receivers in the nation, so when I line up with guys I just pretend I'm looking Jamaal Jones in the face, because that's what I have to deal with at practice.

**MK:** You guys have found yourself in some high scoring games this year, and with a lot of attention being paid to the new offensive system, do you think the defense is getting overshadowed at all?

**Harris:** The world we live in, offense is always going to get attention, and football is all offense these days. If you can't play good defense though, you aren't going to win. Just like in our loss against Portland State, we played bad defense and we lost the game. So if we're getting anywhere, it has to start defensively.

**MK:** As a senior veteran, what's some advice you try to give to the younger guys before you walk out the door?

**Harris:** I always try to beat into the younger guys, I tell them all the time to imagine game days being like a practice. When I started here, I made the game way bigger than it had to be. Now, I'm in the game and it feels like second nature, which comes with time, but it's important to ease up a little. You have to maintain focus, but there's nothing wrong with calming yourself down.

**MK:** What has the Brawl of the Wild series meant to you as a Grizzly and what are some of the things you'll remember most about the tradition?

**Harris:** I hate Montana State. I hate them. I hate them just as bad as I hated my rival high school. The rivalry means a lot to me, but I didn't grow up here in Montana, so I can't even pretend like it's as intense as some of the other guys who are from here. But I want to go out and pay Cat-Griz homage to guys like Colt Anderson and other Montana greats that came before me and play well. •

# MONTANA'S OWN



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**Annisa Keith**  
for the Montana Kaimin

Ben Weyer grins after a Grizzly win against the University of California Davis on Oct. 18, 2014.



# On the gridiron and off the grid:

## Weyer brothers dream of playing together again

**Sojin Josephson**

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Ben Weyer had a choice to make. Going into the 111th Brawl of the Wild, Weyer was still unsure if he should play at Montana or Montana State. That year, the Bobcats were ranked No. 1 in the FCS for the first time since 1985, expecting to defeat the Grizzlies and not by a small margin. But the Grizzlies won that day 36-10.

Weyer grew up going to Bobcat football games most Saturdays with his dad and younger brother, Will. But that day, he was not in the stands. He was part of the team. That day he spent with the Cats was also the day

he decided to become a Grizzly.

"It became evident to me that the Bobcats will always be the Grizzlies' younger brother, and that's how it's always been," Weyer said. "My entire childhood, I watched the Grizzlies beat the Cats year after year, and I wasn't ready to play somewhere where I was going to lose to my rival every season."

Two years later, Will faced a similar decision. He could stay in his hometown and play at Montana State or he could join his brother at Montana. Another Weyer chose the Grizzlies.

Ben and Will grew up high in the mountains outside of Bozeman, where

they shared a room for more than a decade.

For the Weyer brothers, the love of football came at an early age. Growing up, Will wanted to play catch. But Ben didn't want to play catch. He wanted to practice a different part of the game.

"Ben told me, 'If I'm going to take time out of my day to play catch with you, then we're doing some tackling or blocking drills,'" Will said. "I stuffed my shirt with pillows, put on a full-face helmet, and Ben laid a couple of hits on me."

When Will was in second grade and Ben was in fourth, the two started to play on a team that didn't involve

just a quarterback and a lineman. Throughout the next ten years, football kept the Weyers close together as not just brothers, but teammates. They were almost inseparable through the youth leagues and high school. Now they find themselves together again at the collegiate level.

When the Weyer brothers both started for the Bozeman High Hawks, Ben played at left tackle. His job was to protect Will's blindside.

"Honestly, you love all your teammates and always have an instinct to protect the quarterback, but when you share the same blood with the person who's behind you, it means so much

more," Ben said. "Having Will back there made me a better football player, and I developed this anger when anyone would even touch him."

"Ben never let me get hit," Will said. "Not one time."

In both of their senior years, Ben and Will were named "Hawk of the Year" by their high school teams.

But a successful high school career for both Weyer brothers didn't prepare them for a season on the sideline, both facing injuries, watching film every practice while their teammates play.

In the Grizzlies' opening game against Wyoming last year, Ben tore his PCL. He played on it for the season, and it reattached itself. But lightning struck twice for Ben. During the first full-contact, full-pad practice of this season's fall camp, he was blocking and his knee got caught between two defenders. He heard a pop and tore his ACL. After the surgery, the immobilization caused a blood clot in his leg that moved to his lung.

While Ben deals with knee injuries, Will deals with an ongoing hip problem. About six months ago, he got surgery. Although the healing process hasn't been smooth, he said he'll be ready to play again soon.

When Ben and Will aren't on the gridiron, they're off the grid altogether. They fly-fish, backpack and ski through the rivers and mountains of

Chile, Belize, Mexico, Costa Rica, Canada, Nicaragua, Hawaii and, of course, Montana.

Their passion for the outdoors and relationship with each other helps them cope with their time away from the game they love.

"The two of them are soulmates," Ben and Will's mom, Liz, said. "The world they share beyond academics and athletics is a beautiful thing to see."

It never stops for the Weyer brothers. When the Grizzlies are away, Ben and Will spend their time away from Missoula.

"Whenever they're on the road, we always end up doing something to get out of town," Ben said. "It can be a little hard."

Ben and Will haven't had an opportunity to play together as Grizzlies yet, but they still have time.

The Weyers may not be on the football field together this season, but they'll be watching from the sidelines or a hole-in-the-wall restaurant after another adventure.

"I've moved from tackle to center, and I can't think of a better dream than my younger brother taking a snap from me," Weyer said. "He's the greatest teammate I've ever had, and it's going to be a pretty special day when we both get back out there." ■



Will Weyer / Facebook

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