



## Eastern Kentucky Tabbed as 2009 OVC Football Favorite

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**BRENTWOOD, Tenn.** -- In a balanced vote that saw five of the eight eligible teams receive at least one first-place vote, two-time defending champion **Eastern Kentucky University** has been picked as the 2009 Ohio Valley Conference preseason football favorite in a vote of league head coaches and sports information directors.

The Colonels received 10 first-place votes to take home the preseason honor for the third time in the last five years. **UT Martin**, 2006 co-champions, was picked to finish second and received four first-place votes. **Eastern Illinois** was third with two first-place votes followed by **Tennessee State** and **Murray State** who each received one first-place vote. The preseason poll was rounded out by **Tennessee Tech** being picked sixth and **Austin Peay** and **Southeast Missouri** tying for seventh place. **Jacksonville State**, who is not eligible for the OVC Championship this year, was not included in the poll.

Eastern Kentucky, who has won a record 20 OVC Championships, was picked first in the preseason poll for the 17th time since 1979. The Colonels were 7-1 in the OVC a year ago (losing only at Tennessee State) and are a combined 15-1 in the league over the past two seasons. Second-year head coach **Dean Hood** has seven offensive and five defensive starters back from last year's team that lost to eventual national champion Richmond in the first round of the FCS Playoffs. Among those starters is preseason All-OVC and All-American selection **Derek Hardman**, a three-year starter for the program. He will be a key component on an offensive line that will block for senior running back **C.J. Walker**, the leading returning rusher in the OVC. Walker carried the ball 147 times for 706 yards (58.8 yards/game) and seven touchdowns a year ago. On defense, preseason All-OVC defensive end **Chris Hall** had 49 tackles, 13.0 tackles for loss and six sacks a season ago and will be a major force on the defensive line. Although the team lost two All-OVC performers in the secondary, sophomore **Jeremy Caldwell** returns to bolster that unit. Caldwell had three interceptions and 58 tackles as a freshman in 2008.

UT Martin came within a blocked 45-yard field goal attempt of claiming its second OVC Championship in three seasons a year ago, losing to eventual champion Eastern Kentucky by two points on the final weekend of the season. No Skyhawk football coach has been as successful in his first three seasons as **Jason Simpson** (21 victories), and this season Simpson has six offensive starters back from a team that was fourth nationally in scoring offense (37.33 points/game) and 16th in total offense (405.58 yards/game) last season. That offense will be keyed by OVC Offensive Player of the Year **Cade Thompson** who passed for 2,680 yards and 24 touchdowns in his second year with UT Martin after transferring from South Carolina. Those numbers also earned him 2009 OVC Preseason Offensive Player of the Year accolades. Thompson had plenty of weapons to throw to last year, completing passes to 16 different receivers. One of his favorite targets - preseason All-OVC pick **Mike Hicks** - is among the returning players he will throw to this season. Hicks caught a team-best 66 balls last season, racking up 894 yards and 12 touchdowns in 12 games. But UTM can also establish the run, as evident by preseason All-OVC pick **Brandyn Young**. Young carried the ball 143 times for 702 yards and 12 scores as a junior in 2008. A big part of the offense success can be attributed to senior offensive tackle **Joe Gibbs**, an All-OVC selection a year ago.

Eastern Illinois began last season in search of its fourth straight FCS playoff appearance but struggled to a 5-7 overall (3-5 OVC) record. But under the direction of the OVC Dean of Coaches **Bob Spoo**, the Panthers are picked third this season as they look to rebound. Spoo, entering his 22nd season with the program, will matchup with Penn State legend Joe Paterno on Oct. 10 when the teams meet in Happy Valley. The two coaches are among the top five longest tenured active coaches at the Division I level. The Panther offense returns seven players this season including All-American guard **Chaz Millard**. Millard has been a key part of the success of the Panther offense, including blocking for a 1,000-yard rusher a year ago. This season he will help protect senior quarterback **Bodie Reeder** (1,931 yards, 13 touchdowns last season) and a talented group of young running backs. Defensively, junior cornerback **Rashad Haynes** enters the season ranked sixth on the NCAA list for career interceptions (9) among active players.

Tennessee State started last season 6-1 and were eventually 8-2 as the squad climbed as high as 18th in the national rankings. The Tigers would, however, lose its final two games of the year to fall to 8-4 overall and 5-3 in the Conference. Despite eight Division I victories, TSU was left out of the playoff picture but will try to get there this season with 42 returning lettermen. Fifth-year head coach **James Webster** will have the biggest voids to fill on offense, where three players ended up on NFL rosters (including All-American running back Javarris Williams) and three-year starting quarterback Antonio Heffner graduated. The quarterback race this season will be between junior **Dominic Grooms** (26-of-35 for 236 yards and three touchdowns in limited action last year) and **Calvin McNair** (37-of-75 for 601 yards and a touchdown in 2007) who redshirted last season. Among the talent returning on defense is junior defensive back **Eugene Clifford**, who was an All-OVC selection last year after registering 61 tackles and three interceptions, and sophomore linebacker **Rico Council**, who had a team-best 67 tackles in 2008.

Picked eighth at the beginning of last season, Murray State showed its rebuilding process is right on track as head coach **Matt Griffin** led the Racers to a 4-4 Conference record and fifth place finish in his third year with the team. MSU had success with its defensive unit, which had two of the top defensive players nationally. Linebacker Nathan Williams (who has since graduated) led all divisions of college football with 179 tackles while **Austen Lane** (who will be a senior this season) totaled 12.0 sacks, which ranked him fourth nationally (1.00/game). Lane's breakout season caught the eye of the national media and professional scouts, as Consensus Draft Services (CDS) named him the FCS Preseason National Defensive Player of the Year heading into this season. Lane was also tabbed the OVC Preseason Defensive Player of the Year while also being included on numerous preseason All-American teams. He is one of nine defensive starters returning for Murray State this season. Nine offensive starters also return, including Preseason All-OVC wide receiver selection **Derrick Townsel** (53 catches for 667 yards and three touchdowns in only 9 games) and junior quarterback **Jeff Ehrhardt** (1,885 yards and 11 touchdowns).

Now entering year three, Tennessee Tech head coach **Watson Brown** would like to see his team make a leap of improvement like Murray State did last season. The Golden Eagles won just one Conference game a season ago but has 18 total starters back on both sides of the ball and high expectations for 2009. Among the offensive returners is sophomore wide receiver **Tim Benford**, last season's OVC Freshman of the Year. Benford led the OVC with 68 receptions and tied the Tech single-season record with 10 touchdowns. He will catch those passes from senior quarterback **Lee Sweeney** (1,644 yards, 9 touchdowns), who will be attempting to set many Tennessee Tech career passing marks in 2009. One of the team's top offensive weapons is junior **Henry Sailes**, who not only led the team in rushing last season (433 yards, 4 touchdowns) but was second on the squad (to Benford) with 47 catches. Sailes also showed his versatility by averaging 28.1 yards per kickoff return (16 attempts). Among the nine defensive starters returning is junior defensive lineman **Charlie Seivers** (65 tackles, 5.0 sacks) a preseason All-OVC selection.

Since returning to scholarship football (2006), Austin Peay will have its first scholarship recruiting class graduate this season. Now in its third year back in the OVC, **Rick Christophel's** team looks to improve on its 2-9 overall record (2-6 OVC) from last season. One area where the Governors should be strong is on defense where nine starters are back including preseason All-OVC selections **Daniel Becker** (102 tackles, 3.0 sacks, 2 interceptions) and **Kevis Buckley** (40 tackles, 6 interceptions). Also returning is electric playmaker **Terrence Holt**, who has set the OVC single-season record for kick return yardage in each of his first two seasons in the league. Last year he averaged 24.7 yards/return including a long of 77. Also returning is sophomore running back **Ryan White**, who rushed for a team-high 600 yards as a freshman.

Southeast Missouri has 15 total starters returning from a year ago. The Redhawks have several key offensive players back in the fold including preseason All-OVC selection **Walter Peoples** (65 catches, 903 yards, 6 touchdowns in 2008) and fellow receiver **Miles Edwards** (31 catches, 432 yards, 3 touchdowns). The offense will be directed by sophomore quarterback **Matt Scheible**, who threw for five touchdowns and ran for two others in limited time a season ago. Southeast does have one of the top punters in FCS football in senior **Doug Spada**. Spada has earned All-American honors each of the last two seasons, including last season when he was third in the country in punting (44.7 yards/punt) and had 15 punts of 50 or more yards. Spada also handles the placekicking duties for the Redhawks.

Due to a postseason ban by the NCAA (occasion three historic penalty of the Academic Progress Rate), in accordance with OVC by-laws Jacksonville State is not eligible for the OVC Championship this season. The Gamecocks will still play a full Conference schedule with wins and losses counting and will be eligible to be ranked in national polls. Despite not having the opportunity to participate in the postseason, Jax State should have a good team in 2009. The squad is led by senior quarterback **Ryan Perrilloux** who passed for 2,318 yards and 19 touchdowns and rushed for 368 yards and seven scores in his first season with the team after transferring from LSU. His athleticism should make JSU a threat on every offensive possession. Defensively the team returns two players who have garnered preseason All-American status, linebacker **Alexander Henderson** (103 tackles) and defensive back **Carnell Clark** (66 tackles, two interceptions).

#### **All-OVC Preseason Football Team**

UT Martin senior quarterback **Cade Thompson** and Murray State senior defensive end **Austen Lane** have been tabbed the 2009 Ohio Valley Conference Preseason Offensive and Defensive Players of the Year in a vote on by the league's head football coaches and sports information directors. Murray State led the way with the most individual selections (6), following closely by five from UT Martin, four from Jacksonville State and three apiece from Austin Peay and Eastern Kentucky. Each of the league's nine teams had at least one player on the preseason squad.

Returning players who were first-team All-OVC picks last season (8 in total) were automatic selections to the preseason team this year. The squad also included nine players who were second-team selections in 2008. Of the 26 total selections, 21 were seniors (including the entire offensive unit), four were juniors and there was one sophomore pick.

The offensive unit is led by Thompson, who earned OVC Offensive Player of the Year honors last season after UT Martin finished as the league's runner-up and was among top offensive units in the country. Thompson finished the season with a league-best 2,680 passing yards and 24 touchdowns. He is joined by his own teammate in the backfield, senior **Brandyn Young** (744 rushing yards, 12 touchdowns). Eastern Kentucky senior **C.J. Walker** (706 yard, 7 touchdowns), the top returning rusher in the OVC from last season, is at the other running back spot. Three wide receivers were selected to the preseason team, UT Martin senior **Mike Hicks** (66 catches, 894 yards, 12 touchdowns), Murray State senior **Derrick Townsel** (53 catches, 667 yards, 3 touchdowns) and Southeast Missouri State senior **Walter Peoples** (65 catches, 903 yards, 6 touchdowns). Murray State senior tight end **DeAngelo Nelson** appears on the preseason All-OVC squad for the second year in a row. Last year Nelson grabbed 34 passes for 386 yards and a score. The offensive line is anchored by returning first-team All-OVC selections **Chaz Millard** (Eastern Illinois) and **Derek Hardman** (Eastern Kentucky). The other linemen are UT Martin's **Joe Gibbs**, Jacksonville State's **Reggie Wade** and Murray State's **Eric Ornella**.

Lane ranked fourth nationally a year ago in sacks (12.0) in a breakout season as a junior. His development has been so impressive that Consensus Draft Services (CDS) named him the FCS Preseason National Defensive Player of the Year heading into this season. Joining Lane on the defensive line is Jacksonville State senior **Brandt Thomas** (34 tackles, 2.5 sacks), Eastern Kentucky senior **Chris Hall** (46 tackles, 13.0 TFL, 6.0 sacks) and Tennessee Tech junior **Charlie Seivers** (65 tackles, 5.0 sacks). The linebacker unit includes Jacksonville State senior **Alexander Henderson** (team-high 103 tackles), Austin Peay senior **Daniel Becker** (102 tackles) and UT Martin junior **Josh Bey** (team-best 88 tackles). The four defensive backs selected to the team are Austin Peay senior **Kevis Buckley** (league-high 6 interceptions), Jacksonville State senior **Carnell Clark** (66 tackles, 2 interceptions), Murray State senior **Taylor Lanigan** (104 tackles) and Tennessee State junior **Eugene Clifford** (61 tackles, 3 interceptions).

Specialists selected to the preseason team include Murray State sophomore kicker **Kienan Cullen** (14-of-20 FG's, Long of 41, 27-of-29 PAT's, 69 points), Southeast Missouri senior punter **Doug Spada** (47 punts, 2103 yards, 44.7 yards/punt, Long of 65) and Austin Peay junior return specialist **Terrence Holt** (52 kickoff returns, OVC record 1,285 yards, 24.7 yards/return).

# 2009 Preseason All-Ohio Valley Conference Football Team

(Selected by OVC Head Football Coaches and Sports Information Directors)

**Preseason Offensive Player of the Year:** Cade Thompson (QB), UT Martin

**Preseason Defensive Player of the Year:** Austen Lane (DE), Murray State

## OFFENSE

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player, School</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Yr.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
QB	*Cade Thompson, UT Martin	6-2	190	Sr.	Maryville, Tenn.
RB	**Brandyn Young, UT Martin	5-8	205	Sr.	Stone Mountain, Ga.
RB	C.J. Walker, Eastern Kentucky	5-9	194	Sr.	Altamonte Springs, Fla.
WR	*Mike Hicks, UT Martin	6-3	220	Sr.	Jacksonville, Fla.
WR	**Derrick Townsel, Murray State	5-9	182	Sr.	Memphis, Tenn.
WR	**Walter Peoples, Southeast Missouri	6-2	210	Sr.	Glendale, Ariz.
TE	**DeAngelo Nelson, Murray State	6-1	235	Sr.	Memphis, Tenn.
C	Reggie Wade, Jacksonville State	6-1	285	Sr.	Tuscumbia, Ala.
OG	*Chaz Millard, Eastern Illinois	6-3	289	Sr.	St. Charles, Ill.
OG	Eric Ornella, Murray State	6-4	295	Sr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
OT	*Derek Hardman, Eastern Kentucky	6-6	292	Sr.	Spencer, W.Va.
OT	**Joe Gibbs, UT Martin	6-5	290	Sr.	Brilliant, Ala.

## DEFENSE

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player, School</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Yr.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
DL	*Austen Lane, Murray State	6-7	270	Sr.	Iola, Wis.
DL	**Brandt Thomas, Jacksonville State	6-3	290	Sr.	Anniston, Ala.
DL	Chris Hall, Eastern Kentucky	6-3	252	Sr.	Waynesville, N.C.
DL	Charlie Seivers, Tennessee Tech	6-3	250	Jr.	Knoxville, Tenn.
LB	*Alexander Henderson, Jacksonville State	6-1	212	Sr.	Mobile, Ala.
LB	**Daniel Becker, Austin Peay	6-3	230	Sr.	Brentwood, Tenn.
LB	**Josh Bey, UT Martin	6-0	220	Jr.	Springfield, Tenn.
DB	*Kevis Buckley, Austin Peay	5-10	185	Sr.	Lexington, Tenn.
DB	*Carnell Clark, Jacksonville State	6-2	183	Sr.	Birmingham, Ala.
DB	**Eugene Clifford, Tennessee State	6-2	195	Jr.	Cincinnati, Ohio
DB	Taylor Lanigan, Murray State	6-1	210	Sr.	Naples, Fla.

## SPECIALISTS

<u>Pos.</u>	<u>Player, School</u>	<u>Ht.</u>	<u>Wt.</u>	<u>Yr.</u>	<u>Hometown</u>
K	Kienan Cullen, Murray State	6-3	224	So.	Louisville, Ky.
P	*Doug Spada, Southeast Missouri	6-1	190	Sr.	Shelby, N.C.
RS	*Terrence Holt, Austin Peay	5-8	165	Jr.	Nashville, Tenn.

\* - 1st team All-OVC team in 2008      \*\* - 2nd team All-OVC team in 2008

# 2009 OVC Football Predicted Order of Finish

(Selected by OVC Head Football Coaches and Sports Information Directors)

	<u>Order of Finish</u>	<u>Points</u>
1.	Eastern Kentucky (10 first-place votes)	105
2.	UT Martin (4)	92
3.	Eastern Illinois (2)	89
4.	Tennessee State (1)	74
5.	Murray State (1)	61
6.	Tennessee Tech	35
7.	Austin Peay	33
	Southeast Missouri	33

*Note: Jacksonville State is not eligible for the OVC Championship (NCAA APR penalties) and therefore is not ranked. (7 points awarded for a first-place vote, 6 for second, etc. - Coaches and SID's could not vote for their own teams)*