FOOTBALL PREVIEW 2011

The Collegian

2011 DEPTH CHARTS
PAGE 08

THE NEW CARR ERA
WILL DEREK CARR FOLLOW IN HIS BROTHER’S FOOTSTEPS?

MIGHTY MOUSE HAS HIS CAPE BACK ON
ROBBIE ROUSE RETURNS!
PAGE 03

LINEBACKER STEPS INTO LEADERSHIP ROLE
PAGE 06
BROWN LOOKS TO MAKE AN IMPACT THIS SEASON

PLUS: THOMAS BRINGS STABILITY TO THE SAFETY POSITION
PAGE 06

DEREK CARR #4 QUARTERBACK

PAT HILL HEAD COACH

HARRIS HAS GONE FROM BASKETBALL PLAYER TO RELIABLE STARTER
PAGE 04

LOGAN HARRELL #77 DEFENSIVE TACKLE

THE RELENTLESS FORCE IS BACK
LOGAN HARRELL AIMS TO BUILD OFF OF LAST SEASON
Rouse is ready to step up
Junior Robbie Rouse looks to take his game to the next level.
Harris is back to protect Carr’s blindside
Bryce Harris enters his fourth year as a staple on the offensive line.

Carr is ready to go
redshirt sophomore Derek Carr is finally under center after two seasons waiting in the wings.

Harrell looks to go from good to great
Senior Logan Harrell returns after a breakout season.

Brown puts imprint on program
After his first season as a starter, junior Travis Brown is ready to step into a new role.

Projected starting lineup
Get an inside look at who will be lining up at Candlestick Park on Sept. 3 for the Bulldogs’ season opener.
Rouse looks to build off a last season where he was overlooked with many dominant backs in the Western Athletic Conference.

By Jerry Huerta
The Collegian

Coming into last season, now-junior running back Robbie Rouse was just one of a handful of rushers that were competing to replace one of the best running backs in school history in Ryan Mathews. Rouse cracked the starting lineup in week one at home against Cincinnati but showed little promise carrying the ball 20 times for 40 yards, adding a receiving touchdown in the game. Throughout the season, he battled injuries leading to his slow start in the rushing department early on. It wasn’t until the New Mexico State game that Rouse flashed his full potential. The 5-foot-7 San Diego native rushed for 150 yards and two touchdowns en route to a 9.4 yards-per-carry average. But Rouse wasn’t close to being done yet. He followed that game with some big performances against Louisiana Tech and Nevada where he rushed for 286 and 217 yards in weeks eight and nine. The two monster performances propelled Rouse to finish the season with 1192 yards and eight touchdowns, second best yardage in the Western Athletic Conference. Rouse, however, was snubbed of any All-WAC recognition in 2010 after being snubbed in vote during the season by Boise State’s Doug Martin, Nevada’s Va Tu Tualagi, Louisiana Tech’s Lennnon Creer and Hawaii’s Alex Green. With Rouse finally healthy after battling injuries in 2010, the hype behind him is similar to that of a recent record-breaking running back. “I think the expectations kind of stay the same,” running backs coach Joe Wade said. “They’ve been high since I got here. With Ryan Mathews being one of the greats in school history in Ryan Mathews, I have perdicted thought a little questionable about our little questionable about our depth, but if that group can stay healthy that group will really grow.”

The offensive line lost plenty of experience due to graduation as four of the starters are gone from last season’s team. Since Harris is the only full-year starter returning from last season, he has tried to help the younger players progress. “We lost four seniors,” Harris said. “We had a good feel together with the guys that we got coming in right now. They’ve all had playing time. They’re all really good. Physical. I think we’ll be good.”

By Jerry Huerta
The Collegian

Four years ago, who would have predicted thought a little-known basketball product out of Tulare Union high school would become an all conference performer for Fresno State on the gridiron?

But senior offensive tackle Bryce Harris defied the odds and has been a mainstay on the offensive line for the past two seasons. Coming out of high school, Harris played basketball and football, but he signed with Fresno State to play football. One coach acknowledges how far his most experienced linemen has come.

“I really like Bryce Harris,” head coach Pat Hill said. “This is his third year as a starter. He was a basketball player coming out of Tulare high school. Played football but his main sport was basketball. I think he’s developed into quite a player for us. It’s going to be important for that offensive line to jell early. I like the talent on the offensive line. I’m a little questionable about our depth, but if that group can stay healthy that group will really grow.”

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Ryan Mathews

As someone who replaced the injured Joe Bernardi at center during multiple games, Leslie Cooper also started six games in front of Andrew Jackson at right guard in 2010. Also, in a win at Louisiana Tech, Helepiko, junior Matt Hunt and sophomore Austin Wentworth saw playing time. The game was significant for the young players because with them leading the way running back Robbie Rouse ran for a career-high 286 yards. Rouse talked a little about this year’s offensive lineman. “Last year, a few of our older linemen went down and some of the younger linemen stepped up, Rouse said. “So they stepped up and did good so I’ve already seen most of our lineman in game situations so I know what they’re capable of doing. I know they will do just fine.”

The same and some other instances have shown Rouse what this unit can accomplish on the field and off the football field. “Just to get stronger and faster,” Wade said. “With the emergence of the rest of the group to help him out this will help him come through out the season.”

The other main contributors as Wade mentioned will be juniors Ellis and Harris. Ellis had a breakout 160-yard performance in week two against Utah State before suffering injuries of his own. Harris also battled injuries throughout last year but now he too is healthy.

Another running back that could see playing time is Milton Knox, a UCLA transfer who sat out last season due to NCAA rules. He will be battling for playing time with Rouse and Ellis. 

Harris is back to protect QB Carr’s blindside

The possible faces of the future are freshman Dillon Root and Daryl Cash. Root was the top running back recruit from the 2011 recruiting class out of Redwood High School in Visalia, Calif. Cash is a running back out of St. Mary’s High School in Stockton, Calif. With all these young running backs behind him competing for playing time, Rouse talked about what he did to improve during the offseason to set him apart from the rest.

“Just to get stronger and faster,” Rouse said. “Do all the things that come with the game. Just get better with every aspect of football.”

Now, that the season just days away, Rouse can focus on his main goal for this upcoming year.

“The big expectation is I want to win a WAC championship,” Rouse said. “That’s definitely something I’ve always wanted to do and I think this last year in the WAC, I really would love to win a WAC championship.”
Harrell looks to go from good to great

By Jerry Huerta

Whether it was recording 3.5 sacks in the season opener against Cincinnati or shutting down Cal Poly’s triple-option attack with 1.5 sacks, senior Logan Harrell became a household name in 2010. He went from reserve defensive tackle during his sophomore season to dynamic pass rusher in his junior year. Alongside Western Athletic Conference defensive player of the year Chris Carter, the two formed a dynamic duo that opposing quarterbacks didn’t want to see in the backfield.

They wrecked havoc throughout the season with Carter recording 11 sacks and Harrell not far behind with 10.5 sacks, roughly 58 percent of the Bulldogs’ team sacks.

Now, coming into this season, Harrell has received a lot of recognition by being named to four different preseason watch lists. Some of the notable ones are the Outland Trophy watch list and The Bronko Nagurski watch list. The Outland trophy winner is traditionally a defensive lineman and the Bronko Nagurski trophy winner is awarded to best defensive player in America.

Even though he has been a popular pick on preseason watch lists, he was still voted to finish second as the WAC defensive player of the year for the upcoming season. Head coach Pat Hill gave some thoughts on Harrell and the WAC.

“I think he’s going to have a very good year but there’s a lot of good players in this conference,” Hill said. “That doesn’t diminish what he did in 2010, but this is 2011 and he is going to have to take his play from good to great.”

Now, Harrell will be forced to improve despite a looming hole at defensive end with Carter gone and more offenses focusing on him. But the senior defensive tackle explained what it means going into the season.

“It’s going to be harder without Chris [Carter] here,” said Harrell at Fresno State’s football media day. “There’s going to be more focus towards me as far as teams scouting me. I think the disadvantage they have is they haven’t seen the younger guys that are going to replace Chris Carter, Cornel Banks and Chris Lewis.”

Some of the players that are in the running to play alongside Harrell are, senior Chase McEntee at tackle, sophomore Nat Harrison, junior Matt Akers and senior Donahvaughn Pritchett at end.

“We’re a young team coming in,” Harrell said. “We definitely have more chemistry than our team last year and a lot more energy. There are definitely big expectations for this team because the preseason polls came out with Hawaii at one and us at two. I personally think with this team we have right now we should land at the number one spot.”

Although this team doesn’t have a lot of on-the-field experience, Harrell still believes this year’s team has a shot at winning its first outright WAC championship.

By Jerry Huerta

The Collegian

Harrell enters his senior season with a target on his back after his breakout season

Matt Weir / Collegian File Photo
Carr is ready to go

Redshirt sophomore has opportunity to step out of his brother’s shadow

By Jerry Huerta
The Collegian

It has been a decade since there was a Carr under center for Fresno State, but now fans will get to see what they’ve waited two full seasons for: Derek Carr, starting quarterback.

Carr will be facing a Pacific-12 foe California in the season opener at Candlestick Park in San Francisco while the Golden Bears’ Memorial Stadium undergoes renovations.

As Carr prepares for his first start since his playing days at Bakersfield Christian High School, the redshirt sophomore talked about the match-up and what it means to him.

“That is a dream come true,” Carr said. “I couldn’t ask for a better opener.”

Carr has been preparing for the opener during the off-season and has reportedly looked solid throwing to a young and talented group of skill players.

Some of young skill players at running back are 1,000-yard rusher Robbie Rouse who was hurt for most of last season, A.J. Ellis who had a breakout game against Utah State in the second game of the season and UCLA transfer Milton Knox who will bring another back into the stable of running backs.

On the edge, Devon Wylie returns with the most experience after another injury ridden season to provide some experience. Rashad Evans, Jalen Saunders and Isaiah Burse bring back that elusive-ness in the open field as well in the return game. Freshman Josh Harper is back after red-throwing last season to fill out Carr’s list of potential weapons.

Also, Victor Dean, who is the tallest receiver at 6-foot-5 was out for six to eight weeks with a broken foot. Recently, it was reported that the boot on his broken foot is off. When he returns, he will provide another target for Carr, particularly in the red zone.

Carr has been spreading the ball around like a skilled veteran to his young talented playmakers in fall camp. One coach talked about Carr’s work ethic and what he thinks the sophomore will do this season.

“I expect him to do his job,” co-offensive coordinator Jeff Grady said. “That’s exactly how he approaches his every day deal here in the office and he comes to work and gets his work done. He’s going to be a good player.”

Grady has been the passing game coordinator since Carr has been at Fresno State. He has seen the difference between an early graduate from Bakersfield Christian High school to a veteran who is going into his third year in the system. He has seen his mind-set change since he became the starter.

“He started taking more of a leadership role right after the season ended in January and he’s kind of ran with it,” Grady said. “I think all the guys are all behind him but he’s still got to do it on the field. It’s one thing to do it on the practice field. He’s got to carry that forward to the game field and I got a good feeling he’ll do that.”

Now, Carr has to prove he can bring that leadership to the gridiron like his older brother. But despite throwing just 14 career passes, the last thing the latest Carr lacks is confidence.

“I’m ready to go,” Carr said.
“I’m ready to lead this team. As the quarterback, you’re the leader and I’m ready to rally these guys around me.”

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Brown puts imprint on program

By Jerry Huerta
The Collegian

The linebacker corps lost one key starter from last year’s team in Ben Jacobs, who was a mainstay Bulldog at the middle linebacker for four years. With Jacobs out of a Fresno State uniform after graduation, there is a hole left in the middle of the Bulldogs’ defense. The Dogs are trying out a couple of young players at the position so they can find a starter for the season opener. But with the middle linebacker slot in flux, the outside positions are locked up where senior Kyle Knox and junior Travis Brown are there to stay.

Brown is going on his third year in the Bulldogs’ system and has shown to be consistent on the field. Last year, he finished second on the team with 79 tackles and third on the team with nine tackles for loss, nabbing second-team All-Western Athletic Conference honors in process. Now, going into his junior season, Brown looks to step into the leadership role that is now vacant after linebacker Ben Jacobs graduated this past May.

"He’s a good player. He’s basically a coach on the field." — Tim Skipper, linebackers coach

Brown described what he been working on to improve from last season.

“Mostly my footwork,” Brown said. “Just getting quicker feel. Being able to get to the whole quicker as an outside linebacker (because) that’s what you need to do.”

With all the offseason work put in, Brown now has to translate it on the field. One coach who has watched him closely talked about what kind of player he is.

"He’s a good player," line backers coach Tim Skipper said. "He comes from a coaching family. Very bright, smart and got a lot bigger this year. I expect big things from him. Understands the defense. He’s basically a coach on the field.”

The 2011 recruiting class was full of linebackers which put an influx of youth at the position. Skipper as the run game coordinator works closely with the linebackers and talked about the beneficiary of talent at the position.

"We got a lot of young guys," Skipper said. "Jeremiah Toma is still a young guy playing the Mike [middle linebacker] position. Patrick Su’a playing our buc [outside linebacker] spot who also can play a Will [other outside linebacker] position. Ofa Fiji’a’s moving real well out there. Stephan Flavon is moving real well. Then, we got new signees Kyrie Wilson, Malique Micenheimer,Jarred Rose. Karl Mickelson’s out there. So you got a lot of guys that are stepping up in the program so the future at the position is looking real bright."

Malique Micenheimer will be taking his talents to the offensive side of ball after the loss of Tapa Taumoepeau. Micenheimer will be expected to a fullback to provide the Rose goal." — Travis Brown, junior line backer

position with some young athletes.

With all the other young linebackers play alongside Brown, he has tried to show the newcomers the ropes.

"[leadership role] was bestowed on me by the team," Brown said. "I feel like I’ve stepped up into that role pretty well. I’m excited to actually get that role." Now that Brown is considered one of the leaders on the team, he has the tools to lead the defense to achieving the goal he wants to accomplish.

"My expectations are to play my role and lead this team to a WAC championship," Brown said. "That’s the ultimate goal.

Thomas looks for increased role

Junior strong safety leads retooled secondary into Candlestick Park

By Ben Ingersoll
The Collegian

At the start of 2010’s fall camp, there were whispers around the football program about a potential high-round NFL Draft pick roaming the Bulldog sideline.

It had nothing to do with Fresno State’s 1,080-yard rusher, or its sack master coming off the edge. His name was Phillip Thomas, a redshirt sophmore who had as many jersey number changes as career interceptions (two). But the 2010 early notions that Fresno State’s best amphibian MOSHES Harris could make a splash in the professional ranks were justified. Thomas started all but one game at free safety for the Bulldogs, recording 46 tackles (4.9 per game) with 12 passes defended to go along with three interceptions.

But Thomas’ numbers a season ago weren’t enough to land him on any post-season awards lists. The 6-foot-1, 205-pound Bakersfield product used a steady dose of the weight room in the offseason to potentially land him a spot among the Western Athletic Conference’s best.

"Just a lot of training," Thomas said. "Running. Just getting my body prepared. Lifting real hard. Gaining weight. We’ve been going hard at practice this whole summer camp. Getting prepared for the season. It’s going to be a long one because we have a game this year so guys have been training real hard this offseason."

But Thomas isn’t alone in a defensive secondary unit that was forced to retread in the off-season. The loss of seniors Desia Dunn and Lorne Bell to graduation paved the way for some young but semi-experienced players to step up and make a splash that Thomas garnered this time a season ago.

"There’s some senior DBs on the squad (in) James Green, JT (Jermaine Thomas) and Zak Hill is also a senior safety," Thomas said. "We all got our leadership role. I try to make it point to get my words in there two. Just get everybody hyped and ready to play."

Thomas and company will be tested early and often this season. Fresno State opens the season at California and will line up against Buffalo transfer Zach Maynard at quarterback and one of the most talented young receivers in college football Keenan Allen.

There is little time to rest between week one and week two when the Bulldogs travel to the Great Plains to take on Nebraska’s potent offensive arsenal. The Cornhuskers’ dual threat quarterback Taylor Martinez flashed moments of greatness a season ago. All competition aside, however, defensive backs coach Micah Alba sees potential in his group.

"I think we have a really good group coming back," Alba said. "As they’ve come back into fall camp, they’ve come back in shape. Stronger and faster then when they were in the spring."

Alba added: “As a whole, I expect us to be better than we were last year. We had two seniors leave but the guys that we have coming back are guys that have a lot of playing time because of injuries. A couple guys hurt last year so we got some guys that are coming back so we expect them to be sharper more detailed on what we’re doing.”

But if Alba’s group, Thomas in particular, live up to the coach’s hype, the sky could be the limit for Thomas and his work ethic.

"From what I understand, this is his best offseason so far talking to him," Alba said. "Most consistent going there everyday. Being a leader. Working hard. Doing what he needs to do to improve himself. He’s proved himself to his teammates that he’s in to win all the games we need to win."
Projected Starting Lineup

**DEFENSE**

- Derron Smith, FS, So., 5-11, 190
- Phillip Thomas, SS, Jr., 6-1, 205
- Jermaine Thomas, CB, Sr., 5-11, 190
- L.J. Jones, CB, So, 6-2, 240
- Chase McEntee, NT, Sr., 6-2, 275
- Logan Harrell, DT, Jr., 6-2, 275
- Matt Akers, DE, Jr., 6-2, 245

**OFFENSE**

- Bryce Harris, LT, Sr., 6-6, 300
- Cody Wichmann, LG, Fr., 6-5, 310
- Richard Helepiko, C, Jr., 6-2, 300
- Leslie Cooper, RG, Sr., 6-4, 320
- Austin Wentworth, RT, So., 6-5, 305
- Devon Wylie, WR, Sr., 5-9, 185
- Rashad Evans, WR, Jr., 5-9, 180
- Derek Carr, QB, So., 6-3, 205
- Jalen Saunders, WR, So., 5-9, 160
- Robbie Rouse, RB, Jr., 5-7, 185
- Ryan Skidmore, TE, Sr., 6-5, 250