

# MONTANA ST

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2022

**QUARTERBACKS** - Tucker Rovic threw for 1,969 (62%, 15-5) in 2019. Rovic was back for the 2021 season and they also returned backup QB Casey Bauman (450, 48%, 1-0). The Bobcats also added NC State transfer QB Matthew McKay (PS#42), who started five games for the Wolfpack in 2019. McKay won the starting job and threw for 200+ yards in the F/5 games but only topped 200 pass yards in 1 of the final 6 regular season games. Despite McKay helping lead MSU to the playoffs, he entered the portal after the regular season as there were rumblings of a QB change. In the regular season McKay threw for 2,021 yards (62.2%, 16-3) and also ran for 316 yards (5.1). Freshman Tommy Mellott took over as the starter and helped guide the Bobcats to three postseason wins but in the National Title game Mellott injured his ankle on the 4th play from scrimmage & Rovic took over. This season Mellott returns after throwing for 484 yards (52.8%, 4-0) and rushing for 716 yards (6.3, 10 td). Rovic (186, 45%, 2-1) departs as well. In addition to Mellott returning MSU the Bobcats add former Wyoming QB Sean Chambers who started 18 games and has 2,312 pass yards (49%, 16-10) and 1,092 rush yards (4.9, 15 td). The Bobcats enter 2022 with 2 QB's that have experience & as long as they stay healthy it should be a great season for whoever gets the starting job.

**RUNNING BACKS** - Going into last fall the Bobcats lost their top RB (8 st, 915, 6.2, 8 td). They did return two of their top four rushers in Isaiah Ifanse (4 st, 813, 6.5, 6 td) & Lane Sumner (2 st, 424, 7.0, 5 td). Ifanse had a monster season running the ball as he topped 100 yards in a game eight times including topping 200 yards 2 times (217 vs both E. Wash & Portland St). Ifanse missed the FCS semifinal game vs South Dakota St, but returned for the title game & overall was #2 in the FCS with 1,623 rush yards (5.8, 10 td) and was 2nd Tm AA and 1st Tm Big Sky! Elijah Elliott started the final two playoff games and was the #3 overall rusher with 319 (5.1). Ifanse and Elliott both return this season, but Ifanse was out for spring and could miss the beginning of the season. Elliott proved he was a capable starter LY and will be productive if Ifanse has to miss any time.

**RECEIVERS** - The Bobcats lost 3 of their top 5 receivers including their top 2 going into the 2021 season. Their top 3 returnees were WR Coy Steel (5 st, 334, 14.5), WR Lance McCutcheon (1 st, 197, 15.2) & TE Derryk Snell (3 st, 84, 9.3). McCutcheon who would staep up & take over as the top target, as he finished the season with 1,219 yards (19.4, 9 td) and was 1st Tm Big Sky. This season McCutcheon (15 st) departs along with Nate Stewart (L/6 st, 209, 17.4). However, MSU does return Willie Patterson (15 st, 406, 13.1) along with TE's Snell (13 st, 159, 7.9) and Treyton Pickering (1 st, 140, 9.3). The WR depth takes a big hit as 5 of the top 7 are gone. While MSU passed on just 35% of their plays LY, the lack of depth at WR is concerning going into the '22 season.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - The OLine lost three players that combined for 28 starts in '19. They returned four OL who combined for 47 starts in '19 giving them a solid group going into '21. While a solid core returns they did have a new C taking over. However the rushing attack did not skip a beat as they topped 200 yards 8 times including rushing for 387 (6.5) vs UT Martin in the first round of the playoffs. Overall the OLine helped pave the way for 221 rush ypg (5.2) and they allowed 20 sacks (5.9%) with just 2 of those sacks coming in the playoffs. This season the Bobcats lose 1st Tm AA and 1st Tm Big Sky LT Lewis Kidd along with 2nd Tm Big Sky LG Taylor Tuasosopo and 4th Tm Big Sky RG Zach Redd. Overall 4 starters are gone for MSU on the OLine. The lone returnee is C Justus Perkins and this unit will have their work cut out for them if they are to have the same success running the ball & protecting the QB as last season.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - The DLine lost 3 players going into 2021 that combined for 32 starts including a DE who led the Big Sky with 15 sacks in '19. They returned two starters in DE Amandre Williams (15 st, #3 tkl'r, 5 sk, 11 tfl) & NT Chase Benson (13 st, #7 tkl'r, 3 sk) and move LB Daniel Hardy moved to DE. The Bobcats rush defense allowed 200+ yds three times, but held 8 foes to 100 rush yds or less and overall allowed 126 rush ypg (3.3) and collected 42 sacks! The DLine was led by DE Hardy (15 st, 77 tkl, 8 tfl) who was #3 in the FCS with 16 sacks and was 1st Tm Big Sky. Hardy departs this season along with 3rd Tm Big Sky DE A. Williams (14 st, 47 tkl, 8.5 sk) and 1st Tm NT Chase Benson (13 st, 41 tkl, 4.5 tfl, 3.5 sk). DT's Sebastian Valdez (L/8 st, 41 tkl, 3.5 sk) and Blake Hehl (6 st, 21 tkl) return along with DE Brody Grebe (27 tkl, 5.5 sk), but with 3 starters gone, this unit, while solid, will likely take a step back.

**LINEBACKERS** - This unit lost three who combined for 15 starts in 2019. The Bobcats returned McCade O'Reilly (10 st in '19), along with Troy Andersen (9 st, #8, 6.5 sk, 5 tfl in '19). Last fall Andersen had an excellent season, as he recorded 147 tackles (15 st, 14 tfl, 7 pbu, 2 int) and was 1st Tm AA and the Big Sky DPOY! O'Reilly was MSU's #2 tackler with 105 tackles (14 st, 4 tfl, 3 pbu, 2 int) and was 3rd Tm Big Sky. NB Ty Okada was the #3 tackler and he had 78 tackles (14 st, 6 tfl, 6 pbu, 2 int) and was 2nd Tm Big Sky. While the Bobcats lose their star LB Andersen (#2DC ATL) O'Reilly is back but is coming off shoulder surgery in the offseason. Three of the top four LB's return and they get back NB Okada. If O'Reilly comes back healthy & a new starter can emerge at LB this unit will still have a decent season.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - MSU gave up 436 pass yards to Tex Tech in the '19 opener, but against the rest of their schedule they allowed 223 pass ypg (61%) and recorded 14 int's. The secondary LY lost three who started 14+ games in 2019 including the #2 tackler ROV Brayden Konkol (15 st, 3 int, 9 pbu). Their top returnees were CB Tyrel Thomas (11 st, #10 tkl'r, 2 int, 12 pbu) & CB Eric Zambrano (#21 tkl'r, 1 pbu). Last fall MSU allowed 163 pass ypg (53%) through the F/12 games. Even after allowing 354 and 315 pass yds in B2B playoff games MSU gave up just 184 pass ypg (56.2%) for the season with 18 int's. S Tre Webb led the MSU secondary with 70 tackles (15 st, 2.5 tfl, 2 pbu). Webb is the lone DB starter for MSU that departs this fall, as 3rd Tm Big Sky S Jeffrey Manning (15 st, 33 tkl, 7 pbu, 4 int) is back along with CB's Simeon Woodard (L/11 st, 37 tkl, 4 pbu, 4 int) and Zambrano (14 st, 26 tkl, 9 pbu). CB James Campbell (5 st, 20 tkl) also returns and this secondary should have another productive season with 3 starters returning.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - Going into '21 MSU lost their K (14-24 fg's, L/47) from '19 along with their P who had a 45.0 avg and a 39.2 net. Blake Glessner took over as the kicker and hit 20-26 fg's including 2-3 from 50+ yards (L/54) and was named 3rd Tm Big Sky. LY 2 of Glessner's 6 misses were blocked. Bryce Leighton took over as the new punter and averaged 40.9 yards per punt with a net of 37.0 yards. RB Elliott led with 199 KR yards (13.3) and MSU had 133 PR yards all season. With this unit returning all their top performers they should have another stellar season on special teams.

**COACHES** - Fomer Wyoming OC Brett Vigen was hired as the new HC at Montana St prior to the 2021 season. Vigen did alright for his debut season as a HC, leading the Bobcats to a 12-3 mark and a berth in the FCS Championship Game for the first time since 1984! Vigen's 12 wins LY were the most ever by a 1st year Big Sky HC. Vigen spent 2014-2020 at Wyoming as the QB coach/OC and from '17-'20 was also the assoc HC. Vigen spent 15 years as a coach at North Dakota St (1998-2013) going from a GA role to eventually being the OC from 2009-2013. Taylor Housewright enters his second season as the OC for the Bobcats. Prior to taking over that role with MSU, Housewright was an offensive analyst for Oregon in 2020 and in 2019 was an offensive quality control coach for Mississippi St. The new DC is Willie Mack Garza, who previously spent the past 2 seasons at McNeese as the safeties coach, and

also was the S's coach at Wyoming in 2019. Justin Udy has been the WR's coach here since 2020 and now is the ST coordinator as well. Prior to MSU, he was an offensive quality control coach for Texas Tech in 2019.

## FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - In 2017 MSU averaged 397 ypg (249 rush ypg) and 25 ppg. In 2018 the rushing numbers were still great (232 ypg, 5.5) but overall MSU gained just 372 ypg but scored 28 ppg. In 2019 the offense returned 9 starters but only improved to 427 ypg (258 rush ypg, 5.7) but did score 33 ppg. After not playing in 2020 the Bobcats returned just 5 starters on offense, yet they averaged 402 ypg and 29 ppg. This season MSU gets back just 4 starters on offense including just 1 Oline starter. QB Mellott (L/4 starts LY) is working his way back from offseason surgery and they also add a Wyoming QB transfer. The top two rushers are back but 5 of the top 7 WR's depart. MSU's offensive strength in years past has been their rushing attack & they will likely have to rely on that this season if they are to see similar success to last season.

**DEFENSE** - MSU's defense in 2017 allowed 407 ypg and 25 ppg. In 2018 the Bobcats defense gave up 409 ypg and 28 ppg. With 7 starters back on defense in 2019 the numbers improved to allowing just 358 ypg and 22 ppg in 2019. The Bobcats brought back just 5 starters on defense in 2021 and just 6 of their top 16 tacklers. However, led by AA LB Troy Andersen, the Bobcats allowed just 273 ypg and 13 ppg in their F/12 games. Despite allowing 459 ypg and 25 ppg in their L/3 playoff games, the MSU defense allowed 310 ypg and 15 ppg for the season and overall held teams to 78 ypg under their season average. The MSU defense returns just 1 starter along the DLine and they lose LB Andersen to the NFL as well as their star DE who had 16 sacks LY, but they return their NB and 3 of the 4 secondary starters. With 6 starters back this defense has talent, but need new starters to emerge on the DLine if they want to come close to matching LY's numbers.

**2022** - MSU had their most successful season in 2021 since winning the FCS National Title back in 1984! Last season saw the Bobcats finish 12-3 and make it to the FCS Championship Game. They were also +92 ypg and +14 ppg. A big key to MSU's success was their +14 TO ratio! This season the Bobcats will look to build off of LY's success, but return just 10 starters and have some key holes to fill on the team. MSU opens with McNeese and Morehead St at home before going to Oregon St. MSU then opens Big Sky play at E. Wash (won there LY 23-20) and then host UC Davis and Idaho St. MSU then goes on the road for 3 of the next 4 games, playing at N. Colorado, N. Arizona and 2021 Big Sky champion Cal Poly, who MSU has defeated 4 straight games. MSU then closes out the season with their annual rival game vs Montana, who gave MSU their only Big Sky loss in 2021. While the Bobcats need to replace 4 starters on the Oline and 3 starters on the DLine, HC Vigen has this team going in the right direction & QB Mellott showed LY the lights weren't too bright as his first 3 career starts were all playoff wins. We expect Montana St to be in the mix for the Big Sky crown and possibly another trip to the playoffs.