

# MVFC Conference

## South Dakota State Picked To Win Missouri Valley Football Crown

For the first time since joining the Missouri Valley Football Conference for the 2008 season, South Dakota State has been tabbed as the league pre-season favorite in a poll

conducted by league coaches, media and sports information directors. South Dakota State

returns 10 offensive starters and 10 defensive starters from its Spring 2021 team, which reached the FCS title game and earned a share of the MVFC crown.

SDSU received 24 first-place votes and 454 total points to edge North Dakota State, which earned 435 points and had 18 first-place tallies. North Dakota and Southern Illinois

were third and fourth with 357 and 345 total points, respectively. UNI, which received the

remaining first-place vote, had 311 points to finish fifth. And defending tri-champ Missouri

State was picked sixth with 256 points. Illinois State (196), South Dakota (163), Youngstown

State (126), Indiana State (112) and Western Illinois (83) rounded out the voting.

Collectively, the league returns 88 percent (212 of 242 student-athletes) of its starting lineups to this year's fall rosters (from Spring 2021, and for Indiana State Fall 2019).

UNI,

notably, is slated to return all 11 starters on both sides of the ball.

Although the 2020-21 season did not yield a national championship, the season may have been one of the most successful in league history

as the Conference and its member schools navigated through a season that was shifted from the fall to the spring. Despite cancelled games

due to COVID-19 which also led to multiple league teams who became unable to compete or complete the season, five MVFC teams made a

playoff field that was limited to only 16 total participants. Three schools shared the league title (Missouri State, North Dakota, and South Dakota

State), marking just the second time in league history that the Conference had tri-champions. Those three schools were joined in the playoff

field by North Dakota State and Southern Illinois. Four teams advanced to the quarterfinals, and South Dakota State reached its first title game.

SIU, which snapped NDSU's FCS- and league-record 39-game winning streak, was making its first playoff appearance since 2009; Missouri

State earned its first league title and first playoff appearance since 1990; UND reached the playoffs in its first year as an MVFC member; and

NDSU and SDSU extended their streaks of consecutive playoff trips to 11 and nine-straight years, respectively.

In 2020-21, five MVFC teams were ranked in the Top 13 of the final Stats Perform Top 25 poll, led by SDSU's No. 2 ranking. The league had

an FCS-best 16 student-athletes on the FCS Stats Perform All-America team, and the MVFC had a league-record five players taken in the 2021 NFL Draft, highlighted by QB Trey Lance of NDSU who was the third overall pick.

In terms of post-season success, a league school has now reached the title game 11 times since 2011 (North Dakota State-8, Illinois State-1, South Dakota State-1, Youngstown State-1). South Dakota State extended the league's FCS-record streak of having at least one MVFC team in the finals to 10-straight years as the Jackrabbits reached the FCS Championship in the Spring of 2021, falling to second-seeded Sam Houston State in the final seconds.

The 2021 season will mark the seventh in an agreement with ESPN to distribute all 44 league games on ESPN3 (or ESPN+), while the league has implemented other initiatives to promote its institutions, student-athletes and coaches, including a weekly podcast series ("First and Goal"), and video segments that review ("Two-Minute Drill") and preview ("The Extra Point") each week's contests throughout the season. The MVFC and other FCS leagues have partnered in the production of a weekly "FCS ALL IN" special which will air 15 times on Saturdays throughout the season on a dedicated YouTube channel, beginning Aug. 21.

A pre-season favorite has claimed the league crown 22 times (in 35 previous polls). In addition to today's team rankings, the Conference has announced its preseason team, voted on by coaches, sports information directors, and a media panel. All 11 teams have at least one honoree, topped by Southern Illinois with 13 total selections.

## **Missouri Valley Football**

### **2021 Preseason Poll**

#### **Team Points**

<b>1. South Dakota State (24)</b> .....	<b>454</b>
<b>2. North Dakota State (18)</b> .....	<b>435</b>
<b>3. North Dakota</b> .....	<b>357</b>
<b>4. Southern Illinois</b> .....	<b>345</b>
<b>5. UNI (1)</b> .....	<b>311</b>
<b>6. Missouri State</b> .....	<b>256</b>
<b>7. Illinois State</b> .....	<b>196</b>
<b>8. South Dakota</b> .....	<b>163</b>
<b>9. Youngstown State</b> .....	<b>126</b>
<b>10. Indiana State</b> .....	<b>112</b>
<b>11. Western Illinois</b> .....	<b>83</b>

### **2021 Missouri Valley Football Preseason Team**

Total picks, includes honorable mentions, by school:

Illinois State – 1; Indiana State – 4; Missouri State – 7; North Dakota – 8; North Dakota State – 10 (Christian Watson a duplicate honoree)

UNI – 11; South Dakota – 8; South Dakota State - 12; Southern Illinois - 13; Western Illinois – 5 (Tony Tate a duplicate honoree)

Youngstown State - 6

**FIRST TEAM**

QB Tommy Schuster, R-So., North Dakota  
RB Pierre Strong Jr., Jr., South Dakota State  
Otis Weah, R-Jr., North Dakota  
FB Hunter Luepke, Jr., North Dakota State  
TE Zach Heins, So., South Dakota State  
WR Avante Cox, Jr., Southern Illinois  
Dennis Houston, Sr., Western Illinois  
Christian Watson, Sr., North Dakota State  
OL ZeVeyon Furcron, Sr., Southern Illinois  
Garret Greenfield, So., South Dakota St.  
Cody Mauch, Sr., North Dakota State  
Cordell Volson, Sr., North Dakota State  
Matt Waletzko, Sr., North Dakota  
DL Jordan Berner, Sr., Southern Illinois  
Jared Brinkman, Gr., UNI  
Caleb Sanders, Jr., South Dakota State  
Spencer Waege, Sr., North Dakota State  
LB Logan Backhaus, Sr., South Dakota State  
Spencer Cuvelier, Sr., UNI  
Grant Dixon, Youngstown State, Sr.  
James Kaczor, Sr., North Dakota State  
DB Montrae Braswell, So., Missouri State  
Qua Brown, Sr., Southern Illinois  
James Ceasar, Sr., Southern Illinois  
Don Gardner, Sr., South Dakota State  
Michael Tutsie, Sr., North Dakota State  
P Brady Schutt, Sr., South Dakota  
PK Matthew Cook, Jr., UNI  
LS Dalton Godfrey, Jr., South Dakota  
AP Javon Williams Jr., So., Southern Illinois  
RS Christian Watson, Sr., North Dakota State

**SECOND TEAM**

QB Stone Labanowitz, Sr., Southern Illinois  
RB Isaiah Davis, Fr., South Dakota State  
Jaleel McLaughlin, Sr., Youngstown State  
FB Jacob Garrett, Jr., Southern Illinois  
TE Noah Gindorff, Sr., North Dakota State  
WR Jaxon Janke, So., South Dakota State  
Tony Tate, Sr., Western Illinois  
Caleb Vander Esch, Sr., South Dakota  
OL Landon Bebee, Jr., Missouri State  
Dan Becker, Youngstown State, Sr.  
Wes Genant, Sr., South Dakota State  
Mason McCormick, So., South Dakota St.

Trevor Penning, Sr., UNI  
DL Kevin Ellis, Sr., Missouri State  
Eric Johnson, Sr., Missouri State  
Anthony Knighton, Sr., Southern Illinois  
Eli Mostaert, So., North Dakota State  
LB Devon Krzanowski, Sr., North Dakota  
Brock Mogensen, So., South Dakota  
Bryson Strong, Jr., Southern Illinois  
Tylar Wiltz, Sr., Missouri State  
DB Omar Brown, Jr., UNI  
Austin Evans, Gr., UNI  
Evan Holm, 5th Year, North Dakota  
Zaire Jones, Sr., Youngstown State  
Kyriq McDonald, Sr., Missouri State  
P Jack Colquhoun, Sr., Southern Illinois  
PK Jose Pizano, Jr., Missouri State  
LS Bradey Sorenson, Sr., South Dakota State  
AP Deion McShane, Sr., UNI  
RS Tony Tate, Sr., Western Illinois  
**HONORABLE MENTION**  
QB Will McElvain, Jr., UNI  
Connor Sampson, Sr., Western Illinois  
RB Tyler Hoosman, Sr., UNI  
FB Tim McCloy, Sr., Illinois State  
TE Josh Babicz, Sr., North Dakota State  
WR Dante Hendrix, R-Jr., Indiana State  
Isaiah Weston, Sr., UNI  
OL Isaiah Edwards, R-Sr., Indiana State  
Mason Scheidegger, Sr., South Dakota  
William Waddell, Sr., Western Illinois  
DL James Jackson, Sr., Youngstown State  
Jacob Matthew, Sr., South Dakota  
Inoke Moala, R-Sr., Indiana State  
Reece Winkelman, Jr., South Dakota St.  
LB Jack Cochrane, Sr., South Dakota  
Jaxson Turner, 5th Year, North Dakota  
DB Jordan Canady, 5th Year, North Dakota  
Myles Harden, Fr., South Dakota  
Benny Sapp III, Sr., UNI  
P Adam Fellner, Sr., Western Illinois  
PK Nico Gualdoni, Sr., Southern Illinois  
LS Dan Heilbron, Jr., Southern Illinois  
AP Christian Turner, Sr., Youngstown State  
RS Luke Skokna, Jr., North Dakota