

# NORTHWESTERN WILDCATS



RB JUSTIN JACKSON

## POSITION OUTLOOK FOR 2016

**QUARTERBACKS** - NW is more effective with a mobile QB and in '14 Trevor Siemian (#7DC) was plagued by dropped passes, an ankle inj vs NIU and a leaky O-line. Siemian threw for 2,214 (58%, 7-11), 6'4" Zack Oliver (PS#39) hit 30-57-367-2-3 in relief. Matt Alvti (PS#17) played in 4 (4 att). True frosh Clayton Thorson (PS#16) RS. Oliver had the edge in exp and arm strength LY. Alvti ran well, but Thorson was my favorite to win the job and he did. They let Thorson come along slowly and only once all year did he top 200 yds passing (256 vs Ball St). He threw for 1,522 (50.8%, 7-9, #2 rusher). He had 126 yd rushing incl 68 & 49 yd runs in the upset of Nebraska. Oliver played in 6 (53 att, 43.4%, 267) and Alvti in 2 (3 att). Oliver moves on but Thorson should be given a much larger playbook in '16 and should show solid progress as a passer.

**RUNNING BACKS** - In '14 they had to replace their #2 RB (370, 3.8) but got back their leading rusher in Treyvon Green (736, 5.4). True frosh Justin Jackson (PS#16) became the 2nd NW back to top 1,000 in 8 years (1187, 4.8, 201 rec, 3rd Tm B10). Warren Long (PS#109) was #3 (123, 4.1), true frosh Solomon Vault (PS#125) added 81 (4.1). LY they lost Green (7 st, 319, 4.4) but Jackson improved to 1,418 (4.5, 162 rec, 2nd Tm B10). Long had a 55 yd run vs Duke but after 152 in 3 gms he finished with just 329 (5.5) and QB Thorson was #2 (397, 4.0). The speedy Vault (98 yd KR TD) was held to just 159 (2.8). Explosive rFr Austin Anderson (PS#55) had 56 (4.3) and John Moten (PS#80) RS. The top 4 all return and Jackson remains one of the Big Ten's best.

**RECEIVERS** - Last year Northwestern lost their #1 and #3 rec's but got back Christian Jones (PS#71) who was #1 in 2013 (668, 12.4). They threw the ball 136 less times so the numbers were down. Super back Dan Vitale led with just 355 (10.8). This year they lose 4 of the top 5 in Vitale (13 st, #6DC TB), Jones (13 st, 234, 10.2), Miles Shuler (12 st, 149, 9.9, UFA CAR) and Mike McHugh (7 st, 160, 10.0). This group is less experienced but will top 2015's numbers.

**OFFENSIVE LINE** - Pat Fitzgerald likes an athletic O-line which is sometimes undersized. In '14 the line ret'd intact (100 car sts) but NW slipped to 137 rush ypc (3.4, 34 sk). LY they lost a 2x3rd Tm B10 C (4Y st'r) and a 2Y st'g LT. The cars sts dropped to 58 but after underperforming in '14, I looked for improved numbers with 3 st's back. The line was hit hard by injuries with 16 sts lost to injury and only 2 OL starting more than 8 games. NW still improved to 189 (4.1, 29 sk). This year they lose Geoff Mogus (8/31), OG Matt Frazier (9/25) and RT Adam DePietro (1/3). They have 64 career starts back and look for better health, which should mean improved numbers again.

**DEFENSIVE LINE** - In 2014 NW had 1 starter back and all'd 170 ypg rush (4.2, 17 sk). Last year they lost a DT (3 st) but had 7 of the top 8 returning. In my '15 magazine I called for them to allow under 4.0 ypc rush and they had their best ypc yet under Fitzgerald yielding 3.5 (126 ypg, 30 sk). This year they lose their top guy in 2nd Tm B10 DE Dean Lowry (13 st, 52 tkl, 13.5 tfl, #4DC GB), DE Deonte Gibson (13 st, 39 tkl, 9 sk, UFA DET) and DT Max Chapman (4 tkl, 1.5 sk). DE is a question mark and you might see them go to a 3-4 scheme at times if some DE's don't emerge. With 2 solid st's back they could be close to 2015's improved numbers.

**LINEBACKERS** - In 2014 they had to replace their #1 tkl'r but returned their #2, #3 & #12 tkl'rs and moved a S (#8) in. My computer called for them to allow 25.7 ppg on D (pg 43) and they almost matched that (25.2). Last year they lost their #1, #5 & #11 tkl'rs. They had 73 car sts gone and only 14 returning (#7, #10 tkl'rs). Anthony "Big Ant" Walker was the #1 tackler by far (3rd Tm AA, 35 more tkl's than #2) and had 20.5 tfl as a soph! Nate Hall (#5) took over for an inj'd Jaylen Prater (#7) late in the year. This year they lose SLB Drew Smith (13 st, #4 tkl'r, 10.5 tfl) but have 5 of the top 6 back including their star and add in a PS#77 Soph & PS#86 rFr for depth.

**DEFENSIVE BACKS** - In '14 the unit returned 4 starters (did lose 4 bkps) and I called for NW to finish in the Top 40 of my PDR for the first time s/o'05, which they did (#34). Last year they lost a S (#6 tkl'r, #4DC) but ret'd 7 of the top 8 DB's including 2nd Tm B10 CB Nick VanHoose (#4 tkl'r) and their #2, #3 and #8 tkl'rs. As you would expect they rose again (#6, 54%, 5-12). This year they lose CB VanHoose (12 st, #9 tkl'r, 3 int, 12 pbu), FS Traveon Henry (12 st, #3 tkl'r, 4 pbu) and bkp Terrance Brown (1st, 10 tkl). They have 5 of the top 8 back including 3rd Tm B10 CB Matthew Harris (#7 tkl'r, 4 int, 13 pbu, miss 2 gm). Coming off such a high finish and going from 3 returning starters to 2, they figure to drop some in my PDR.

**SPECIAL TEAMS** - The Cats have struggled in this area. Over the last 9 years they've finished above #65 in my ST rankings only twice and that was when Venric Mark was their top RM ('10 & '12). In 2014 Solomon Vault had an 89 yd KR to when Miles Shuler was OFY. The Cats only returned 9 punts (15.1) and plummeted to #104. Last year they only lost their P (32.7 net) and moved up to #100. Jack Mitchell hit the game-winning FG vs Wisky and was 18-27 (L/49). P Hunter Niswander avg 38.0 (tm net 37.2) with Vault a solid 26.3 on KR's (2 td, 2nd Tm B10 KR). This year they only lose PR Shuler (10.0) and should improve again.

**COACHES** - Pat Fitzgerald rebounded from B2B 5-7 years to win 10 games in '15. Now starting year 11 as HC in Evanston, Fitzgerald was the hand picked choice of the late Randy Walker as his replacement at just 31 years of age in '06. Fitz bleeds purple as he was a 2-time AA LB here and the only player to win B2B Nagurski AND Bednarik Awards. Ninth year OC Mick McCall was BG's OC in '07 (QB cch '03-'06) and QB/RB cch at WY ('01-'02). Also in his 9th year here is DC Mike Hankwitz, who was the DC at Wisconsin ('06-'07), Colorado twice ('04-'05 and '88-'94) and A&M ('97-'02) among other stops.

**THIS DECADE 43-33(56.6%)#55** - Northwestern actually won or shared 3 Big Ten Titles in a 6 year stretch ('95-'00) under Gary Barnett and the late Randy Walker. Pat Fitzgerald had the unenviable task of stepping in after the team suffered the sudden death of HC Randy Walker (summer '06) and did a good job just getting to 4-8. In '07 I called for the Cats to be bowl eligible and they were at 6-6 (not invited). Fitzgerald then guided them to 5 consecutive bowls with his high water marks being 9-4 in '08 and 2012 (#17, 10-3), a year in which they were just 5:03 away from an unbeaten record (first bowl win

since 1948). In '13 they had their first preseason AP (#22) ranking s/o'11 NW was 4-0 and hosted Ohio St at night and took it to the wire but lost. The Wildcats never recovered going 1-7 after with some tough losses (see my 2014 mag). In 2014 RB Venric Mark (1st Tm AA in '12) transferred over the summer then their top WR, Christian Jones, was OFY. They got inconsistent QB play and had some tough losses to finish with B2B 5-7 seasons. NW went 10-3 in 2015 and are a solid 43-33 57% this decade.

**2015 ANALYSIS 10-3** - The Wildcats rated a +2.5 in my Stock Market Indicator. They ret'd 14 st's, made my Most Improved List and doubled their win total. NW set the tone right away by upsetting Stanford 16-6 (330-240 yd). NW shutout EIU showing no letdown then upset Duke 19-10. They had a 546-359 yd edge vs Ball St but only won by 5. In their B10 opener NW shutout 3-1 Minny, 27-0. NW was #13 and traveled to #18 Michigan but were outgained 380-168 and shutout 38-0. They took on a banged up Iowa at home and got dominated again 40-10. Just when it seemed they were a pretender they upset Nebraska on the road (stop 2 pt conv 4:23 left). NW got a 35 yd FG w/o:09 left to beat Penn St by 2. The Cats got a TD w/4:37 left to get past Purdue by 7. In a defensive struggle (209-203 yd) they got past Wisconsin at home 13-7, then beat rival Illinois 24-14. At 10-2 and #12, they were dominated by Tennessee in the bowl 45-6 and finished #23.

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**ALSO ON ROSTER:**  
QB TJ Green 6'2" 190 Fr  
QB Dan Kubiak 6'1" 200 So  
WR Parker Oliver 5'11" 180 Fr  
WR Cole Johnson 6'1" 200 Jr  
WR Quinn Baker 5'11" 190 Jr  
WR Chad Hanaoka 5'10" 170 Jr  
SB Eric Lutzen 6'6" 235 So  
LB Josh Roberts 6'1" 215 Jr

## PHIL'S FORECAST

**OFFENSE** - Despite winning 10 games in '15, the Wildcats offense was last in the Big Ten at 19.5 ppg and 327.1 ypg, their weakest numbers since their 4-8 '06 season. Punt was not a bad word LY with their D and now QB Thorson is more exp'd and confident. They have 6 st's back and will easily improve on last years poor numbers.

**DEFENSE** - How good was last year's defense? The 18.6 ppg and 319 ypg allowed were their best totals since that magical 1995 season when they went to the Rose Bowl. While they lose 2 DE's (combd' for 12 sks) and a solid CB, they return their top defensive player in 3rd Tm AA LB Anthony Walker along with their best CB in Matthew Harris. This will remain a top notch D, but matching LY's outstanding numbers will be tough.

**2016** - Northwestern made my coveted Most Improved List last year and went from 5-7 to 10-3, doubling their win total. There are some factors pointing down this year. They rate a -5.0 in my Stock Market Indicator (pg 32). They had 5 net close wins LY (pg 24) and had 4 net upsets. Despite their 6-2 Big Ten record they were -39.3 ypg in Big Ten play. On the plus side this team might be more talented. They rate a +17 in all-conf points returning. Despite dropping from 14 ret st's to 12, they go from #88 on my Experience Chart up to #46. They have perhaps the best defensive back 7, the top RB's and a now veteran QB. The do draw Ohio St and Mich St from the B10 East, and 5 of their 9 Big Ten games are on the road. While I do not expect them to get to 10 wins this year, I do expect a bowl game. Two of my 9 sets of power ratings call for 9 wins (including my main one).

## 2016 PROJECTED STARTING LINEUP

**QB 18 CLAYTON THORSON SO.** 6-4 220 PS#16. 13 st, 1522 (51%, 7-9), 397 rush (4.0) LY. 7 Matt Alvti (6'0" 200 Jr) PS#17. 4 gm, 4 att '14. 2 gm, 3 st att LY. 14 Lloyd Yates (6'2" 195 rFr) PS#75. Aidan Smith is PS#63.  
**TB 21 JUSTIN JACKSON JR.** 5-11 190 PS#16. 5st, 1187 (4.8) true. 13st, 1418 (4.5), 2nd Tm B10 LY. 13 Warren Long (6'0" 210 Sr) PS#109. 18 gm, 179 (4.0) 2Y. 13 gm, 329 (5.5) LY. 12 Austin Anderson (5'9" 180 So) PS#55.  
**WR 80 Austin Carr Sr.** 6-1 195 12 gm, 7 rec '14. 4 st, 302 (18.9) LY. 82 Andrew Scanlan (6'2" 215 Sr) 20 gm 2Y. 1 st, 9 gm, LY. 84 Cameron Green (6'3" 210 rFr) PS#97. 15 Macan Wilson (6'0" 180 Jr) PS#166.  
**WR 4 Solomon Vault Jr.** 5-10 190 PS#125. 8 gm, 6 rec true. 13 gm, 95 (8.6), 657 KR (26.3). 2nd Tm B10 KR LY. From RB spg. 5 Charlie Fessler (6'4" 205 rFr) PS#153. Bennett Skowranek is PS#113. 23 Steven Reese (6'2" 190 rFr).  
**WR 2 Flynn Nagel So.** 5-11 190 PS#61. 6 gm, 4 rec as true. 17 Marcus McShepard (5'11" 200 Jr). 20 gm, 17 tkl 2Y. From DB spg. 6 Jelani Roberts (5'8" 160 So) PS#174. 12 gm, 4 st, 302 (18.9) LY. Corey Acker (5'9" 170 Jr) 2 gm 2Y.  
**SB 9 Garrett Dickerson Jr.** 6-3 245 PS#5. 1 st, 4 rec true. 12 gm, 124 (10.3) LY. 19 Jayme Taylor (6'4" 230 Jr) PS#63. 12 gm, 9 rec '14. OFY LY. 31 Tommy Vitale (6'3" 220 So) PS#77. 44 James Prather (6'4" 270 Sr) PS#298.  
**C 69 Brad North Jr.** 6-2 290 PS#86. 3 gm '14. 5 st LY. 65 Jared Thomas (6'4" 275 rFr) PS#118. Cameron Kolwich is PS#139. LS 52 Chris Fitzpatrick (6'2" 235 Sr) PS#359. 25 gm 3Y. Tyler Gillikin is PS#34.  
**RG 70 SHANE MERTZ SR.** 6-8 310 PS#101. 16 gm 2Y. 7 st (F/GRG, 1LG) LY. Granted 6th yr. 59 JB Butler (6'3" 305 So) PS#303. 8 gm LY. Nik Urban (6'3" 270 Fr) PS#97. 7 Graham Bullmore (6'7" 290 Sr) PS#509. 1 gm LY.  
**LG 63 IAN PARK SR.** 6-4 305 PS#92. 8 st RG 2Y. F/9 st (8C, 1LG) then OFY (inj) LY. 68 Connor Mahoney (6'4" 290 Sr) PS#200. 20 gm 2Y. 6 st, 11 gm LY. 64 Andrew Otterman (6'5" 295 rFr) PS#274.  
**RT 76 ERIC OLSON SR.** 6-6 295 PS#114. 11 gm '13. 9 st '14. 12 st LY. 79 Sam Coverdale (6'7" 305 Jr) PS#89. 9 gm LY. 78 Adam Lemke-Bell (6'5" 270 rFr) PS#159. Gunnar Vogel (6'6" 265 Fr) PS#150.  
**LT 72 BLAKE HANCE SO.** 6-5 300 PS#105. 8 st, 12 gm LY. Tommy Dokes (6'6" 280 So) PS#81. 6 gm LY. 75 Ben Oxley (6'6" 285 So) PS#123. 5 gm, 3 tkl LY. DL to OL spg. Jesse Meyer (6'5" 285 Fr) PS#152.  
**K 7 JACK MITCHELL SR.** 6-3 210 14-18 tfgs, L46, 26-28 PAT, 19 TB/54 KO '14. 18-27 tfgs, L49, 25-28 PAT, 13 TB/26 KO LY. 33 Matt Micucci (5'11" 185 Sr) 7TB/32 KO LY. 96 Hunter Niswander (6'5" 235 Jr) PS#27.

**DE 7 Ifeadi Odenigbo Sr.** 6-3 250 PS#25. 12 gm, 9 tkl, 5.5 sk, 3 qbh '13. 12 gm, 11 tkl, 3 sk, 3 qbh '14. 12 gm, 19 tkl, 5 sk, 3 qbh LY. 54 Trent Goens (6'3" 250 rFr) PS#109. 94 Tommy Carnifax (6'4" 250 Fr) PS#155. IFS.  
**DT 67 TYLER LANCASTER JR.** 6-3 300 PS#78. 1 gm '14. 13 st, 33 tkl, 1.5 sk, 4 tfl, 2 pbu LY. 93 Greg Kuhar (6'3" 305 Sr) PS#90. 6 gm, 8 tkl '13. F/8 st, 29 tkl, 2 tfl, ACL '14. 11 gm, 11 tkl, 1 pbu LY. 92 Fred Wyatt (6'4" 270 Sr) PS#162.  
**DT 99 JORDAN THOMPSON SO.** 6-3 255 PS#86. 1 st, 13 gm, 15 tkl, 1 pbu as true. 90 CJ Robbins (6'5" 300 Sr) PS#209. 8 st, 16 tkl, 1.5 tfl 3Y. 12 st, 17 tkl, 1 pbu LY. Granted 6th yr. Jake Saunders (6'3" 275 Fr) PS#122.  
**DE 97 Joe Gaziano rFr.** 6-4 255 PS#103. 98 Xavier Washington (6'1" 235 Jr) PS#286. 11 gm, 13 tkl, 2.5 tfl true. 13 gm, 14 tkl, 1 sk, 2.5 tfl LY. 58 Heath Reineke (6'3" 245 So) 2 gm LY. 44 James Prather (6'4" 270 So) 10 gm LY.  
**WLB 51 JAYLEN PRATER SR.** 6-0 230 PS#163. 3 gm, 5 tkl '13. 9 gm, 4 tkl '14. 9 st, 46 tkl, 1 sk, OFY LY.  
**31 Tommy Vitale (6'3" 220 So) PS#77.** 5 gm, 1 tkl true LY. 10 Brett Walsh (6'1" 225 Jr) PS#159. 5 gm, 3 tkl '14. DNP LY.  
**WLB 18 ANTHONY WALKER JR.** 6-1 235 PS#120. 7 st, 51 tkl, 4 tfl '14. 13 st, 122 tkl, 20.5 tfl, 5 pd, 3rd Tm AA, 1st Tm B10 LY. 45 Nathan Fox (6'2" 245 rFr) PS#86. 53 Cameron Queiro (6'1" 225 So) PS#133. 13 gm, 7 tkl LY.  
**SAM 32 Nate Hall So.** 6-2 230 PS#141. 14 st, 56 tkl, 2.5 tfl, 4 qbh LY. 42 Joseph Jones (6'1" 225 Sr) PS#160. 11 gm, 6 tkl 2Y. 13 gm, 18 tkl, 2 tfl LY. 34 Simba Short (6'2" 210 rFr) PS#94. 35 Tom Hruby (6'3" 240 Sr) 12 gm 2Y.  
**CB 3 Keith Watkins Jr.** 5-11 180 PS#58R. 5 gm, 6 tkl '14. 3 st, 12 gm, 4 tkl, 6 pbu LY. 24 Montre Hartage (6'0" 180 So) PS#391. 13 gm, 4 tkl as true. Roderick Campbell is PS#81. Joe Bergin (5'11" 190 rFr).  
**CB 11 MATTHEW HARRIS SR.** 5-11 180 PS#165. 5 st, 36 tkl true. 11 st, 70 tkl, 3.5 tfl, 7 pbu, 2 int '14. 11 st, 48 tkl, 13 pbu, 4 int, 3rd Tm B10 LY. 29 Trae Williams (5'11" 200 rFr) PS#248. 28 Alonzo Mayo (5'11" 170 rFr) PS#398.  
**SS 16 GODWIN IGWEBUIKE JR.** 6-0 200 PS#40. 5 st, 11 gm, 51 tkl, 1 tfl, 3 pbu, 3 int '14. 13 st, 87 tkl, 4.5 tfl, 5 pbu LY. 14 Jake Murray (6'3" 200 rFr) PS#338. RS LY. 41 Jared McGee (6'1" 215 So) PS#445. 5 gm, 6 tkl LY.  
**FS 21 Kyle Queiro Jr.** 6-3 200 PS#99. 1 st, 11 tkl '14. 5 gm, 8 tkl then brkrm LY. 22 Parker Westphal (6'1" 190 So) PS#22. 5 gm LY. Travis Whillcock is PS#255. 48 Tommy Odell (5'11" 200 Jr) 7 gm '14. 2 gm LY.  
**P 96 HUNTER NISWANDER JR.** 6-5 235 PS#27. 4 gm, 5 punts, (36.0), L/43 (tm net 37.2). 85 punts L/56, 38.0 [21 In20, 6 of 50+, (tm net 37.2) LY. Mason Weissenhofer (6'2" 185 rFr). Matt Micucci (5'11" 185 Sr) PS#401.



