

# Pioneer Conference

Division I newcomer St. Thomas Football was slotted at No. 8 out of 11 teams in a preseason coaches vote for the 2021 Pioneer Football League race.

Davidson (eight first-place votes) and San Diego (three) took the first two spots, with Drake at No. 3 leading a second tier of teams.

St. Thomas, Marist, Stetson and Butler hold the Nos. 8-9-10-11 spots. PFL head coaches didn't vote for their own teams but ranked each opponent at No. 1 through No. 10. Teams received 10 points for each No. 1, nine for a Nos 2 etc... to get each team's poll points total.

After 100 seasons as a member of the MIAC and more than three decades competing as a Division III program, the Tommies make their Division I debut in all 21 sports in fall 2021. They are the only new FCS or FBS program competing in the 2021 college football season.

Coach Glenn Caruso's eight-game PFL schedule includes road games at the Nos. 1-2-3-9 teams in the preseason poll -- Davidson, San Diego, Drake and Stetson. The Purple's conference home games will come against Butler, Valparaiso, Marist and Presbyterian. They don't play Dayton or Morehead State in this season's schedule draw.

St. Thomas is set to open play with consecutive non-conference games Sept. 4 and 11 against NAIA's St. Francis (Ill.) (home) and Division II Michigan Tech (away). Their first FCS game will come on the road against Northern Iowa on Sept. 18.

Caruso is starting his 14th season here after enduring the program's longest offseason in more than 75 years.

The Tommies are among a handful of FCS programs that didn't play games last season. Covid protocols and restrictions along with trouble finding willing opponents left them with only a few scrimmages last spring. Their last game came Nov. 16, 2019 in their season finale, a 17-7 win over Bethel that clinched a share of the 2019 conference title.

St. Thomas will return five all-conference players from that final season of play in Division III in 2019: starting offensive linemen Eli Wawracz and Matt Weimann; kick-return specialist Tom Loeffler; DB Joe Hird; and QB Tommy Dolan.

Kolby Gartner, expected to compete for the starting punter job, pitched for the Tommies' NCAA runner-up baseball team last spring as a true freshman and made two impressive postseason starts.

The Purple's 110-man preseason roster is expected to include nearly 35 seniors. More than 60 players who joined the team over the last two seasons have yet to play in a college football game, although several will push for starting or two-deep roles. This year's signing class and transfers list includes 35 players from 11 different states.

## 2021 Pioneer Football League Preseason Coaches' Poll

Team	Points
1. Davidson (8)	97
2. San Diego (3)	93
3. Drake	67

<b>4. Dayton</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>5. Presbyterian</b>	<b>59</b>
<b>6. Valparaiso</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>7. Morehead State</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>8. St. Thomas</b>	<b>36</b>
<b>9. Marist</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Stetson</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>11. Butler</b>	<b>15</b>

ST. LOUIS, Mo. – The Pioneer Football League named 38 student-athletes to its Preseason All-Pioneer Football League Teams Wednesday, including 29 returning First Team All-PFL selections.

Returning players named to the league’s 2020-21 All-PFL Teams were placed automatically on the 2020 Preseason All-PFL team in order of head coaches voting. In addition, the 2021 preseason team includes student-athletes from the University of Dayton and Marist College who would have appeared on the 2020 Preseason All-PFL Team.

Preseason favorite and defending champion Davidson has five preseason selections: running back Dylan Sparks, fullback Coy Williams, offensive lineman Khalil Miller, defensive lineman Jonathan Hammond, and linebacker Jake Alexander. Sparks, Williams, and Miller led a Wildcats offensive unit that led all FCS programs in rushing yards (280.0 yards per game). Hammond returns after earning Freshman Defensive Player of the Year accolades after posting 9.5 tackles for loss and four sacks in his seven-game debut campaign.

San Diego, picked to finish second in Tuesday’s PFL Preseason Coaches’ Poll, saw seven of its student-athletes earn preseason recognition: wide receiver Michael Carner, tight end Derek Kline, offensive lineman DJ Wright, linebackers Kyle Bilchik and Kama Kamaka as well as defensive backs Michael Hawkins and Hunter Nichols. The Toreros five defensive selections paced a defensive that permitted a league-low 266.0 total yards per game and tallied a league-best 3.17 sacks per game over six outings.

Drake, picked third in the coaches poll, placed three on the preseason team while Dayton, picked fourth, returns five preseason picks. Morehead State, which was picked seventh, had six preseason selections, second-most among the league’s 11 members. The upcoming 2019 season marks the 29th year for the Pioneer Football League – the nation’s only non-scholarship, football-only NCAA Football Championship Subdivision conference. The league will feature 11 teams, each playing an eight-game schedule to determine the league champion and recipient of the automatic bid to the NCAA FCS Championship.

The 2021 schedule gets underway Thursday, Sept. 2, when Drake hosts West Virginia Wesleyan, and the rest of the league gets underway Saturday, Sept. 4. The 2019 PFL race starts in Week 4 (Sept. 14) with a full five-game slate of league outings.

2021 Preseason All-Pioneer Football League Team  
(as selected by PFL head coaches)

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<b>Pos.</b>	<b>Player</b>	<b>School</b>	<b>Ht.</b>	<b>Wt.</b>	<b>Yr.</b>	<b>Hometown</b>
<b>OFFENSE</b>						
WR	BJ Byrd (1)	Morehead State	6-2	190	Sr.	Richmond, Calif.
WR	Michael Carner (1)	San Diego	6-1	190	RSo.	Westlake Village, Calif.
WR	Yogi Flager (2)	Butler	5-10	165	RFr.	Fairview Heights, Ill.
QB	Mark Pappas (1)	Morehead State	6-2	213	Jr.	Avon Lake, Ohio
QB	Jack Cook (1)	Dayton	6-0	207	Sr.	Cranberry Township, Pa.
TE	Derek Kline (1)	San Diego	6-5	230	RSo.	Phoenix, Ariz.
RB	Jake Chisholm (1)	Dayton	5-9	182	Jr.	Union, Ky.
RB	Dylan Sparks (1)	Davidson	6-0	201	Jr.	Centreville, Va.
RB	Robert Washington (1, PotY)	Valparaiso	5-11	215	Sr.	Huntersville, N.C.
FB	Coy Williams (1)	Davidson	5-11	202	Sr.	Lumberton, Texas
A-P	BJ Byrd (2)	Morehead State	6-2	190	Sr.	Richmond, Calif.
OL	Billy Corte (1)	Stetson	6-5	285	RSr.	Cleveland, Ohio
OL	Antonio Derry (1)	Stetson	6-4	308	RSr.	Baltimore, Md.
OL	Cam Marriott (1)	Morehead State	6-3	300	Jr.	Redlands, Calif.
OL	Khalil Miller (1)	Davidson	6-3	299	Sr.	Lithonia, Ga.
OL	DJ Wright (1)	San Diego	6-4	275	RJr.	Pittsburg, Calif.
<b>DEFENSE</b>						
DL	Jonathan Hammond (2, FRotY)	Davidson	6-2	218	So.	Dunwoody, Ga.
DL	Jake Hoper (2)	Drake	6-4	269	Sr.	South Beloit, Ill.
DL	Vaughn Taylor Jr. (1)	Morehead State	6-2	252	Sr.	Washington, D.C.
DL	Fermon Reid (1)	Stetson	6-0	254	Gr.	Naples, Fla.
DL	Aaron Acosta (H)	Marist	6-0	285	RJr.	Mount Laurel, N.J.
LB	Jake Alexander (1)	Davidson	6-0	189	Sr.	Belmont, N.C.
LB	Kyle Bilchik (1)	San Diego	5-10	210	Sr.	Simi Valley, Calif.
LB	Kama Kamaka (1)	San Diego	6-1	210	Sr.	Kailua, Hawaii
LB	Jaxon Peifer (1)	Valparaiso	6-1	235	Sr.	Normal, Ill.
LB	Zach Rumpke (H)	Dayton	6-0	196	RSo.	Cincinnati, Ohio
LB	Vincent Winey (1)	Morehead State	6-1	230	Sr.	Lindenhurst, N.Y.
DB	Brandon Easterling (1)	Dayton	6-0	203	Sr.	Fairborn, Ohio
DB	Kyle Fleitman (2)	Marist	6-0	178	Gr.	Islip Terrace, N.Y.
DB	Michael Hawkins (1)	San Diego	6-1	200	Sr.	San Diego, Calif.
DB	Danny Morales (2)	Drake	5-11	180	Sr.	Temecula, Calif.

DB	Hunter Nichols (1)	San Diego	6-0	185	Jr.	Los Angeles, Calif.
DB	Keyon Turner (1)	Valparaiso	5-9	160	So.	Chicago, Ill.

**SPECIAL TEAMS**

PK	Brian Bartholomew (1)	Valparaiso	5-11	160	RJr.	Sugar Grove, Ill.
PK	Sam Webster (2)	Dayton	5-10	215	So.	Richfield, Ohio
P	Ben Niesner (1, PotY)	Valparaiso	6-0	190	RSr.	Black Diamond, Wash.
RS	Jaylon Johnson (1)	Stetson	5-10	156	RSo.	Olive Branch, Miss.
LS	Ryan Kriceri (1)	Drake	6-2	235	5th	Aurora, Ill.

Notes in parentheses: 1-was a first-team selection; 2-was a second-team selection; H-was an honorable mention selection in previous year of competition. (Dayton and Marist student-athletes from 2019 all others from 2020 All-PFL Teams). PotY-2020-21 Player of the Year (Offensive, Defensive or Special Teams), FRotY- 2020-21 Freshman of the Year (Offensive or Defensive).